



# Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Volume 14, Number 1 – January 2015

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## Goals are a Set-Up

“[Tomorrow] is not an expectation to live up to, but a possibility to live into.” – Ben & Roz Zander, *The Art of Possibility*

What are your biggest dreams in life? Are they coming true today? I work with people who take these questions seriously. And I overhear hundreds more who seem content just to complain about them. What I find curious, though, no matter the audience, is how they speak of “goals,” statements that invariably describe what they want to “get out of life.” Examples: that perfect relationship, great job, new house, money, promotion, or even that divorce I want done, or annoying boss I want gone from my life. Rarely do I hear what people want to “put into life.” Examples: become the best I can be, serve others with my talents, live in alignment with my dreams. Why does this distinction matter?

It seems we favor *having things* in life over *being someone* in life, and my experience says it’s because we perceive *having things* offers us more **certainty** than *being someone*. (We search futilely for certainty, in a fundamentally *uncertain* world, so as to avoid the fear of being vulnerable.) So we set goals ... believing that’s how we “get” things. Stop briefly and look at your biggest dreams. If you’re like most, you’ve made plans and/or goals to get what you want, and you’ve used effort and willpower to make them happen. But ask yourself: Does life today *match* those plans or goals? Why not? Remember the movie, “*Up?*” It’s not about effort. I think we’re seeing things all wrong.

Goals are a set-up for disappointment, as well as lost potential. Goals come from (then support) the mistaken belief that we can *make* things turn out. “Turn out” is something that happens in the *external* world, a world we can’t control. What we do control is our *internal* world, the world of our thoughts, beliefs, how we use our energy. Although this is the home of our potential and dreams, we rarely look there. So here’s a new take on creating a life you love.

The only thing you *have* in life is what you put in. In fact, everything you’ve created or received came from what you **put in**, not what you wanted back. There’s huge possibility in this shift in perspective. What if you didn’t have to *get something out*? Instead, what if you decided to devote your energy to “being your gift in the world,” using your talents and experience to serve the world in a way that is meaningful to you? Then just keep doing that, no matter what.

True, living this way, you won’t know what comes next *or* where you’ll end up. Yet it’s pure illusion to believe you *can* know these things, regardless of your choices. Life is uncertain – *by design*. Uncertainty makes creation possible. As a matter of fact, no matter how good you are at this, you’re off course 95% of the time. Airplanes and missiles are off course 95% of the time, too. That’s why they have guidance systems. Why would we spend money on a guidance system for a missile, knowing it was going to blow up? Because the missile hasn’t a clue where it is without one! The same is true for you. Great lives don’t come from “making things happen,” but from continually correcting based on what **does** happen. And that comes from **listening** to what life tells you, then making choices that return you to your desired path. Listening, learning and making choices are aspects of “being someone,” not “having something.” Goals mean nothing in this world (unless all you want to do is clean your closet.) True knowing, then, comes from *felt experience*, not from “knowledge.” You gain that by bringing your gifts into the world, then listening (like a guidance system) so you know how it’s going. Your felt experience guides your next steps. (Goals won’t do this.) A great question to keep as a constant companion on your journey is one asked by coach Alan Seale: “What **wants** to happen here?”

**Exercise: Toward a more meaningful (and easier) life.** Quickly write down several things you want in life. You’ve known for years what these are, so don’t think a lot here, just write stuff down. Do this before reading on. Now, take a few quiet moments and “listen” to each item, asking: (1) do I get this *from* the world or do I put this *into* the world? (House, job, relationship you get *from* the world; being your talents/gifts you put *into* the world.) (2) who do I need to **be** in order to guide my life toward this? Only what you **put in** to life is sustainable (*and* invigorates you), because the fuel lives inside you. What you want *out of life* needs constant feeding from outside, which exhausts you. So, take one step into what matters to you each day. After each step - stop ... and listen to what the experience tells you. If it brings you closer to your dream, do more of it tomorrow. If it takes you farther away, then choose a different step tomorrow.

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

**Nature's Story:** About 100,000 years ago, an instant in evolutionary time, some brown bears living on North America's Arctic coasts started to hunt from the edges of the sea instead of from land and rivers alone. Those who succeeded in catching seals from the shore or winter ice extended their range northward. With changing behavior and habitat came changes in biology. Although some changes in nature are cataclysmic, most happens too slowly for us to see or comprehend. The bears most successful at Arctic marine hunting were those with lighter fur, a great adaptation in an all-white environment. Those with longer noses could better snag seals from their breathing holes in the ice. Shorter ears and sticky foot-pads favored living in extreme cold and on ice. Over generations of "stepping into uncertainty," the polar bear was born. Today's polar bear is the ultimate Arctic carnivore, so well adapted to life in this hostile environment that the only "heat" showing up on an infrared photograph is its breath!

Nothing inside a brown bear offered previous evidence of the emergence of a polar bear. There was no "goal." The ecological niche of "ultimate Arctic marine carnivore" was empty at the time – opportunity. Although nature doesn't envision a specific possibility, she is always poised to step into an uncertain future with new invention.

**Brad's Story:** Many years ago, I managed Digital Equipment Corporation's software publishing business. I'd been an engineer and engineering manager for 15 years, and I didn't take well to this day-to-day operations role. By most accounts, namely my own, I was the worst plant manager Digital ever had. I remember asking my manager for help. It was tough to admit I needed it, but he responded and I was grateful. His greatest gift wasn't the help, but the words he said as I left. "Instead of being hard on yourself, you might remember you're the only one who has ever managed that business who actually *knows* what's inside those boxes." It took a few days, but it finally dawned on me (a shift in perspective). The value of software is not in the books/media we were using back then, but in the *information*; all my experience up to that time had viewed "information as value." Opportunity greeted me when I least expected and most needed it. I began to reinvent the business as an information business, not a "putting things in boxes" business. My thinking was freed, invited as I'd been to explore outside the box, literally and figuratively. My work had become both bigger *and* easier at the same time, too, just by learning to *listen* to my environment instead of *fighting* with it.

### Openings to New Possibility

#### **Available for you:**

- *The Road Not Taken Community*, a no-cost subscription that offers you connection, interaction, challenge, and learning. Articles, newsletters and blogs [here](#). I welcome conversation; dialogue is how we all learn together.
- "*In Nature's Image*," 100 of my nature images, each with a simple message to help experience life's meaning.
- *The Road Not Taken* newsletters (13 years, 156 issues of *Purposeful Wanderings*) available [here](#) as a pdf file.
- Photo images from my travels available [here](#) on fun products – note cards, coffee mugs – great gift ideas.

**An invitation to possibility:** This (or any) newsletter could be the basis of a six-month program of personal coaching. So if you read something that evokes a sense of the potential inside you ... and have the courage and determination to step apart from the crowd (i.e., *challenge conventional thinking* so you can live with *authenticity and freedom*), then contact me for a conversation that can energize your dream. I will help you reach a level of *clarity and perspective* – about yourself, others, your life, your work and the world – that allows you to live your truth, every day. Trade the *way it is* for the *way it could be*.

**Book of the month – Daring Greatly, by Brené Brown.** A daring book about a daring subject – stepping with confidence into the unknown, by accepting your own vulnerability as an *opening to possibility*. Each one of us experiences vulnerability; the issue is *how we respond* to the experience. Most of us fear being vulnerable, to the point of discomfort even talking about it. It seems a more poignant topic for women, perhaps only because men deny it. As Brown says, though, it is at the heart of what holds us back from our life potential. If a single topic can be this big in terms of our search for freedom and our dreams, it would seem a worthy (albeit difficult) one to explore. This is a powerful book, well-written, approachable, and even humorous at times. If your life falls even one step below amazing (and whose doesn't?) this is so worth reading. ... And, if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book available at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons – 508-539-6985.