



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Setting Life's Table

*"Start where you are; use what you have; do what you can."
- variously attributed to both Teddy Roosevelt and Arthur Ashe*

Are you one with the courage to take to take 100% personal responsibility for how your life goes? Or are you one resigned to blame life's circumstances, other people, or even the past, for why your life doesn't work?

Those who struggle and blame often believe the path to happiness means *others* (or the past) must change, that they deserve a **re-deal** on life. (If only he were nicer. If only I had more money. If only I had different parents.)

Those who take responsibility know the path to happiness is up to them, doesn't depend on the behavior of others, and may just need a perspective **re-set** every now and then. They accept life as it is. (What's possible now, *given* what is so?) "Accept" doesn't mean like or agree; it means seeing with clarity and objectivity, unclouded by any judgment you may hold in the matter. Only then can you bring the phenomenal power of consciousness inside you to apply this month's quote: "start where you are, use what you have, do what you can."

It seems to me that we often live *in denial* of this message, however, which is the **true** cause of the struggles we complain about. I mean, really: you can't start where you're **not**, you can't use what you **don't** have, and you can't do what you **can't** do. Simple enough, right? Yet how often do we judge and/or fight this simple truth?

Despite that our judgmental nature holds us back, we came by it innocently enough; we *learned* it! Think back: You **should** do well in school. You **should** know a lot. You **should** work hard. You **should** avoid mistakes. You **should** stay busy. You **should** be productive. Life **should** be fair. You **should** be nice to others before caring for yourself. You **shouldn't** waste time dreaming. You **shouldn't** question authority. You **shouldn't** rock the boat. These "**should**" lessons left us believing life *isn't OK* as it is, so we have to turn it into something else if we're ever to be happy. I don't know about you, but after 30 years of trying to uphold this nonsense, I realized the boat *needed* to be rocked!! Unknowingly, I'd *become* these lessons, and I'd left my true self by the roadside. No wonder I was stressed, anxious, disillusioned. You might reflect for a moment on lessons *you've* "become" over the years. Can you trace them back to their source? Can you see how they serve to constrain you from joy that could be yours?

So then, what's the path beyond ... beyond re-deal mentality if you're so inclined, and even beyond the everyday challenge inherent in taking personal responsibility? The "answer" is simple; the path to get there takes a bit of work. The answer: gain non-judgmental clarity and acceptance that "what is true today" "... is true today. With that clarity, you have a solid foundation from which to create a life you love. "Start where you are."

I've written much about gaining awareness, clarity and acceptance. (See either of my [books](#), *A Field Guide to Life* or *Living Authentically*, or just about any of my monthly newsletters.) So here, I want to suggest an exercise that *begins* with clarity and opens you to a world of new possibility, possibility that has always been inside you, but may have become lost in the cumulative weight of life's lessons, experiences and challenges. It's called "Setting the Table." It's an *imaginative* exercise that evokes the inherent power of your creative genius. Its effectiveness lies in the fact that it's ... imaginative ... meaning that it's not a plan, a project, a chore, or mandate to change. Imagination is one of the powers human consciousness holds that allows us to *create* a new reality (in our minds) while we *live* in different reality, *at the same time*. In imagining mode, nothing is impossible. Today's struggles exist only if you imagine them continuing. And why would you do that, unless you simply love struggle?

So allow your mind the freedom to "imagine a world into being." And be aware that the only thing that can stop you here is **you** ... in the form of a *thought* ... a thought that tells you this is nonsense, useless, impossible, etc. Do you have the courage to hold those thoughts in abeyance for long enough to consider new possibility? The picture that emerges may surprise you.

Exercise: *Setting the Table*. Sit quietly in a comfortable place, free of distraction. Let your mind calm. Imagine you have the power to “set the table” of your future in exactly the way you’d like life to unfold. (You do.) Start by seeing the table as empty – *nothing* at all on it. Your future hasn’t been invented yet; for this exercise, nothing in today’s world exists except your inner truth. Allow yourself to *be* with this image for a while. “Clear the table.”

Now it’s time to “set the table” – with a life you’d love. It’s *your* life, so all that’s needed here is energy that’s *already inside you* (your deepest longing, for example). Ask yourself what’s the most important thing you’d *like* your life to embody. It could be an idea, like “freedom,” or an activity, like “meaningful work,” or “connection with nature.” Allow what’s unique in you the room to play. Remember: *it’s an exercise!!* Absorb the feeling of this being the core of your life. Then ask what might be *next* most important. Keep going, one at a time, allowing the energy of your inner truth to surface, be “felt,” then become part of an expanding whole. (P.S., You don’t have to *fill* the table!)

You may think you need space on the table for everything in your life today. The whole point of this exercise is to “dream an ideal life into being.” Why would you put toxic people, bills, resentments or meaningless work on the table if the idea is to create a life that brings you joy? You wouldn’t. Remember: *it’s an exercise*. Nothing goes on the table unless you *want* it there! As the picture of a life you’d love emerges, embrace it, feel it, fall in love with it. You need “sell” your ideal life to only one person – you! As you do this exercise regularly, its energy grows.

Now, as you re-enter “today’s reality,” notice how this exercise *proved* you have the power to choose where you put your energy. (You chose to do the exercise!) This means, despite life’s “stuff,” you also have the power to *take one step* toward your vision every day. Try it out! As a way to guide you, notice that because you have the power to *imagine* a life you love, you also have the power to *become* the life you love. It’s the same power – consciousness, choice, personal responsibility. If you believe someone can stop you, did you put them on the table?

Life lessons from nature: “Every moment Nature starts on the longest journey and every moment she reaches her goal.” (Goethe) Mother Nature doesn’t concern herself much with having her table overflowing with “stuff.” That’s because nature *sees* an empty table ... in each moment. In this way, each moment becomes a space of pure possibility. And just look at the magnificence she has created, and *continues* to create in each moment. Clearing the table, then setting the table, *in each moment*, for 4 billion years. Might we listen? Might we hear?

Openings to New Possibility -- *The Shop at The Road Not Taken*:

- *The Road Not Taken Community*, a no-cost subscription that offers you connection, interaction, challenge, and learning. Articles, newsletters, blogs. I welcome dialogue; it’s an example of how we may all learn together.
- My books: available [here](#).
 - ***“A Field Guide to Life: Navigating the Challenges of Our Lives and Times.”*** Explore common struggles that hold you back from a life you love. When you discover their true causes, you can create true solutions.
 - ***“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.
 - ***Purposeful Wanderings***, 19 years of *The Road Not Taken* newsletters available [here](#) as a single pdf file.
- ***Personalized Life Coaching***: If you’re one of the few with the courage to leave conventional thinking behind so you can live instead with authenticity and freedom, I’ll help you gain clarity and perspective – about yourself, others, life, work and the world – that allow you to do just that, every day. Trade the *way it is* for the *way it could be*. [Contact me](#) for a conversation that *will* change your perspective and may just change your life.

Book of the month: *Radical Responsibility*, by Fleet Maull. This book offers in-depth, and very practical advice on moving from a culture of blame to a culture of personal responsibility. He has “been there,” so he’s walking his talk. His message is based in personal experience, science, some of the best thinkers of our time, and a true desire to help others. “You” are OK; you just “learned” to focus outside yourself instead of inside. And that can be unlearned. Powerful; fascinating. And if you’re on Cape Cod, you’ll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.