



Locating Your Core—And Your Clients'

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*To find my home in one sentence
Concise, as if hammered in metal
Not to enchant anybody
Not to earn a lasting name in posterity,
An unnamed need for order, for rhythm, for form,
Which three words
Are opposed to chaos and nothingness.//
—Czeslaw Milosz*

I don't know if it's fate, the result of my curiosity, or some cosmic message that is being sent to me piecemeal, but I continually find myself in conversations with people struggling with midlife career crises. It's like the retirement conundrum—"What do I now do with my life?"—but long before the retirement phase of life. These conversations are with successful folks in corporate or practitioner settings who are wondering why they are so terribly uncomfortable and at odds with where their careers are.

I remember sitting with an attorney who was "walking comatose" through the motions every day. I asked him first to describe the tasks expected of him each day and then gave him a personality profile. The results from the profile demonstrated the exact opposite of what was expected of him careerwise—his work ran counter to his core being. He was attempting to push his circular core into a square workplace. I looked at him and said, "You're wired for something else, and I think it has to do with building relationships and getting deals done." Today he is in commercial real estate and loving it.

Another executive told me of his corporate home office shifting to something other than what he had signed on for—something less human, coldly calculating and political and often disingenuous. I hear this story a lot. Some try to maneuver into another position until they are vested and can hit the exit. Some leave and start their own business. Others do nothing and try to ride out the misery. A common thread in all these stories has to do with how we order our lifestyle and noetic priorities—or more specifically, how we decide what matters most. There are three key elements to consider:

1. □ Our essence. Who we are at the core.
2. □ Our environment. Where we plant ourselves with hopes toward fruition.

3. Our income. The material return on our core at work.

This is the precise order in which life decisions should be made. If the order gets scrambled, confusion sets in—creating internal chaos and a sense of nothingness. Wise lifestyle decision-making starts on the inside and works to the outside. A signal of things out of order is when what's happening on the outside begins to disrupt what's happening on the inside. It's a sign the internal (who) has become a slave to the external (it).

Consider the following three frameworks, and ask yourself which one feels right, possesses the greatest integrity, and would lead to the greatest fulfillment:

1. I've got to make a certain amount of money no matter what. I may hate my job, hate the company I keep and loathe each day, but I've got to get it done.
2. I want to be in a safe place, even if it means I'm not doing things that interest and energize me. The income is too important to risk.
3. I want my work to be an expression of who I am. I want to sense a mission in my efforts. I'll do this wherever I am welcome and appreciated. I'll find a way to live on what I can make.

In statement No. 1, we see what happens when income takes the wheel and environment and essence are placed in secondary and tertiary roles. In statement No. 2, we see what happens when environment takes precedence to preserve income. Essence, or who we are at the core, suffers again. Instinctively, we all recognize what's happening here, and although we tell ourselves that statement No. 3 may be best, it's just not practical. Well, I guess that depends on what you want out of life—either the accoutrements or the sense of well-being and satisfaction that come from pursuing life from the inside out.

The vast majority reverse the order of this framework into the disintegrating sequence of, "I've got to make the money in spite of what I must endure to get it." Their order is: income-environment-essence instead of the natural, organic order of essence-environment-income. This framework leaves behind shells of human beings, mental lesions and existential havoc.

Since 1981, Dr. Joseph Janesz has been counseling top executives, professional athletes and uber-successful individuals at the Cleveland Clinic. He told me, "Through the process and the demands of the process of achievement, there is very little reflection, and these [financially] super-successful people end up in a mindless, mechanical, trans-like state where they end up being a human doing instead of a human being." He asserted that the clinic is busy because, "We have a lot of human beings who are living unexamined lives."

Janesz sees anxiety and depression, dissatisfaction and unhappiness ramping up in our present age. He says the reason is simply that people are lacking alignment with their true inner self (their core). This lack of alignment often results in chronic and compulsive behaviors where these people become addicted to destructive behaviors and habits. If people don't get to the core of who they are at the front of the parade, everything around them starts falling apart.

Recently I began reading *Finishing Well*, a book by Bob Buford and a sequel to his best-selling *Halftime*. In the book, he tells the story of a fateful lunch with his mentor, Peter Drucker, where Drucker articulated in a single sentence what he perceived to be Buford's core.

Drucker did for Buford what the Polish poet, Milosz, articulated as, "Find my home in one sentence." It strikes me that this might be a worthy exercise for all of us to attempt—to find our home in a single sentence or in a

few words. Here are some questions that might help in the exercise:

1. Essence

“What matters most to you?”

“Who are you at the core?” (What makes you unique?)

“What excuses are you making for not honoring your essence?”

2. Environment

“Is my essence allowed to flourish here?”

“Am I growing toward what I want to be?”

“Am I challenged in positive ways?”

3. Income

“Do I feel fairly compensated for the value I bring?”

“What is my paycheck costing me (in terms of life quality)?”

“Has the money become a tether to misery?”

Milosz’s quote italicizes the struggle to locate one’s core, focusing on the core as the driver—and not some other consequence of one’s efforts. As a poet, Milosz identified his core as the need for order, rhythm and form. Those three aspects were always at work in him and he sought to give them expression.

What is at your core? How would you define it in a single sentence? My single sentence is, “I want to stimulate meaningful dialogues around money and life.”

I’m hoping that this happens for you and for whomever you pass this article on to.

Mitch Anthony is the author of the industry best seller StorySelling for Financial Advisors and the groundbreaking The New Retirementality (now in its fourth edition). A highly sought-after speaker, Mitch is widely regarded as a thought leader and pioneer in Financial Life Planning.