

Names are changed to honor client confidentiality

The Untethered Life

Resolve to live an untethered existence.

I asked my four-year-old granddaughter: “What’s a robot?”

She didn’t mince words. “Not alive,” she said.

Unbeknownst to her, she was on to something. Many people feel “not alive”—their lives are endless strings of compromises. Instead of charting their own course, they blindly follow traditional paths, conventional norms, or the wishes of others.

Not surprisingly, these people aren’t happy. Something’s lacking. A deeply felt longing is tugging away at them. Call it their true self.

Happiness is the byproduct of living an untethered life—living life on our own terms.

Bob, 51, a client, functioned on automatic pilot for years. By society’s standards, vocationally and financially, he’s been successful.

“But my occupation has a shallow and meaningless quality to it,” he said. “Any day now, I expect some hovercraft to pluck me from my backyard because I live such a clichéd existence. The message is clear: Why are you here? There’s nothing original about you.”

Bob is a cancer survivor.

“My brush with death has made me impatient with nonsense,” he said.

He’s easily bored and irritated with superficiality and routine tasks that lack substance or a deeper purpose. Bob’s wake-up call brought into sharp focus his chronic state of dissatisfaction. Consequently, he’s revamping his world, starting with his inner self. Call it an introspective plunge, a journey of self-discovery that includes rethinking his priorities and looking at what makes him happy at the core level.

“I’ve always wanted to fly,” he said with a glint in his eye.

He played out his passion—took it seriously—and promptly signed up for flight school. That’s just the beginning for Bob. Before long, he’ll be making other modifications to his life. That’s because changes within inevitably stimulate changes without.

Psychological discomfort seems to be the soul's way of getting our attention.

I recall telling another client, "Of course you're depressed. You're living a suppressed life! For some people, your life would bring contentment. But when it comes to you, that isn't happening. That's because your life circumstances don't match who you really are. You're trying to make something palatable and gratifying that isn't."

Such attempts are akin to forcing ourselves to love the color yellow. But in our heart of hearts we love blue. Or forcing ourselves to love accounting when our passion is organic farming. So tempting it is to adapt to unfulfilling circumstances rather than face change. Living a compromised, robot-like existence can seem easier—the path of least resistance. But the cost is pervasive.

Well known American author Sam Keen spells it out.

*"Chronic boredom is the sting of non-being,
The pain of the unlived life,
The roads not explored,
The risks not taken,
The persons not loved,
The thoughts not thought,
The feelings not savored."*

Not only do we adapt to unfulfilling circumstances, but also to the expectations of others—what they want for us. Their influence can be far-reaching, affecting everything from the toothpaste we buy to the vocation we choose.

In truth, only we know how to best lead our lives.

Untethered people don't yield to the expectations of others. They are concerned with living by their own expectations and being true to themselves. This doesn't imply self-centeredness, a lack of sensitivity or a refusal to be cooperative. It merely means they won't abandon themselves.

There are times when we should conform. But blind obedience lacks good sense. Conformity or nonconformity should be based on a level-headed decision after weighing all facets of a given situation.

There can be no change, no opening to a new way of seeing and being as long as we continue to tightly grip that which is no longer working. We have to be willing and ready to let go.

I like this quote by the noted French author Anais Nin:

"It takes courage to push yourself to places that you have never been before...to test your limits...to break through barriers. And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight inside

the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”

Risk blossoming. Mentally project yourself into a preferred existence. Wear it like a brand new wardrobe—something you’ve always yearned to wear.

Gladdened and liberated are those spirited by their own will.

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