

finding your smile

ezine



Closing Your Legacy Gap

By Colin Hiles

Simple solutions for closing the smile gap in mid-life by Colin Hiles

Solution 5.

Closing Your Legacy Gap

“We were meant to give our lives away. Spend more time living your legacy instead of worrying about leaving it.”

- Lee J. Colan

Have you ever stopped to wonder what your family or friends would most value about you long after you are gone? My ‘legacy gap’ has been sharply brought into focus after I recently experienced one of life’s inevitable events – the death of a loved one.

The 17th of July 2008 is a date etched on my mind for ever. The phone rang. My sister. Her tone told me it wouldn’t be good news. Then she said, “Dad’s died.” Just two small words, but two words packed with emotion.

Dad had been ill with a lung disease called Emphysema, in which irreversibly damaged lungs make it hard to breathe. He had gone in to hospital for his routine yearly check up (or M.O.T. as he called it!), which included an overnight stay. Late in the afternoon of the first day he suffered a massive heart attack and died. Even though his health had deteriorated over the years and we all knew how severe his illness was, it was a shock to lose him so suddenly. There had been no reason to believe he wouldn’t be coming home from hospital.

Remembering

As the eldest son, I was called upon to write Dad’s eulogy. As I sat down to capture my thoughts I began to recall all the special times and fond memories we shared as a family and his impact on my life. It wasn’t long before I had a couple of pages full of thoughts. After a hard day’s work, I felt I had written something worthwhile, and that I would pay my last respects in a manner that would put a smile on his face.

Yet I was under no illusion this was going to be the most difficult eight minute speech I’d ever given. It needed all my courage and composure to deliver it. A couple of times I was overcome with emotion but I knew *what* I said is more important than *how* I said it. I’m sure I did him proud.

Reflections

When we lose someone dear, we are knocked into a period of deep reflection.

Was what Dad considered important while he was alive actually what I wrote in his eulogy? Did Dad know the legacy he had really left us? You see, in my reflections, I realised that his eulogy was filled with so many of the little things that he did which meant so very much to us.

It's not possible for everyone to leave a financial legacy but everybody can, and does, transmit some of the richness of life. The truth is that we are all going to leave a legacy of some kind. The important question is what will the legacy be? What legacy would I leave my two boys, my family, my friends, and my co-workers? My early mentor once said "When they write the chapter about you, make sure it's in the example section not the warning section!"

Legacy building

The word "legacy" focuses our attention on the bigger picture and purpose of our lives. It's important to have goals in our careers and finances but often we tend to polish a couple of facets of our life like a diamond while the other facets become neglected and tainted. This imbalance inevitably slows down our growth and frequently results in a lack of fulfilment.

The legacy we are going to leave is something mid-lifers don't give much thought to, especially in the hustle and bustle of our daily life. There is hardly time to slow our thoughts down and be still long enough before the hard reality of living in these economic times hits us and we are off and running again. Are you busily marking tasks off your "To Do" list or are you creating your "To Be" list?

Living your legacy involves leaving your individual, authentic thumbprint on others' lives and on your world. When my Dad died, it became clear to me at first hand that what begins with you does not end with you. Every seed you sow has within it the possibility of growth for generations to come, even surpassing your own lifetime. You can send a powerful message into the future by choosing to live your best life right now.

The bottom line is that we are either living a life by design or default. Make it by design.

Authentic self reflection time

If you can't do this exercise now, do yourself a BIG favour and find the time soon to reflect on this important topic.

Imagine you're at your own funeral. Picture the scene. As you take your seat from a high vantage point you see a tranquil setting with soft music playing in the background and the wonderful fragrance of fresh cut flowers filling the air. Gathered around your casket are faces of many people you know. Now picture four specific people who want to honour and express their gratitude for knowing you through a speech. Imagine one from your family, one from your friends, one from your community and one from your work standing and sharing their experience of knowing you.

Now think deeply. What would you like each one of them to say about you and your life? What difference did you want to make to their lives? What words do you want them to use to describe your character? How will the world be better because you have lived?

Now write down the thoughts, feelings and words that rise to the surface and give yourself this gift of reflection.

This gift will help you identify your core values, beliefs and principles. Spend some quality time putting these ideas into a short sentence or two so that you can read it anytime and anywhere to stay on task towards being the best possible you. It will help you remember what matters most especially when your core values are out of alignment with how you are behaving or living.

With a little time and effort, you'll end up with something that will describe "the *you* that you always wanted to be." Living this *you* will close your legacy gap, forever reducing that space between what is most important to you and how you spend your time.

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