

Excellence. NO EXCUSES!

Excerpt:

The Work Matters!

Tom Peters

10 July 2014

What Is It You Plan to Do With Your One Wild and Precious Life?

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”
—Mary Oliver

“When was the last time you asked, ‘What do I want to be?’”
—Sara Ann Friedman, *Work Matters*

“[The novel] traced the very ordinary life of a very ordinary woman—a life with few moments of high drama, but which was also remarkable. The extraordinary in the ordinary. It was a theme I often discussed with my students—how we can never consider anybody’s life ‘ordinary,’ how every human existence is a novel with its own compelling narrative. Even if, on the surface, it seems prosaic, the fact remains that each individual life is charged with contradictions and complexities. And no matter much we wish to keep things simple and uneventful, we cannot help but collide mess. It is our destiny—because mess, the drama we create for ourselves, is an intrinsic part of being alive.”—Hannah, from *State of the Union* by Douglas Kennedy

“For Marx, the path to social betterment was through collective resistance of the proletariat to the economic injustices of the capitalist system that produced such misshapeness and fragmentation. For Emerson, the key was to jolt individuals into realizing the untapped power of energy, knowledge and creativity of which all people, at least in principle, are capable. He too hated all systems of human oppression; but his central project, and the basis of his legacy, was to unchain individual minds.”
—Lawrence Buell, *Emerson*

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“It’s no longer enough to be a ‘change agent.’ You must be a change insurgent—provoking, prodding, warning everyone in sight that complacency is death.”
—Bob Reich

“Self-reliance never comes ‘naturally’ to adults because they have been so conditioned to think non-authentically that it feels wrenching to do otherwise. ... Self Reliance is a last resort to which a person is driven in desperation only when he or she realizes ‘that imitation is suicide, that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion.’”
—Lawrence Buell, *Emerson*

“Strive for Excellence. Ignore success.”—Bill Young, race car driver

“... the delight of being totally within one’s own element—of identifying fully with one’s work and seeing it as an expression of one’s character ... this affection must be so strong that it persists during leisure hours and even makes its way into dreams ... the mind knows no deadlines or constraints and is open to its inner energies ...”
—Robert Grudin/ *The Grace of Great Things: Creativity and Innovation*

“This is the true joy of Life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one ... being a force of Nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.” —GB Shaw/*Man and Superman*

If you ask me what I have come to do in this world, I who am an artist, I will reply: I am here to live my life out loud. —Émile Zola

*“To have a firm persuasion in our work—to feel that what we do is right for ourselves and good for the world at exactly the same time—is one of the great triumphs of human existence.”—David Whyte, *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity**

*“The antidote to exhaustion is not rest, it is wholeheartedness.”—David Whyte, *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity**

*“If I can reduce my work to just a job I have to do, then I keep myself safely away from the losses to be endured in putting my heart’s desires at stake.”—David Whyte, *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity**

*“All of our artistic and religious traditions take equally great pains to inform us that we must never mistake a good career for good work. Life is a creative, intimate, unpredictable conversation if it is nothing else—and our life and our work are both the result of the way we hold that passionate conversation.”—David Whyte, *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity**

What we do matters to us. Work may not be the most important thing in our lives or the only thing. We may work because we must, but we still want to love, to feel pride in, to respect ourselves for what we do and to make a difference. —Sara Ann Friedman, *Work Matters: Women Talk About Their Jobs and Their Lives*

Make each day a Masterpiece!—John Wooden

*“Make your life itself a creative work of art.”—Mike Ray, *The Highest Goal**

HAPPINESS: *Eudaimonia* ... well-doing, living flourishingly. *Megalopsychos* ... “great-souled,” “magnanimous.” More: respect and concern for others; duty to improve oneself; using one’s gifts to the fullest extent possible; fully aware; making one’s own choices. (Adapted from A.C. Grayling, *The Meaning of Things: Applying Philosophy to Life*)

LEISURE: pursue excellence; reflect; deepen understanding; opportunity to work for higher ends. (“Rest” vs. “leisure.”) (Adapted from A.C. Grayling, *The Meaning of Things: Applying Philosophy to Life*)

“In a way, the world is a great liar. It shows you it worships and admires money, but at the end of the day it doesn’t. It says it adores fame and celebrity, but it doesn’t, not really. The world admires, and wants to hold on to, and not lose, goodness. It admires virtue. At the end it gives its greatest tributes to generosity, honesty, courage, mercy, talents well used, talents that, brought into the world, make it better. That’s what it really admires. That’s what we talk about in eulogies, because that’s what’s important.

*We don’t say, ‘The thing about Joe was he was rich!’ **We say, if we can ... ‘The thing about Joe was he took good care of people.’*** —Peggy Noonan, “A Life’s Lesson,” on the astounding response to the passing of superstar journalist Tim Russert, *Wall Street Journal*, June 21-22, 2008

“We make our own traps.”
“We construct our own cage.”
“We build our own roadblocks.”

Source: Douglas Kennedy, *State of the Union*

“Nobody can prevent you from choosing to be exceptional.”—Mark Sanborn, *The Fred Factor*

“Nobody gives you power. You just take it.”—Roseanne

*“Strive for
Excellence.
Ignore
success.”*

—Bill Young, race car driver

“Well-behaved women rarely make history.”—Anita Borg, Institute for Women and Technology

“To Hell With Well Behaved ... Recently a young mother asked for advice. What, she wanted to know, was she to do with a 7-year-old who was obstreperous, outspoken, and inconveniently willful? ‘Keep her,’ I replied. ... The suffragettes refused to be polite in demanding what they wanted or grateful for getting what they deserved. Works for me.”—Anna Quindlen/Newsweek

“Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in one pretty and well preserved piece, but to skid across the line broadside, thoroughly used up, worn out, leaking oil, shouting ‘GERONIMO!’”

—Bill McKenna, professional motorcycle racer

From a review of my book *Re-Imagine*: “In Tom’s world, it’s always better to try a swan dive and deliver a colossal belly flop than to step timidly off the board while holding your nose.”—Fast Company

**Collected by Tom Peters
27 June 2014**