



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Over the Load Limit

"If you don't know where you're going, you might end up someplace else." – Yogi Berra

Is your life on overload? Too much to do; not enough time to do it, uncooperative others, dysfunction, conflict, drama. *Of course* we're on overload. In evolutionary terms, we're adapted to handle overload; it's a key survival strategy. We're *not* adapted (very well at least) to run on overload *100% of the time*. We know the consequences all too well: 1) stress, anxiety, even anger; 2) lost productivity, being prone to careless mistakes; 3) dreams for peace and well-being fade into obscurity; and 4) long-term ... illness or disease. *Of course* we're on overload.

But how we *react* to overload is a story all its own. More often than not, we see stress, anxiety and lost dreams as "natural" parts of life. (They're not.) More often than not, we blame time, others or "life" for holding us back. (They don't.) By seeing this way, however, (which is a choice we make, even if unconsciously), we miss the true cause of our overload, and in so doing, we also miss the potential we have to reduce or eliminate it.

I'm not suggesting you "do less." That's both a cop-out and futile. But *do* recall the world's great masters – those we hold in high regard because of their contribution to life, to others, to the world. *As is true for us, they* had 24 hours each day; *they* were surrounded by drama and distraction; *they* lived amidst conflict and judgment (as those who challenge the *status quo* often do). My view is that having learned to *not* allow these things to derail them helped *make* them the masters they were. They had more energy to devote to what mattered most.

So, perhaps it's about *energy* ... not time, drama or workload. Each of us has a certain amount of energy available each day. Think of this energy as water in a bucket. We *regenerate* energy (fill the bucket) through rest, self-care and nutrition. We *use* energy (pour from the bucket) on what we do each day. We may *intend* to use our energy on what matters, but some gets diverted (without our awareness) ... to deal with drama, dysfunction and stress, ... and most recently, uncertainty and divisiveness in the world. It's as if someone punched holes in the bucket, so water leaks out – energy we would *otherwise* have had available for better things. Desire or intention aside, the fact is this: if energy gets used up on what matters *least*, we've got nothing left for what matters *most*.

When you've used all the water in the bucket (whether on purpose or through leaks), it's time to regenerate. But if you *continue to pour* instead, you're "over your load limit." You can't use energy you don't have – without the consequences. Evidence says we've certainly got consequences. If we could *see* this, consciously, we'd be better able to manage the drain, the load, the balance. Unfortunately, society's messages (try harder, stay busy, control life, be productive) *encourage* us to keep pouring, often well after the energy is gone. It's as if there's a penalty for conscious awareness! So we not only miss, but often deny, what's holding us back (see [August newsletter](#)).

This suggests we'd be better off if we stopped blaming and fighting with life (when that's not the problem to begin with), and truly *got to know* what drains our energy. If we could plug the holes in the bucket, we'd have "extra" energy to live more productively and sustainably. The "masters" *got this!* (Their strategy *wasn't* to fight, stress or "do less," but rather to not lose so much energy. Their awareness level was exceptional.)

This isn't easy work. Although I've long been purposeful about maintaining balance in my days, I've noticed that lately I don't feel as calm; I get less done, *and* less effectively; I don't sleep as well; I can react sharply to others. I feel "over my load limit." I'm now aware that growing divisiveness, chaos and even deception in our world has punched holes in my bucket. (And I'm not even a news junkie.) Fortunately, this awareness allows me to say *no* more often, to take extra measures of self-care, and to reset my "plans" for the day – until I release the drain. In all this, I realize I'm making the conscious choice to favor life balance and "being my best self" over trying to jam more into my day (with the stress and lack of presence that would sure tag along). I can't give what I don't have.

Each of us is different; your choices may differ from mine. Without awareness, however, you don't *have* choices.

Exercise: Load limits affect each of us differently. Some of us are more focused than others on what we want. Some of us are more drained than others by the world around us. Some of us apparently (perverse?) thrive on the consequences (stress, anxiety, etc.). The impact is real, whether we're aware of it or not. Either way, you can learn to restore energy balance to your life. Steps: (1) know what *matters* to you each day; (2) grow *awareness* of where your energy is going, both intended and not (leaks); (3) make new *choices*.

Exercise #1: Know what matters: Start each day by naming what you want this *day* to be like. (You can do this for projects, meetings, relationships, etc., too.) At first, you'll find that your results may not match your vision. That's not failure; it's part of building momentum. You don't force change; your growing awareness of what matters most creates energy, so change happens – naturally – as a result of your continued practice alone.

Exercise #2: Know your energy drains: Stop what you're doing several times a day. During a few moments of quiet reflection, replay in your mind what's happened since the last time you stopped, as if a movie with you as audience. *Listen* to what this tells you. Don't try to change anything. Just notice. For each thing you notice, ask yourself how your energy was used. What energy was directed to what you *wanted* to have happen? What energy leaked out into distractions, the not-so-important, the counterproductive? What symptoms of overload did you experience (stress, productivity drain, etc.) Make two lists; label one *intention* and the other *leaks*. Keep the lists going daily for the month. Stop every several days and see what you're learning about yourself. The more aware you are of where your energy is going, the more your energy will go toward what matters, naturally, without "effort."

Life lessons from nature: I've always been fascinated by nature's energy equation. Nothing is wasted in nature. So, over the 20 years that I led nature tours, I made it a personal challenge to figure out how and why nature's ways made sense from an energy point of view. Some things appear to be wasteful, but on closer inspection, are not. A river's meandering path is a lower energy path to the sea than a straight line. (We'll skip the physics of why this is so.) Polar bears play and spar during times of scarce food supply, yet the energy expended is paid back in the strength and agility required to catch seals from the sea ice. Creosote bushes often show up in a near-perfect matrix, almost as if planted. Although a bit tougher to figure out, that layout provides maximum access to the desert's scarce moisture; another plant in between would starve.

We're all familiar with the "tree line," a not-so-straight line running across North America, Europe and Asia that marks the most northerly extent of trees. Above the tree line lies Arctic tundra. Tundra supports a wide variety of plant life, but none with woody stems or trunks. Why? The common answer, even in some "science" articles, is that it's too cold for trees to grow farther north. That's simply not true. It's actually colder in the boreal forest to the south than it is across much of the tundra or North Pole. The true limiting factor shows up as an energy equation. Trees put their energy *first* into growing and sustaining roots, *next* into leaves or needles, and *only then* into flowers and seeds. (It's about sustainability. No roots = no tree.) Above the tree line, the growing season is simply too short for trees to reach the seed production stage.

My book: *Living Authentically ... in a World That Would Rather You Didn't*. Its *premise* is simple: in the midst of a world that has lost its way, you need never lose your own. Get to know, then honor, your unique truth; the self-trust that emerges will light your way forever. Insights, perspectives, personal reflections and exercises ... so you can make your life your own, not someone else's. All you need to know [here](#) – intro, samples, purchase link – for you or as a gift.

Book of the month: *Sea People, The Puzzle of Polynesia, by Christina Thompson*. Some might consider this a special interest or "niche" book, yet it need not be ... for it speaks loudly to the powers of human consciousness, the limitless nature of human potential, strength of the human spirit, the power of living in the present moment, and dedicated focus on what matters most. It's also a window into a piece of history often (and sadly) not taught in schools. Early Polynesian explorers discovered, by the year 1000, almost every island in the *10 million square miles* of Pacific Ocean using only their acute powers of observation – of winds, waves, stars, birds – and a rather phenomenal consciousness that kept in their mind the *complete navigational path* (directions, positions, timing, winds, waves, stars) they had followed for every moment since leaving home, often months at a time ... so when it was time to return home from their exploration, they truly *knew* their way. Mostly, we can't even *imagine* the depth of that kind of conscious thought or knowing, so far have we strayed from this, the true nature of our humanness. A beautiful window in history, humanity, consciousness and the potential available to us all. And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.