

Professional Speaker

Enjoying the Journey

Hang On and Enjoy the Ride!

For more than 20 years I've been on this journey, which has taken me through the ups and downs of a multifaceted career: speaking, counseling, consulting, writing, being an expert witness in court cases and working with the media. Whew! I get tired just thinking about it. Yet, I can say without reservation, that it continues to be an exhilarating journey, full of adventure and deep satisfaction.

Looking back, I can identify three lessons that have allowed me to stay energized as my career and life have evolved.

1. Live on purpose.

For me, this is the single most important one because I believe personal purpose is no less than a divine calling.

I was fascinated by the role that "purpose" played in the story this spring involving Ashley Smith, held hostage by alleged Atlanta courthouse murderer Brian Nichols. She was able to save her own life and probably others' by staying calm and, among other things, reading to him from a book about purpose and talking with him about his life purpose.

Many years ago, after months of soul-searching and prayer, I defined my own purpose in life: to bring out the best in people. This is the compass that guides my decisions about what projects to take on and how to respond in challenging situations.

Fifteen-year-old Michael, a clinical client of mine, summed up the power of living on purpose. Having just returned from a trip to Mexico with his church youth group, he told me: "We were clearing the land to build a school for poor Mexican children. It was really, really hot. I was sweating and chipping away, chipping away at the ground. It was the hardest work I've ever done. I hated what I was doing, but I loved why I was doing it!"

Let's face it. There are parts of this business that are no fun. When you are

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struggling with something, pull away for a moment and focus on the why. What impact do we want to have? What difference will this work ultimately make in the lives of others? Knowing that deeply and feeling it fully infuses the joy that makes it all worth it.

2. Don't sit down when you have a setback.

So many times in my career and in my personal life, circumstances and people have disappointed me, and what's worse, I've disappointed myself. Unwise decisions, market downturns, divorce, lost contracts, death of loved ones, lost opportunities: each seemed like a catastrophe at the time. But I'm still here, and life is good.

When (not if) setbacks occur, I've learned to remember these three things:

- Acknowledge the loss, but focus on working with what you have left.
- Remember how you've dealt with past setbacks and draw on the best of those strategies and strengths.
- Do something (even something small) that gets you out of inertia and moves you in a slightly more positive direction.

3. Learn to laugh at yourself.

From childhood, this one has saved my sanity and helped me put things back in perspective. I have CSP, CPAE Jeanne Robertson to thank for teaching me to become more systematic about capturing the funny stuff. (If you haven't read her book, *Don't Let the Funny Stuff Get Away*, get it now.)

Here's an example. My struggle with weight has been a lifetime battle. Quite a while ago I decided that I needed to learn to laugh at myself in painful personal situations like this one. I soon got a good opportunity.

Ninety-two-year-old Ms. Daisy was a new client in my clinical practice. She had been brought by a family member for an evaluation to see if she was competent to handle her own money. There was a big family dispute about this, and it appeared that some relatives might be motivated by financial gain. When I went to the waiting room to meet her, Ms. Daisy looked at me suspiciously as I attempted to connect with her.

"Well, hello, Ms. Daisy. It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Dr. Smallwood."

She looked me up and down and said flatly, "Well, you don't look too small to me!"

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Jerry Seinfeld in *Sein Language* summed it up: "Life is truly a ride. We're all strapped in and no one can stop it. When the doctor slaps your behind, he's ripping your ticket and away you go. As you make each passage from youth to adulthood to maturity, sometimes you just hang on to that bar in front of you. But the ride is the thing. I think the most you can hope for at the end of life is that your hair's messed, you're out of breath and you didn't throw up."

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