

**"Redirect and Refocus: Discover your Lifework" Summary, June VAN Meeting
Tuesday, June 10, 2003, 10 a.m. to noon, Earle Brown Center, U of M St. Paul**

Present

Maureen Bruce, Julie Bursik, Thor Carlson, Cathy Coult, Meridel Fahsl, Deborah Dolan, Gretchen Faas, Mark Fischer, Karen Greer (presenter), Chuck Gribble, Jan Hively (convenor and recorder), Janet Jacobson, Frank Johnson, Fahy Low, Sue Meyers, Barbara Muesing, Robert Pope, Amanda Sapp, Ray Seth, Jan Sigmund, Dick Smith, Jackie Stewart, Janet Triplett, Doris Unger, Karl Willson, Rich Young

Introductions

Jan Hively convened the meeting and asked people to introduce themselves by telling their names, describing some vision for their future lifework that they had had when they were young, and telling what had actually happened in relation to that vision. There were a few recurring themes, among them:

- ♦ A number of the women had had career dreams that were changed dramatically after they got married.
- ♦ A number of men and women had converted their avocations/hobbies/passions to their professions (e.g., teaching, investments, travel, righting wrongs)
- ♦ A number of men and women had just moved along in life, changing direction as job openings were available
- ♦ The older participants spoke about their current transition from "humans doing" to "humans being"

"Creating a Compelling Vision for your Future"

Presenter: Karen Greer, Retirement Transitions Consultant.

Karen has been making presentations through the U of M Career and Lifework Center during the last year. Steve Wagner, the director of that center, was scheduled to join her as a presenter for this VAN meeting, but was then called to join a grand jury.

Personal Introduction. Karen has a master's degree in Adult Education and has been trained as a Life Coach. Karen said that while she had been employed in staff development for the Robbinsdale Schools in the early 80s, she had developed a retirement program for teachers. Now, she is a retirement transitions consultant. It was and is exciting for her to see people take advantage of the opportunity to step back and take a look at the infinite variety of choices available to them through the transition to retirement. Many people have not previously reflected on what they really like or enjoy. It's Karen's mission to inspire people -- to ignite people to "stand up for their lives" (a phrase from Cheryl Richardson's weekly on-line newsletter).

Connecting head and heart. It's important to take some time for self-evaluation and reflection. What moves you in a powerful way? What generates deep, soulful emotion? Where is your passion? For Karen, the possibility of joining an international peace force is deeply moving, stimulating tears. She asked the participants to think about books. "Which section of the bookstore do you head for?" "What is exciting on the news?"

"Which movies would you watch over and over?" "What clues do they give about the themes that generate your passions?" "What excites you when you listen to personal stories told by others?" "What personal stories would you tell to engage the passions of others?" "Have you overcome a challenge? Put it to use in inspiring others."

Adult Wellbeing. One researcher, Dorothy Cantor, worked with people 45 to 80 to follow their life process. She found that everyone needs someone to reflect back to you what he/she has heard from what you have said. It's helpful to have a Life Coach, who helps you shape your lifework, and is good at making you feel valued. It's also helpful to have a group to talk with. She wrote about the "Six Dimensions of Adult Wellbeing": self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, sense of autonomy, control over your environment, sense of purpose in life, and sense of personal growth. The latter are related to the meaning of Lifework.

Defining "Lifework." "Lifework" describes your work that expresses your uniqueness. This is what gives the sense that there is meaning in life, a deep sense of fulfillment. That is what I am called to do, to be, or to share. For some, it's their career. For others, it's telling a story, caring for grandchildren, volunteering, providing hospitality. It's paid or unpaid productivity. The more we do what fits for us, the better we do it. Then we carry our talents and strengths with us to apply elsewhere.

Retirement. During retirement, you should take the time to look at what you have done and what you enjoy doing. Reflection is scary for a lot of people. They are afraid to look at the future. They are afraid of failure in this success-oriented world. Also, there are time management issues that stand in the way of spending time to reflect. Regardless, it's important to spend time looking at your experiences with the ups and downs of life. Life is a journey, and we build resiliency as we go along.

Questions for "After mid-life". Karen asked the participants to pair up and to give each other the chance to respond to each of the following questions:

1. What dimensions of life energize you? Which deplete you?
2. What do you value most at this time in your life?

The pairs were given 10 minutes to conduct this conversation.

Karen handed out a dozen more questions for the participants to use to stimulate reflection at another time:

1. What have been your most fulfilling and least fulfilling jobs and why?
2. What two accomplishments in your work and/or life do you feel most proud?
3. What are important values for you at this point in your life? (flexibility, leadership, creativity, adventure, variety and security)
4. What are your strongest skills that you still enjoy using? (communication, creative, interpersonal, technical, intellectual, management, numbers and data.)

5. Is it possible for you to assume a role as a mentor in your work life?
6. What involvements/activities in your life are energizing you and which are depleting you?
7. Is there a nagging inner voice that keeps reminding you of a change you really want or need to make? If so, what is it?
8. Are you spending your time on what matters most to you in your life?
9. Do you feel good about where you are putting your creative talents and energy?
10. Are your talents and gifts being used to their fullest potential?
11. If money were not an issue, what would you do now and in the future?
12. What is your dream for your retirement and/or later years?

Barriers to reflection. Unfortunately, it is not usual that we have the opportunity for deep, rich conversations about questions such as these. Sometimes conversations are incomplete. Competition for survival is a major issue in this new world, inhibiting mutual support. Also, there are major issues about making the most of your health and aging. You don't want to waste a minute of it. Changes in your situation cause anxiety. We must acknowledge how huge the retirement transition is, talk with others, and receive support.

Our life experiences have frequently created barriers to dreaming:

- ♦ "I don't deserve to dream."
- ♦ "My parents....culture....religion have given me my belief systems."
- ♦ "What I believe is actually what happens."

But the experience of dreaming about the future is important, because it uncovers what is possible.

Bibliography. Karen mentioned that there are a lot of resources to support transitions. Go to the first pathway on VAN's Web site, <www.van.umn.edu>, called "Finding Personal Direction". Learn from older adult role models. Or check out some of the following books:

1. Braham, Barbara, Finding Your Purpose, Crisp Publications, Inc. Menlo Park, Ca., 1991.
2. Cantor, Dorothy, What do You Want To Do When You Grow Up, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, MA, 2000.
3. Drilling, Vern, Closing Doors, Opening Worlds, Fairview Press, St. Paul, MN., 1993.

4. Gambone, James, *Refirement, A Boomer's Guide to Life After 50*, Kirk House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN 2000.
5. Harrison, Earl, *You Are More Than Your Job*, Fairview Deaconess Press, Minneapolis, MN 1993.
6. Jeffers, Susan, *Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway*, Fawcett Columbine, New York, 1992.
7. Leider & Shapiro, *Repacking Your Bags & Whistle While You Work*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 1995 & 2001.
8. O, *The Oprah Magazine*, Oprah Winfrey, "Are You Listening To Your Life?", January 2001, p. 128.
9. Richardson, Cheryl, *Stand Up For Your Life*, Simon & Schuster, Book or Audio Tape, 2002.
10. Rowe and Kahn, *Successful Aging*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1998.
11. Sheehy, Gail, *New Passages*, Random House, New York, 1995.
12. Zelinski, Ernie, *The Joy Of Not Working*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA., 1997

**Next VAN Meeting: Tuesday, July 8, 10 to noon, Fridley Community Center
"Simple Practices to Transform Mind, Body and Spirit."**

The meeting will be held in the Fridley Community Center, 6085 7th Street Northeast. It's a few blocks north of Hwy 694 and three blocks east of University Avenue. Go to 61st Avenue on University Avenue (Highway 47) and turn east a few blocks to 7th Street, which runs parallel (north and south) to University. The center is on the northeast corner of the intersection of 61st and 7th.