



# Purposeful Wanderings

A Monthly Newsletter for Clients and Friends of **The Road Not Taken**

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## ~~~~~ Quote of the Month ~~~~~

“The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth, dwelling deeply in the present moment and feeling truly alive.” --- Thich Nhat Hanh

### Happiness is a Choice

I've never met anyone who *wanted* to be unhappy. Yet the number of people who truly *are* happy seems relatively small. Why so? “Happiness quotient” appears to have three categories: (1) happy all/most of the time, (2) unhappy all/most of the time, and (3) happy sometimes/unhappy sometimes. I did a not-so-scientific research project this month, simply asking people about happiness. In general, comments within each of the three groups were quite consistent. What I heard:

- “unhappy” people pointed to all the things wrong with life, including themselves, others, jobs, money, relationships, the world, the economy, etc. It was almost as if they were saying, “how could I possibly be happy given all this?”
- “sometimes” people pointed to their external world, and noted that when things were good “out there,” they were happy “in here,” and vice versa. It was almost as if they were saying, “others are responsible for whether I’m happy.”
- “happy” people pointed to their internal world, and noted that they felt gratitude for their lives, relationships, and opportunities. I kind of got the sense they were saying, “why are you even asking; I’m happy because I *want* to be.”

Although *every* person acknowledged having problems or challenges to deal with, responses confirmed what I already believed to be true (hence the not-so-scientific nature of the project). *We experience in life what we look for.* We’ve been programmed to “see” that which reinforces our [mostly unconscious] beliefs about life. What this means is that we don’t really *look*; we *look for*. If we “believe” life is difficult, life shows up that way. If we “believe” life is beautiful, we see beauty at every turn. And if we “believe” the last two statements are nonsense, then we see little hope in any new idea.

It may be easy to conclude that I’m saying you should just “be happy,” perhaps on-command. Although I *do* see happiness as a choice, we make lasting choices only by changing how we believe and see. (Changes made at the level of behavior alone are short-lived, because you’re using the same believing and seeing that created *old* behaviors to try to create *new* ones. It’s the “washing off paint with paint” story.) The only way we change ways of believing and seeing is by making them conscious. When we’re *aware* of how we believe, those beliefs change naturally and easily, without trying.

**Exercise:** Here’s a way to get to know the belief system that underlies your thinking and behaving. Stop for a few minutes of quiet reflection each evening. Name three things from your day for which you feel grateful. Gratitude need not be about big things; a smile from a stranger, a friend’s call, the smell of a flower, sunset, a gift you received (or gave). Write them down. (A calendar book is a great tool for this.) After noting three things, reflect on pieces of your day and on the level of happiness you experienced. No need to change anything. Just notice -- who you were being, how you saw each situation, how you felt. Do this every day. This is a powerful way to become aware of your ways of believing & seeing.

In adopting this exercise as a regular practice, you begin to get inside the “machinery” that drives your seeing, thinking, speaking and acting. That machinery is a conveyor belt, ferrying your [largely unconscious] beliefs into your seeing and thinking. When you discover its source, and become aware of the beliefs that power the it (by *naming* them), your conscious mind takes over, choosing new beliefs & ways of seeing that open up (instead of closing down) new possibilities. As with other practices I’ve suggested as accompaniment to newsletters, the simple act of self-observation conveys phenomenal power to make fundamental changes to the internal system that powers your life. And this happens whether or not you “believe” it or believe “in” it; what matters is the practice of doing it.

That said, do be aware: one of the “beliefs” hiding inside your machinery is the belief that you shouldn’t examine the belief system. That belief is a form of “perceived protection” against major changes. That may be a good deal if you want tomorrow to look like yesterday. But if you’re up to bigger things in life, then you need to be aware of this potential block, and the commitment it takes to step beyond it. Practicing new ways of seeing is all it takes. Why allow your *unconscious* to choose *unhappy* when your conscious can choose happiness? See this month’s quote.

## A River Runs Through It [Life lessons offered by nature]

When you're outdoors, exposed in some way to the elements of nature, what's your experience? Beauty? Distaste? Fear? A mixture? A few thoughts. While most people love the fragrance of a wild rose, just as many feel the opposite being around spiders. Taking a step back, roses & dandelions have a lot in common. So do spiders & butterflies. Yet how we *experience* those things may be drastically different. Because spiders are no more aware of our dislike than butterflies are of our love, we must conclude the distinction lives only in our head, and therefore results from [largely unconscious] beliefs we carry around from ages past. Some people experience wolves (or even a thought of wolves) as fearful. Those who truly know wolves also know the love and connection we humans have with this amazing species. Wolves are wolves independent of our view of them. So what? In nature, as in our often not-so-natural everyday lives, we experience our belief system. We get what we see. The old adage says, "seeing is believing." I say it's the other way around: "believing is seeing." I feel more safe, loved, embraced and alive around wolves than I do on an interstate highway. Most don't. But the wolves are just being wolves and the highway is ... well, just a highway. Once again, the only difference is a way of seeing. And if that's a choice, I want to choose the one that offers me the maximum potential, the most joy, the greatest happiness, the most richness life has to offer.

I have a friend who would far rather encounter a drug dealer on a city street at night than a mouse in her kitchen in broad daylight. I have a niece who's so freaked out by mosquitoes that she'd rather spend summer at the mall than experience one day on a pristine mountain lake. And ... I have a friend who invites insects into her home so she may better know the gift they offer. And I have a client who spends a month or so each year only a few feet away from brown bears, naming them as individuals from years of accumulated connection. None of this is about right or wrong, good or bad. It's about a choice as to how we experience our lives, others, the world. And *that* is one of the biggest choices we can make.

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### Openings to New Possibility

***Communications Skills for Life*** – Exploring language skills offers phenomenal power to create and live a life you love. You may want to consider how you (and perhaps those with whom you work or live) might examine this aspect of life in a more committed way. Here are brief summaries of programs I offer, for both individuals and groups, that can help you to be the best you can be, to evoke the greatest potential that lives inside you, using that unique human tool -- language.

- Constructive Conversations - an overview of principles on how to make every conversation a constructive one. Language skills are central to our lives as human beings.
- Communication for Action - specific skills for making things happen. Designed for business, useful anywhere, it's about making powerful requests & promises to move your world forward, and how to handle issues along the way.
- Language as Art - language is descriptive; we all know this. But it is also generative. Through language structures, you can actually create any future you want ... a powerful new slant on an old tool: the art of the spoken word.
- Conflict Resolution - even with the best intention, contention happens. An in-depth exploration into the "unavoidable." Make even the most contentious of topics "turn out" for you, with family, employees, managers or friends.
- Commitment: A Source of Freedom - all-too-often, we see commitment as a scary thing. In fact, it's a most powerful opening to both freedom *and* possibility. Learn to step with confidence and effectiveness into this world of YES.
- Performance Management - how to conduct ongoing, constructive conversations between manager and employee.
- Effective Meetings - most meetings waste a huge amount of energy and time. Eliminate the drain - overnight.

Each of these programs is tailorable to individual coaching, group seminars or workshops (from 2 hours to a day or more). Research shows that no program, policy, initiative or activity holds more potential for dramatic transformation toward excellence than learning how to communicate more effectively with one another.

***Book of the month*** – ***Listening Below the Noise***, by Anne LeClaire. This book is subtitled, A Meditation on the Practice of Silence, and explores Anne's personal experience and choice about introducing silence into her life. I've met Anne; she's a Cape Cod "local." Her words are universal. Her choices may not be yours, but her story can help you *find* yours.

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