

"I know well who I am"

The title for this week's edition of Monday Motivation comes from the book "Taran Wanderer," a children's book by Lloyd Alexander.

In the book, the main character searches to find his niche in life, trying many vocations, none of which fit him perfectly. Finally, his mentor, a man called "Annlaw Clay-Shaper," (perhaps Harry "Potter" is his descendant) says this:

"... I know well who I am. Annlaw Clay-Shaper. For better or worse, that knowledge must serve me my lifetime."

It's perhaps sad to note it, but most of the people in the world today aren't like Annlaw. Very few can say: "I know well who I am."

"Know thyself," said the philosopher Socrates -- and throughout history, that has remained the essential advice to a person who wants to succeed: First off, know who you are.

So -- who are you?

It's funny -- but many people get to middle age without ever giving a thought to who they really are. One mid-life crisis later, they may have a better understanding of who they are, but they're also likely to have an ex-spouse, a toupee, a family who hates them, an alimony payment, a really cool red convertible, and a "social" disease.

Surely there's got to be a better way to gain an understanding of who you really are.

May I ask a few questions?

1. Is your work fulfilling? If they didn't pay you to do it, would you do it anyway?

This is the first question we have to ask, because so many people tie up their self-image with their profession.

Most people labor most of their lives doing a job they hate, for a company they distrust, for a paycheck they think is too small. They never take the time to choose a line of employment that would challenge, invigorate, and inspire them to greater heights, while usually providing a salary that was significantly higher than their current job.

People stuck in such a rut don't progress to their full potential; they can't make the contributions they may have otherwise made; they rarely achieve the happiness they should have achieved.

Look around you at your friends and co-workers. How many of them appear to be in the right line of work? How many of them appear to be happy at what they do?

My late father, God rest his soul, was in a job that he did very well. He owned his own business; he was respected in the community. Still, he sometimes referred to going back to work as "going back to that He_ _ hole." (You can no doubt fill in the blanks).

While there are many people who can be happy in any position, anywhere, for a lot of us there's one "optimal" career we "ought" to be following -- at least in this time frame, and it's up to us to find it.

My suggestion: most people know inherently what things interest them most out of life. Try and find a way to make a living doing that. It's usually something that comes easily to you, although it may be difficult to someone else.

For those people who don't know what interests them, or for those who may not have reasonable expectations (how many people will be chosen to play professional baseball, for example), perhaps some job counseling is a good choice. Most large cities have professional job coaches who make their living by helping people find where they belong in life. If you can't find one, a call to the human resources department of a large local employer may provide a lead.

2. Do you like who you are? If there were one thing that could be easily changed about you, what would it be?

This is another two-in-one question, I know -- but it should be an easy one to answer. Do you like yourself? If you are able to answer in the affirmative, it shows you're likely on a reasonable track. Even though you might have to do a little bit of fine-tuning, you're heading in roughly the right direction. The second part of this question is the quest for positive change -- the one thing that would make you better. It's only through constant improvement and change that we truly learn who we are -- because when we discover our "best self," we tend to change and grow even more rapidly.

3. Are you willing to dedicate yourself to becoming better, stronger, and happier?

Sure you are -- or you wouldn't be reading Monday Motivation. Commit to this challenge, right now. Write it down on a sheet of paper: "I commit to being all I am capable of becoming." Sign your name to it. Remember it.

Each of us is capable of finding out who we are, and what we can offer. It may take work, introspection, and questioning -- but it'll come, nevertheless.

Just a word to the midlife-crisis prone out there: in all your introspection, questioning, work, and seeking, don't lose the heaven you have, looking for the Hell around the bend.

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