



Purposeful Wanderings

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

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Being Busy or Being Productive

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and to see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." – Thoreau, in Walden

As a society, we seem obsessed with being productive, often living in a state of constant overload, fixated as we are on "getting it all done." Yet even a casual observer would note we rarely do "get it all done," which invariably leads to *more* overload ... thereby denying us the freedom, peace, meaning and joy we *claim* we're working so hard to attain. It would appear we're stuck in an endless loop. It would also suggest *we must be missing something*.

If you're familiar with my writing, you know my claim: what we're commonly missing is wrapped in our [outdated, habituated and largely unconscious] ways of seeing and thinking. We do remain stuck in a loop, simply *because* it's all unconscious and habituated! More of the same "thinking" creates more of the same result. Until ...

Among those habituated thoughts are three self-limiting beliefs: (1) We equate being busy and being productive. This mistaken connection leads "naturally" to a mistaken conclusion ... if we're *not* busy, we're *not* productive. (2) We can't imagine that creativity, pondering or silence could be thought of as "busy," so we deny ourselves exactly what's needed to get out of the endless loop of trying. (3) We secretly "like" being busy because it serves to distract us from the discomfort of our own *lack of self-trust*. No wonder things don't change all that much!

Whole industries have sprung up around changing this behavior – books, workshops, medications, even coaching. But focusing on changing behavior without changing the thinking that created the behavior is just not sustainable.

So, what's the path out (assuming you'd prefer freedom and peace to overwhelm)? As always, it's to get to know those now-unconscious thoughts, thoughts that continue to tell you to keep busy no matter what, thoughts you listen to (and follow) instead of listen for (and question). With a bit of practice, you begin to see firsthand the invalid connection you've drawn between busyness and productivity; you begin to see how your sense of self and your measure of success are based more in the *results* you achieve than in the essence of who you truly are. And as your ways of seeing change, your ways of thinking change to match. And so do your choices ... then your results.

My "quiet time" is not quiet. It's filled – with insights, intuitive messages, creative ideas, awareness of possibilities. Turns out this is the most productive part of my day! In this silence, I reclaim my true self *each day*, the real me, unclouded by the noise that otherwise surrounds me. (I don't get lost this way.) Yet if I don't "look busy," some would call me lazy (or at least assume I'm in desperate need of being interrupted so I'd have someone to talk to).

I lead a productive life. I work harder than I used to, yet my energy no longer comes from wanting, from trying, from goals, from fear, from measurement or from impatience ... but from the creative essence inside me. I write because I love to. I coach because I love to. I speak because I love to. Yes, I make my living from what I love, but I can't help myself; I'd do these things anyway. They're who I am. I've found that when I trust my [sustainable-for-a-lifetime] inner truth, there's little I *can't* do. This kind of productivity arises naturally from *living the unique innate creative process* inside me (and not living just for the *results* of that process). It's powerful indeed.

Being perpetually busy may give the illusion of being in control, but the opposite is closer to true, simply because the faster we go, the more we miss along the way. Being perpetually busy may help us feel we're "good enough," but thusly deluded, we fail to discover and trust our own inner truth – that who we are is pure possibility.

When I think of living the limitless potential we represent, I often recall an idea from Ben and Roz Zander in their book, *The Art of Possibility*: You might learn to view life as a *possibility* to live *into*, not just another *expectation* to live *up to*. Even the *words* exude the freedom, meaning, peace and joy I want to experience in my life ... with no hint at needing to be busy anywhere in this message. Wildly productive, perhaps, but not just "busy."

Exercise: Stop for a few moments of quiet reflection each day. Call it meditation, self-reflection, time-out, quiet time, prayer, or just doing nothing. The discovery of true self shows up in silent moments, spaces *between* your thoughts. But if there are no spaces, it's really no surprise that you don't know what truly matters to you. A regular practice of calming the mind is a pathway to that truth. Review your day; see if you can notice, then name, hidden beliefs, assumptions and ways of thinking that underlie your choices – ***why and how you do what you do each day.*** Write them down. Possible candidates: making money is #1; trying harder always works; I have to get it all done; I have to please everyone; life is tough and I can't change that; I can't make a living doing what I love. Among these "voices in your head" you may even find one that says stopping to do this exercise is "unproductive." Just notice. Even though it may feel awkward or unproductive at first, you discover "design flaws" in your life. Perhaps you'll see how your *thinking*, not the *workload*, causes your stress and dissatisfaction. Stress doesn't come from not trying hard enough; it comes from trying too hard – with outdated or inadequate processes and systems. Trying is a sign that you're off track! A ***sustainable system*** is one that works as well under heavy loads as it does under light loads. Your life will be in balance when ***you*** are in balance. Is your life a sustainable process?

Life lessons from nature: *Nature doesn't care about results.* Results happen, but her focus is instead the *process* – creative expression. *Nature doesn't know what comes next.* Continually focused on process, she keeps creating, regardless of what's happening. (Stop here for a moment and think about your own relationship – to "results," to "not knowing.") *Nature "listens" to what's going on in the environment* for clues as to what to do next. Because her mind isn't already made up, choices can be "context-sensitive;" *she responds to the conditions of the moment, in the moment.* (*How might that be as a way of living?*) What nature listens to is called *feedback*, and it's a natural and inherent aspect of all living systems (including our own). By responding to feedback in each moment, nature creates a "real-time" system of adaptation, allowing life to create its next steps as it goes. This approach generates far more possibility than plans or goals could ever fabricate. With creativity and uncertainty together, nature then creates order from chaos. Creativity comes in many flavors; the environment is always changing ... so the universe is rich with variety. We are creatures of nature. Not surprisingly, we follow the same laws. But when we shun creativity as unproductive, quell uncertainty to regain our lost sense of control, obsess on the outcomes at the expense of the process that creates them, invoke measurements from the outside rather than listening to what's already there on the inside, we live in a constant fight with nature's laws, making the "order" we so desire a nearly impossible outcome. *Then* we wonder why life is so difficult. Nature teaches. Can we listen? Can we learn?

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 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: ***To Walk Alone in the Crowd***, by Antonio Muñoz Molina. An artfully done story (or set of stories, really) designed to help you know (and remember) who you are, even *while* in the midst of life's noise and distraction. It's not so much about being alone as it is about being awake and aware of your own experience in this very moment ... just so you don't miss so much. It's a book for all of us, not just the "alone-minded." And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons; 508-539-6985.