



Do You Think About Doing Your Own Thing?

by Ed Maier

Earlier this year, I attended the Connections event at the Q Center (formerly Arthur Andersen's St. Charles Training Facility). Connections began several years ago as a get-together of Andersen alums from the human resources and operations side of the business. I was invited to join and have had the opportunity to attend a few times. The event is organized under John Blumberg's and several others' leadership and is held annually. Its focus is leadership development. If you would like information about next year's event, contact John at JohnBlumberg@KeynoteConcepts.com.

At this year's event, Roycee Kerr and David Swinehart gave a very thoughtful and interesting presentation. It was about several Arthur Andersen alums who have taken on roles and responsibilities that are significantly different, or in substantially different industries or walks of life, than their responsibility areas with the firm. I may devote future writings to some of the specific changes people have made. But I did want to raise the question—have you ever thought about doing your own thing?

I am not referring to completing a "bucket list". This is not about doing some things you have always wanted to do -- like sky-diving, mountain climbing or driving a Harley. I am talking about making a significant change in your career path, and perhaps your life.

In my coaching career, I have had the chance to meet many people who are going through a career transition. Many must make some quick decisions and a quick change due to economic necessities. But others have time to think through what it is they really want to do -- and yet they don't. They get stuck in jobs and careers that may reward them economically, but do not fulfill them as individuals. If you have a passion for something in life, but your job or career is not related to that passion, you should give some serious thought to making a change. And, what better time to begin thinking or planning it than when change has been thrust upon you?

So, how do you get started?

First, answer this question: Do you understand your economics? Will your personal fiscal situation allow you time to do some exploration? If the answer is a resounding "No", then focus on getting the best job you can to stabilize the economic side. Save the "do-your-own-thing" thing for later. But if you have some time, start to develop your own alternate path thinking. Sit down and make some lists:

- What are your values?
- What's important to you in your life? What drives you? What are your passions?
- What are your motivators and de-motivators? What energizes you, what de-energizes you? What activities make you want to face the world each day, over and over again?
- What are your skill strengths and what are your skill weaknesses?
- What is your behavior style? Are you a quick-starter or a thoughtful planner? Do you like being around people all day or would you rather work in a quieter, more reflective environment?
- What is fun for you to do? What is not fun for you to do?
- Involve your close relatives, friends and colleagues in the process of identifying these characteristics about you. Challenge them to challenge your thinking.



Once you have made some lists, and checked them twice, review them to look for patterns, relationships or common ideas of interest. This exercise will stimulate your thinking. Perhaps it will lead you to the same activities you have pursued in the past--perhaps not. Whatever the results are, you can now build a plan and execute it. In this article, am not going to write up the steps you should take to build a plan. Besides, I am pretty confident that each reader of this article had sufficient training and experience at the firm that you can develop your own plan.

I do suggest that you start your plan with an overall idea of where you would like to end up ten, twenty, even thirty years down the road. This is your life you are talking about. Barring unforeseen circumstances and with a good health maintenance plan, actuaries say you will live a long time. Look ahead that far and create your future. Then fill the gaps and build-in the steps to achieve it.

Doing your own thing does not only mean running your own business or being an entrepreneur. It can be achieved as a participant in a larger team or organization. But how are you going to achieve what it is if you never define it?

As always, I am interested in your comments on these newsletter articles. To continue with the theme of this piece in the future, I am interested in hearing from anyone who has made a significant change in direction of their profession or their life. What did you think about? What steps did you take to achieve your goal? What mistakes did you make? As always, please send your thoughts to me at Ed@ThinkStraightTalkStraight.com. Thanks.