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PURSUE “PASSIONATE EQUILIBRIUM”

Simplicity as a Solution

Paul and Tina were living the high life. They had great jobs, earned salaries that went a long way, and were respected and well-liked by their colleagues. In short, they were the consummate career couple.

Tina completed her Ph.D. with honors and had a very stimulating and satisfying position working closely with the dean at a well-known medical school. Life should have been perfect. It wasn't. Tina longed for a child. Paul did not—not at all.

This single discrepancy could not accommodate compromise, only consensus, and Tina and Paul couldn't reconcile the question. Finally, they divorced, and to their credit, did it amicably. Tina then summoned all her courage and took the biggest chance of her life so far—she adopted a child as a single parent. She is now the proud parent of Mary, who has made all the difference in Tina's life. Of course, Tina is making all the difference in Mary's life too! The remarkable part is that even though Tina complicated her life greatly and added infinite responsibility, she is even more successful as the new assistant dean. %

Imagine how many different ways you *could* live your life. You could run your own little boutique business or oversee a cast of thousands. Perhaps you want to dance all night and bake all day. Maybe you want to travel the globe and have a small farm. Stay home and raise a family but still taste-test chocolates for Godiva. Maybe you want to be a CEO *and* a soccer parent.

Sometimes life imitates art, but often it feels like a treadmill, moving all the time but going nowhere with the same old view. Work. Chores. Errands. Bills. Do it all over tomorrow.

Other times, it's just a rat race. The physicists didn't really need to prove that the pace of life is accelerating—most people are barely hanging on. When the focus is just trying to hang on, though, it's pretty tough to truly engage in the full experience. The stress overwhelms the joy, the dissatisfaction squelches the passion, and the pace precludes renewal.

Living with zest and getting some rest—are both possible? Yes, and it's always about balance. A new PDA with more horsepower won't get you there. A hands-free cell phone or a wireless Internet connection won't do it either. You'll be able to multiply your multitasking, but all the gadgets in the world won't serve up passionate equilibrium. Passionate equilibrium is what *will* get you there.

Passionate equilibrium is about how you live your life. With it, you can claim the delicate balance of truly bringing your best gifts to life while also living in a healthy, sane fashion. You'll be able to do what you love and actually love it while you're doing it, because you'll slow down long enough to enjoy it all.

Explore passionate equilibrium and make it a vital part of your life when you:

- Identify your true passion and practice saying *no* to the surrounding noise that leads to chaotic diversions rather than a balanced and meaningful life.
- Break through resistance and reluctance to claim success.
- Address gaps in job and life satisfaction by learning how to expand your EQ skills and be happy.
- Check in with your 2% Project to be sure you're on track to combine passion, patience, and practice.

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JUST SAY YES!

Do you sometimes dream about what you would do with your life *if only*. . . ? If only you had the energy. The money. The opportunity for the right training or education. Excuses are a dime a dozen and obstacles are around every corner. There are always a million reasons why something can't be done, but it just takes one reason to do it—and you can find that reason in your Esprit d'Core!

Think for a minute of a time when you were fully enthusiastic, meeting life with zest, overflowing with gung-ho, go-for-it behavior. Was it fun? Was it contagious to others? Do you look back at the time fondly? Make a few notes about how you got there and how to get back there in the future.

What keeps you from living that way all the time? You may think it is just too hard to live a life filled with zest. The choices aren't as narrow as living with passion at a pace faster than the speed of light or living a simple, uncomplicated life that offers balance and rest at the expense of passion. The strategy calls for the appropriate doses of correct thinking, action, and balance. Of course, life sometimes deals some hard blows, but that need not stop you from finding a way to express your passion.

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SITTING TALL

My brother Ken is challenged with severe multiple sclerosis, or MS. His whole life happens from a chair, but he's no spectator. He doesn't own a car because he can't drive, so he has to rely upon his wheelchair, public transportation, family, and friends to get around town. Even still, this doesn't slow him down.

Life is neither simple nor easy for Ken, yet he has found many ways to pursue his passions and bring his gifts to the world. When he had more mobility, he was co-leader of a Boy Scout troop for physically challenged boys. Later, he served on the board for his housing association. Although his health has continued to decline, he hasn't quit. He

approaches every day with cheerfulness and gratitude, happy to be a part of life. Ken is passionate about his independence. He works fiercely to take care of himself, and he does it with more courage and grace than you can imagine. He is a role model for so many, including myself. I am awed and inspired by him, and when I am with him, I am humbled by how pale my own challenges are. I want to be a better human being because of him. What a gift he is to all who know him!

A DEFINING MOMENT

Is it safe to bring your passion, your zest, fully alive? If something says it's not, befriend that voice and investigate to find what changes it needs to help you go for it.

Some people may feel that it's too risky to bring their passion fully alive. They may worry that it will consume them or force them to abandon their loved ones or other joys. Understandably, most people don't want to give up most of their life to develop one gift. This is even truer for the many who feel a hunger to live simply. Of course there is always some give and take, but you can bring your best to your life, you can engage in your passion, and also live a balanced life. Neither value will be accomplished to the extreme; there will be a balance. Yet by giving time and expression to both, you are likely to feel more fulfilled and less harassed.

The bottom line for building this discipline requires that you express clarity about your values through all your important choices. It means that once you make a decision, you actively pursue it.

DO IT ON YOUR OWN TERMS

Grace and Grit (1991) is in my top 10 favorite books of all time. The always loving and sometimes painful story covers the five years of Ken and Treya Wilber's marriage during which they struggled with Treya's breast cancer. The authors invite the reader into the heart of their anguishing and uplifting love story. Their story includes the journal

writing Treya did during the time, interspersed with Ken's thoughts and recounting of his experience. Treya was in her 30s and had been an activist in many causes. Ken Wilber was becoming one of the world's greatest living philosophers.

Treya wrote of her effort to balance being and doing. As it became increasingly apparent that she might not live long, Treya faced a powerful struggle, feeling despondent that she hadn't had enough time to bring her gift to the world. "Yes, I have contributed," she wrote, "but not enough." No amount of assurance from Ken or others about her value helped her feel sufficient about her contributions during her life.

Treya's illness brought her to her knees at times, but it also raised her to what I can only call "divine wisdom." Ken writes that her archetypal issue was "being versus doing, allowing versus controlling, trusting versus defending" (166). We all have archetypal issues; perhaps meeting the challenge they present us is the reason we are on this planet. Dealing with our core life challenges is usually at the heart of our life's deepest purpose. If we are not facing those challenges, we will begin to swing out of balance and struggle with denial.

When Treya found the answer to her personal quandary, she described it as a marriage of the "Carmelites' [Catholic nuns] emphasis on passion with the Buddhists' parallel emphasis on equanimity" (338). Her writing seems to sing the phrase of passionate equanimity over and over. Finally she found the answer to her struggle! She describes her phrase as "to be fully passionate about all aspects of life, about one's relationship with spirit, to care to the depths of one's being but with no trace of clinging or holding." Treya continues, "The first part of my life was learning passion. The life after cancer, equanimity" (338–39). This was her balance of being and doing.

When I read this phrase I felt a surge of excitement. Yes! I recognized the struggle. How much should I do? I have many gifts to give, but surely it isn't valuable to live my life in an exhausted state. There's a phrase some revolutionaries use that they find inspirational: "We sleep when we die." That doesn't feel authentic or wise to me; I need passion with balance.

Equanimity implies composure; Webster's defines it as "evenness of mental disposition." *Equilibrium* is defined as a "state of balance

between or among opposing forces or processes. . . . a state of intellectual or emotional balance.” So for me the guiding phrase is similar to Treya’s, but different. My watchword is *passionate equilibrium!*

My excitement bubbled over; I couldn’t wait until the women’s leadership group I was in met again and I could tell them *The Answer*. Part of my passion to share the concept and process of the 2% Solution with the world comes from the tremendous lift I received once I could finally articulate my life’s inner goal—to live with passionate equilibrium. While I believe strongly that all of us will benefit from both passionate engagement and balance in our lives, I also know that *you* will only be able to articulate what is most important to you through connecting with your core challenge. What phrase best represents your challenge?

You can’t force your way to authentic discovery—it requires a balance of zest and rest, a harmony between passion and equilibrium. Claiming this balance is what yields a graceful life. A Buddhist practice that can help with this is to come to a full stop when things are starting to get too hectic and assume the mind set of “nowhere to go, nothing to do.”

Passionate equilibrium is a real-world game plan. It’s not pie-in-the-sky perfectionism; rather it is a continual learning process. As you commit to nurture all of yourself, rest and zest both happen, each in its own season and rhythm, but not always according to your schedule. So you need to learn to balance your expectations as well.

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JUST SAY NO!

My book agent, Michael, is unique and insightful. One early day in the life of this book, he mentioned the importance of cutting out the noise in our lives. “That,” he said, “is a critical benefit of the 2% Solution.” He is a good role model. Amazingly, he cuts out the noise in his life by not receiving e-mail. It’s mind-boggling to me that a busy professional with commitments and engagements across the world can pull off something that drastic in the 21st century! Michael demonstrates the possibility of gaining freedom by not surrendering to others’ expectations.

Noise can be too many social events with neighbors, cell phone calls, season tickets that you don't enjoy, overscheduled kids, and anything else that feels burdensome on a routine basis. Noise is the stuff that is hard on your lifestyle, but for some reason you believe you have to tolerate it. You don't—at least not always. Ask Michael. Few of us would think we could run work successfully without e-mail, yet perhaps we could. Check out the noise in your life by working with this questionnaire.

Activity: *Turning Down the Volume*

1. Make a list of all your complaints for a few days. What is irritating, annoying, painful, or just makes things seem jumpy and out of alignment?
2. After you have gathered some data, sit quietly. First enjoy some relaxing, meditative time. Then begin to imagine what a more peaceful life would look and sound like. Feel the experience of a quieter atmosphere in your life. List some concrete examples of how things would sound, feel, and look.
3. Ask yourself what is different. What could change that would bring this marvelous peace?
4. Make the change if you're ready.

Most of us live in an environment that is truly noisy. It may be traffic, sirens, kids, or machinery. In a way it doesn't matter where the noise comes from; no matter the source, it has a stressful effect. That makes it even more important for you to choose to eliminate distractions that don't provide sufficient benefit to justify their cost. Are you ready?