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Constructive Living...



What to Give Up ?

Two years ago I was visiting friends with two young children and was struck by their clarity of purpose around parenting. They had made conscious decisions on what they would need to change in their daily lives in order to have time to nurture their children in body, mind and spirit.

"We no longer spend as much time keeping a meticulous house," he said, "because we want more time for our family. We now take evening walks, play the piano and sing together, and go exploring on the week-ends. *We can't do everything; we have had to make choices.*"

That was it. End of conversation. It is funny how such a simple statement surrounding this one small issue stuck with me. I thought at the time that it was the practical clarity they had brought to this new reality but now I think it was something much more significant. What I witnessed that day was this: if you are going to take on a new purpose, you have to give something up. And who wants to do that?

This is tough in a world that says we can do it all and have it all. We are conditioned to add one more thing to the list: be it a baby, an academic degree, a bigger house, a spiritual practice, a spouse, a demanding new job, volunteering - you name it. Yet, something has to come off our plate to make room for our new purposes. The challenge is what to discard when we want to keep everything we've got.

And to make matters worse, when we give something up there's an immediate loss, and what we will gain in return isn't apparent yet. For example, in order to lose weight we need to give up the excess salt, fat and sugars that we have become habituated to and replace them with healthy foods that don't have the same initial appeal. We simply do it, without having any immediate satisfaction of feeling or looking better.

It's the same with exercise. If we take the time to exercise, we have to give up something else: an hour of sleep, a TV show, or working overtime. We even have to give up our excuses that we can't fit it in. Unless we are willing to stick with it during that initial time of delayed satisfaction, we will soon let this purpose slide away. A lot of our well-meaning goals slip away because we never make the difficult choice of giving something up to create space for something new.



Trudy Boyle and
Gottfried Mitteregger
The Constructive Living Learning Centre
1-877-247-2032

For all of my dreams I am what I do.
-Dr. David K. Reynolds

Ongoing Training in Constructive Living

www.constructiveliving.ca

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*"Kirtan means
chanting — chanting
the names of God, the
Divine Name...All
these names are really
our own true names,
and they're all doors
into our own true
being."*



One of my favourite stories of “giving up” something to a greater purpose comes from a collection of essays, *Mindfulness and Meaningful Work*, edited by Claude Whitmyer. It is an inspiring story of a creative solution to making a career change for ethical reasons.

“A group of engineers who worked in the nuclear weapons field had all come to the decision that their work and their spiritual beliefs were out of synch, but because they had families to support they were reluctant to just up and quit their jobs. So they got together and created a group support system. One at a time, the engineers left their jobs; they and their families were supported by the others in the group during the months it took them to find a new job in a more benign field.”

I doubt this was easy for any of the engineers and their families. Each of them had to give up a hefty portion of their wages and thus live on less. Each of them had to give up the security of their career. They gave these things up to regain integrity of purpose, to be true to their own values. To take responsibility for their lives.

Of course there is always a trap. Giving something up to get or do something else can become a bit like event living. Take an Olympic athlete who gives up her social life, makes huge financial sacrifices, and trains for years to get on the podium. When she gives up almost everything else for this event or outcome she sets herself up for failure. On the other hand, the athlete who gives these things up because she wants to be the best she can be for the race has no regrets. Disappointment, maybe, but she has made the sacrifice for the journey, not the outcome, and the experience becomes life changing no matter whether she does or does not get a medal.

Occasionally we hear of someone who complains bitterly that they gave up everything for their children or their spouse or an ill parent. “And now look. It was all in vain.” If we only do something to achieve a certain outcome we are setting up conditions for failure. If we make choices because they are sensible, realistic and purposeful, we will have no regrets later regardless of how it turned out.

Does giving up something when we change our purposes provide balance to our lives? I don’t think so. My life is continually out of balance, but giving up things that don’t **need** to be done, in favour of things that I consider do need to be done or I want to do assists me in staying healthy in body, mind, and spirit. It gives me a fall back position by asking, “is this the best way to spend my time now?” If the answer isn’t yes, I can self-correct, right then and there. And believe me it is a life’s practice.

Trudy Boyle originally published this article in Thirty Thousand Days, spring 2006 . 1-877-247-2032

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