



Getting Unstuck: Heal your Life

Day One: The Beginning

"In the end these things matter most:
How well did you love?
How fully did you love?
How deeply did you learn to let go?" --The Buddha.

Finding the Keys

Imagine we could do what we love, melting away obstacles, letting go of fear, and living happy—and now, not later. What would happen if the world existed to fulfill our dreams and desires? How would you feel if everything around you were a reflection of your energy and what you were creating? And what if your purpose here were exactly to fill this role as the best way to serve the universal good? And then one day, you discover that's already the case.

I've read many metaphysical "do what you love" books (I used to manage a New Age book store), and I've listened to many "dream and you can achieve" platitudes. What I found was a tougher world than that. Rejecting most of what I had heard and read, I sought out practical, demonstrable, down-to-earth paths to a better and more successful life. I made a

lot of mistakes. I learned a great deal too, and put it to work for me. I made more mistakes—and so the process continued. Through it all, I did manage to work toward things I wanted, as much as possible, and slowly, I built a life that was comfortable and relatively secure. I even coached others, from a consulting practice to a business column to teaching college classes. I enjoyed helping people resolve their business difficulties. I liked serving the world, and got paid for it. But I knew there was more.

When I conceived “Getting Unstuck,” I sat down to write a practical book. I was watching so many people struggle, and unnecessarily. They were looking for work. They hated their jobs. Meanwhile my students were getting jobs, even in a difficult economy, as I shared what I had learned graduating into stagflation years ago. I saw how people were stuck in other area of their lives as well. I had learned the hard way how to be happy, on my preferences, and could share this, bring ideals into hard reality. I listened to people’s stories about how they were stuck. I worked through these and addressed them.

I expected to write of struggles, hard work, recovery, methodologies, and I did write about those things. But when I stepped away from the details for an overview, I found I had written something else entirely. In short, in every section, in every chapter, in every part of every approach, there was a consistent and persistent theme:

The Keys to Abundance are Love and Gratitude.

There it was, looking all mystical and idealistic. But there it was—the essence of the very practical processes and analyses I had spend months recording. Love and Gratitude. I had long preached that it’s easier to do what you love than to settle for what you don’t. But now I had myself discovered that this was only the surface. To be successful, to enjoy Abundance in all areas of life, begin with Love and Gratitude. Not dreamy talk, but practical, demonstrable reality.

Not only can we do what we love, but also if we are not, then we are not truly living our lives. So what seems to be the problem? How can we move past the obstacles blocking this destiny? And what about the fears holding us back? What do we do about unfavorable conditions? What’s the secret to making something so seemingly idealistic work for us? This is a journey that first requires us to take a good look at ourselves and our habits.

Complaining doesn’t help—Lessons from Gary

To move past these barriers, let go of complaints and move to happiness and hope.

I went to college as a music major, interested in learning, and hopefully approaching mastery, of music performance. I was scared; throughout high school, I had heard several amazing student players perform at All-County orchestra and band events, at Junior Pro Arta (a local group for young talented musicians), and at the Syracuse Symphony Youth Orchestra. I imagined all the young stars of all the other areas converging upon the music colleges, and I

hoped against hope I could just somehow manage to survive in this atmosphere.

I did all I knew to do in high school. I bugged my parents until they let me take private lessons with professional symphony musicians, not just school lessons. I did all the outside performing I could, as advanced as I could. I even played bassoon in the Syracuse University orchestra, as they were short a player, learning a lot from working next to the principal player. And I went to every concert I could find and afford, soaking in the sounds and techniques and talking to the players afterward for performance tips. I bought records, or borrowed them from the library, and listened to them repeatedly. I would need every edge I could hone in college. I just hoped I could someone make it through.

Well, something amazing happened. When I arrived at SUNY Fredonia, I found a seat in my first music course, and watched as the instructor began to write several key signatures in preparation for the day's lecture. He then turned to the class and remarked, "Can you write your flats and sharps this fast?" I was stunned. Of course we could. We were music majors. We practiced major and minor scales every day. Didn't we?

Turns out, not. My fear over keeping up with my imagined paragons of performance peers turned to wonder at how many of these people passed the entrance auditions and exams. You don't just "get into" music college as you might another major. You not only have to pass a performance audition, but you also have to demonstrate proficiency at ear training. For example, a short piece will be played on the piano, and you have to write down in music notation what was played. You are given sheet music you've never seen, and asked to sing the notes. In short, you have to show that you have music talent and training. And my best friend and accompanist, Gary, got a continual earful about what I perceived as lack on the part of both the students and the college.

Now, an important note to be fair—this was my perception as an 18 year old wrapped up in my own experience. Clearly, there were good students too. Gary's teacher was a superb pianist, one Gary had travelled to study with. And I had many good teachers and worthwhile experiences too. My music-theory/sight-singing teacher, for example, skillfully challenged me; when he saw I was easily doing the exercises (which consisted of playing one part on sight at the piano and singing another), offered playfully "I bet you can't do it in _____" and started naming other keys. I was sure I could, and as he watched my progress, I transposed at sight as well. Only later did I realize he had done this purposefully. My functional piano teacher as well taught me a wealth of skills I use to this day. But that's not how I saw it at 18.

Finally, even Gary's easy-going nature had its fill. "Look," he said, calmly, in response to my latest complaints. "If you're this unhappy here, you owe it to yourself to transfer." I was stunned. I hadn't looked at it that way. I hadn't even considered the possibility. While I was looking at music schools, my parents were looking at the financial picture, and it was my Dad's decision (well, strong encouragement, anyway) for me to attend a state school, as the tuition was lower. Private schools hadn't gotten a good look.

But I saw immediately that Gary was right, and said so. I began the application/audition process, and was accepted at Ithaca College, an opportunity I was excited about, particularly because of the bassoon teacher's reputation. Further, a performance scholarship made the move away from a state school affordable. I was off! I was unstuck.

Oh, I went on to get re-stuck on other things. And I was much better off than I thought before, both in high school and at Fredonia. Despite my fearful perceptions, I **was** holding my own among the talented high school students, and then some—they certainly all weren't in the Syracuse University orchestra, for example. As for those talented stars in Junior Pro Arta? I was one of the solo recital winners, performing at the Everson Museum of Art. And I DID learn valuable things at Fredonia. My bassoon teacher WAS good, the ensemble coaching enlightening, the faculty concerts inspiring—I had it better than I thought. But for now, I was unstuck. I was moving again. And I was happy.

Why?

*I appreciated what I had (well...generally...at least the new possibilities).

*I worked with the current situation (which wasn't ideal—what changed was Me).

*I saw a vision of the future, even if only a small way down the road.

Note---I got happy/hopeful first, THEN got unstuck....not vice versa. This is Key. You cannot wait for things to get better and then show hope and happiness. No. You. Must. First. Get. Happy (or at least Hopeful). First. THEN things start to get better. That's not philosophical daydreaming. It's not just some pretty platitude. That's. How. It. Works.

So I can hear the objection: "Wait—didn't you have to get the new college first?"

No...I saw hope, and expected to get accepted elsewhere. That movement is the moment I got unstuck.

Or more accurately, the moment I realized Gary was right and that I would take his advice by taking action. That's the key.

No action equals stuck. Action equals unstuck. If nothing changes, nothing changes. And what changes first are not circumstances or situations, but thoughts and emotions. I cannot stress this heavily enough. The key change is in your thoughts and emotions. Happiness and Hope come first, not as a product. If you're waiting for either, that's why you're stuck. Happiness and Hope are waiting for You—not as a mystical future, but as patiently waiting servants ready for you to get started.

That's essentially how you get unstuck. Right here at the beginning of the book!

My Early Work Experience—To Get Unstuck, Do What You Love

A vision of the future, appreciating the choices you have and working gratefully with where you are now inspires the changes necessary to get unstuck—by definition, a needed change. Without this change, we not only stay stuck, but also stay stuck in what we don't want to do.

In my early twenties, I struggled to find work in a tough economy. I did find it, and in fact, as each job proved unsatisfying, I moved on to the next.

But job after job, with each move to a new situation, the same problems followed me. The manager would become overbearing. The staff would include untalented people who didn't seem up to the job and some very nasty coworkers (mixed in with some nice ones). The pay was poor, far less than what we deserved or could live on well. There was no real opportunity for advancement. We were stuck. Even many of the customers brought attitude and problems. At least, that's what I thought then.

This pattern persisted, for years—until one day, the thought occurred to me that of all these experiences, *I* was the common denominator. Ya think? Thus, although I really didn't see it at the time, somehow, I must be the cause – at least in part – of my own workplace problems.

This took me a while to sort out – about a year and a half. But it worked, if slowly.

Why did things finally change?

Because I took the focus off other people and put it on myself.

As a mature adult, I can see the problem now clearly—when everyone is unreasonable...chances are it's YOU! I was young, inexperienced, cocky and judgmental, and when feeling sorry for myself, I left a wake that I then got caught in myself. Isn't karma interesting? But I didn't have that perspective at the time.

So what did I do?

First, I learned some communication skills. People “weren't taking me the right way,” as I saw it, but I could at least see my way to working on the problem from my end. I had to pay attention to their perceptions, not just ride roughshod over them because of how I happened to feel. I had to learn to listen. I had to learn to watch for the more subtle signs people give about how they're feeling and what they think.

Second, I found the courage to speak up and ask to talk for a resolution when I was in a perceived conflict. I say “perceived” because once I started this practice, I found a good many “conflicts” were entirely inside my own head! Problem solved. And I owe the genesis of this to, again, Gary. We had a discussion/debate about why students don't raise their

hands in class, and the next time silence answered our professor, Gary looked pointedly at me...and I raised my hand. Yes, to prove my point to Gary, but nonetheless, I was starting to learn to speak for myself.

And that helped in turn with the third step—I became willing to do what I loved and to take a chance to help make it happen.

My pattern of Job Roulette ended when I decided I would prefer to work at Seven Rays Book Store, a metaphysical/New Age store with a very laid back feel, a wealth of books on all imaginable subjects related to its genre, and related products—futon, crystals, incense, meditation music, spiritual cards and so forth. And I did this knowing I would take a pay cut—and that I was OK with that. It was worth it.

I walked in and talked to David, the owner, and made my case. I was familiar with his store; I had read many of the books, and was familiar with much of the subject matter; I practiced meditation, T'ai Chi, and similar pursuits; I liked the “mission” (unspoken though it be) of the store. He hired me on the spot.

A month or two later, I was the store manager—the first one the store had ever had. A few years later, I was promoting a concert for the store. My promotional activities there, along with my association with them as a buyer, attracted the attention of the distributors, and after interviewing with three of the main independent wholesalers, went to work for Silo/Alcazar in Vermont. Later I jumped from there to work for a major label distributor, and from there, into a variety of management positions and eventually my own consulting business.

How did all that start happening so fast and so smoothly, after years of struggle?

Easy. Because I wanted to do what I was doing. It makes that big a difference. It really does.

Now, granted, I was young, single, with no children, no one to answer for but myself. But even if those conditions had been different, the essential principle would have been the same. Do what you love. It is easier. Not someday—now.

In fact, if I weren't into writing this right now, it wouldn't be happening. As I began, I wasn't even sure what I would write. But once I STARTED, I not only wrote, but also had ideas once I was writing, jotting down ever-lengthening notes as I fleshed out the details bit by bit.

Take action! But it's not the doing that's important; it's the doing what you love that matters. Allow that to enter your world, and your world will transform as if by magic. It will. It has no choice once established on that path.

Just doing what you have to do creates the status quo

Struggling to do what you believe you have to do just doesn't work well. Unfortunately, it's also the most common approach.

Why? People are often motivated more by avoidance of what they don't want than by what they would prefer. We are a reactive lot. Stimulus/response. Positive, proactive action requires that stimulus come from within. Not how we roll. We prefer to coasting to climbing, and coasting only happens downhill. Then we have more and more things we don't want that we now have to work to avoid. Look at how cares build on people's faces. Look how stress builds and builds until vacation time is a brief release before another round of stress accumulation. It's no way to live, but it's precisely how so many of us live routinely.

Ryan Eliason talks about income, for example, as a thermostat. When we're at that level that's comfortable, even though not what we'd dream, we basically maintain that level, even if unconsciously. If that income level dips, we start to work more, plan new projects, basically get going to relieve that shortfall. If that income rises, without even realizing it perhaps, we start to slack off, not doing the maintenance and long-term planning that would make this a new level, and so income eventually slips back to the mere comfortable level. We work more to avoid pain than to achieve our dreams.

We call this being practical. We see it as facing reality. But what it really does is embrace and institutionalize the status quo. Without recognizing it, we are choosing to stay where we are, and as long as we do so, we cannot move on to realize our dreams, goals, and ambitions. Honestly, despite the common acceptance of this false truth, there's nothing practical about this approach at all—it's merely building a prison.

Without realizing it, holding this "I just have to do this now" vision keeps re-creating the present difficult circumstances, a perpetual "Groundhog Day." We move toward what we're looking toward, and seeing being stuck in the present is keeping you stuck in the present.

"But wait!" you cry. "I *am* stuck!"

I hear you. But if nothing changes, nothing changes. What can you do right now, literally, Now, to start to Be where you want to be? What small change can bring you closer? What small bit of the essence of this can you enjoy right now? As Stephen Covey points out, even if you're up to your ass in alligators, take some time, however little, to start draining the swamp. Until then, there will *always* be more alligators. You will be stuck. Start draining the swamp. See it dry. Create it now, even if in part. A first step.

If you aren't working to build your dream, you're working to build someone else's dream. If you believe in their dream, great. But if you're just doing it for now, your dream will always be shelved. Don't let that happen. Dreams slowly die on the shelf—and needlessly.

Magic and Momentum comes from Doing what you Love

Bring magic and momentum into your life by doing what you love. This isn't the "you can be anything you want" candy we lay out for schoolchildren. It's down and dirty practical. When you're doing what you love, you have an authenticity people see. There's an intangible rise in quality in what you do. And you end your days feeling great, not broken down and used up.

Now, there is a catch—you have to know what you want. But there's a trick that can help...be childlike. Children love everything everywhere, the world one big playground. And ask children what they'd like, they'll go on and on and on and on. Ask an adult, "So, what do you want for Christmas?" and you'll get, "Oh, I don't know . . . a sweater, I guess." A sweater???? What happened to all that energy and passion and love? Bit by bit, all that love got buried under protective reaction. Defensiveness. Playing it safe. Stop it!

You—yes, You!—are *bursting* with love and passion. Yes, you are. Let it out. It's what you best have to offer, and the way that you see it and do it and offer it is unlike anything anyone else on the planet does. You are that special, and when you're doing what you love, no one can touch you. If you don't do it, it just doesn't happen. Not like you do it.

Once you start to do this, you'll start to feel the excitement again. You'll start to feel the magic. You'll be passionate about getting up each day to start, even if only to get a piece of your plan going. And as you do this day by day, momentum will build, carrying you smoothly through a slow day here and there.

Put another way—you will be You again! And why would you live life as anything less than the authentic You? People will see it, and you'll be more energized, more attractive, more compelling, and more effective, in all areas of your life.

Magic. Love. Dreams. This is the stuff actual reality is made of. What love are you building?

"I'd Love to, But Times are Bad."

Blaming the times we live in doesn't work, as it reinforces the status quo, when often "bad" times open unique opportunities and provide extra motivation to change and grow. "I'd love to, but times are bad," is one of the greatest myths. Get past it—it's a sticking point, not a reality. Oh, times can be bad, fair enough. But that doesn't mean this or any other time is a bad time to get started—quite the opposite is often true.

For example:

*Are you interested in starting a business? When the economy is in a downturn, prices of the many things you may need are lower, from equipment to buildings to vehicles, especially

used items from people going out of business. You help them recoup their investment while you get a jump start on your new enterprise.

*Do you need to write a successful proposal? A lot of people tell themselves there's no point in doing this when money is tight—which only makes your chances better! Seriously—your odds are better in bad times than in good. Whether you're looking for a federal, state, or local grant, or funding from a foundation or corporation, those funds are still sitting there. Sometimes—literally—they never get used, because no one asked. Ask.

*Is the Job market tough right now? This is exactly the push many people get toward taking those moves that make their lives far richer, from getting more education to starting that endeavor they were nervous about leaving a job to do. What better time?! Nothing more to lose, and everything to gain.

Take my good friend Doug, for example. He worked for years at a factory job he didn't particularly enjoy (in fact, he once punched out so hard one angry day that he broke the time clock off the wall, and everyone just parted before him). When the factory went under, he was scared, but decided to go back to school. With a two year degree (and a lot of quality work), he was hired by an international company that handles construction inspection for the state—a job he loves and that pays well. But not something that would have happened without a push. And today—he's the easiest-going guy in the world!

Let's look at some other common complaints. But let's call them what they are, in this context—excuses. That's right. Laments such as these:

*The government is the problem—you just can't survive in this political climate with these regulations (or lack of regulations).

*Taxes are the problem—an honest person just can't make a living when all the money goes toward wasteful programs.

*The global situation is the problem—people just don't buy local anymore; no one cares about supporting workers in this country, and foreign competition is stealing all our business. Damn soul-less international corporations!

*My community is the problem—people around here just don't care.

...are all irrelevant excuses. Yes, I said excuses. Yes, I said irrelevant. The problems may indeed be as you see them, but they are irrelevant to the decision to get unstuck. These situations (and many others) merely set the ground rules, and those ground rules dictate neither the opportunities nor the fruits of pursuing those opportunities. The strategies may change as the conditions evolve, but there are always opportunities in the new situations. People will still have needs; needs will still need to be filled. That means businesses and jobs.

And one more irrelevant excuse....uncertainty. This freezes many businesses and economies from time to time. They aren't sure what to do...so they do nothing while waiting to see, and consequently, economic activity slows. That worsens the uncertainty, and nothing gets done out of fear of making the wrong move.

But to get unstuck means not making the “right” decision, but making ANY decision. Really, honestly—ANY decision. Once the decision is made, even if distasteful, even if not ideal, business and economies again know the rules and can act accordingly. For example, it’s not this legislation or that international agreement or these economic indicators that are the problem—it’s not knowing which way they’ll go. Even if they go the “wrong” way, people now know the new rules and can plan and act accordingly. Motion again.

The same is true for individuals. Decide what you want to do, and do it. Have a reasonable plan, but if it’s the wrong one, adjust it and move forward. Only staying frozen is guaranteed to keep you stuck.

Of course, most of us keep doing what we’ve been doing, denying it isn’t working. As one of my friends likes to say, “How’s that working out for you?”

Creating a Network

Instead of doing what doesn’t work well, create a network, first by telling people what you’re striving to accomplish.

Let’s take probably the hardest one...a tough job market. People are naturally worried in tough economic times, and projecting negatively into the future exacerbates those natural fears. But fear not. Things are better than they look.

You have two options: getting a job, or creating a job.

Option I: Getting a Job

We’ll discuss effective resume, cover letter, job search and interview procedures in a later chapter. But here are a few observations to get you started.

Most people look for jobs in a very ineffective way: they send out resumes (or post them online), and read the classified ads in the local paper. These methods certainly **can** work, but they are low-return procedures. Very low return.

Here’s why. An average size city will yield about 500 to 2,000 responses for an employment ad. So, your mission is to convince the employer that you are better than potentially 1,999 other applicants. Even if you **are,** those are terrible odds. And resumes don’t effectively target jobs...they’re essentially cold calls. How much do you buy on cold calls? See the point?

So what’s an effective way? Network, and in two ways.

The first way is to tell everyone what you’re looking for. I do mean everyone. Your landlady. The bagger at the grocery market. Your cousin Mindy. Your online friends.

Everyone...no matter what the job you're seeking. Talk it up.

People know people who know people who know people. Take advantage of this. 85% of job openings are never advertised, anywhere. The **only** way to find this hidden market is to network. That means talk to people. Everyone.

Now, when you find this job opening, (1) you don't have to convince the employer you're better than 1,999 other applicants—just that you are well-qualified for the job, and (2) instead of taking a risk on a stranger, the employer has a better shot at a good employee with you, since you came with a personal reference from someone connected to the employer in some way. Win/win—and without that long employee search no employer really wants to do.

Keep in mind that hiring an employee is expensive—and by this I mean far beyond your wages or salary—so this referral is truly valuable to the employer. Generally, consider an additional 50% added to your base wage. The employer has federal and state tax obligations for employees, and the costs of processing this. There's the cost of benefits—health insurance, sick days, vacations...these all cost money. In particular there's the problem turnover, which means training someone new every time someone moves on to new opportunities. That means while you're being paid to not do much, since you're learning, another productive employee is not producing much because the work day is devoted to training you. It's very costly. Never take the tack of “just give me a chance”; it's not an appropriate gamble. But if you're referred by someone the employer knows, that considerably lessens that gamble. This is the position you want to be in—less of a gamble, and without competition.

There is always a job market—people still have needs, and businesses still need employees to help meet those needs to turn a profit. A slow economy doesn't mean there's no money or no customers or no opportunities. It **does** often mean those opportunities aren't advertised, as business needs for labor openings can be filled without those often expensive advertisements. Finding those openings through your solves those needs, co-opts potential competing applicants who didn't network, and portrays you as someone who can and does work well with other people.

Informational Interviewing

The second way to network is to go on informational interviews. This is different from looking for a position directly but it starts the same. Have your resume, cover letter, portfolio, whatever else you need ready, as if you were applying.

Look up where to go to do the kind of work you want to do. Do some research about these places. Find out who the people are you would want to talk to about this. Then call them. Only instead of applying for a job, you ask for a little advice. Ask for 15-20 minutes their time to review your resume and get feedback about your materials and what you might do to

improve them.

Don't be shy. Polite, yes. But don't make excuses about this. Most people are glad to help. Others helped them, and you'll find they're honored to help you.

As a college student, ill-dressed and unkempt, my violinist friend and I (we played on the streets for cash) would hit many concerts by many of the world's most famous musicians and simply walk backstage afterward and introduce ourselves. Sure, we were nervous and star-struck, but nearly everyone was gracious and giving, happy to give a couple of strange students a wealth of free advice and information, even though they had just played a show (performing music is much harder physically than most people realize—very tiring). My friend even had pizza once with Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zuckerman and Samuel Sanders, simply because he invited them to join him and his friends at a college dive.

OK, but those are artists—not business people! Well, let me tell you a story.

I was 22, and trying to find work in the midst of stagflation—no economic growth with high inflation on top of it. Not a good job market. And I...was a musician. So I decided I needed to face reality and “get a real job.” I dressed up, made a nice resume, and started pounding the pavement. As I worked my way down the business district of Syracuse, I came across Dean Witter Reynolds. I went in (Hey, if you're gonna go capitalist, why not jump right into a brokerage house!) and asked if I could apply for a job.

The receptionist made a call, then asked me to take a seat in the waiting area at the end of the hall. I did, and waited, nervously, for 30 minutes, before an older man came out, introduced himself, and led me into his office—the Vice-President's office!

I sat across from him at the huge conference table, and laid out all the things people say when they aren't actually qualified—I'm intelligent, I learn fast, I work hard, I'm a people person, I just need a chance, and so forth. He listened quietly for a while.

“Son,” he said (I knew then this wasn't good), “I don't have a job for you. But if you have a few moments, I'd like to talk to you about what you should do the next time you apply for a job.”

I was no fool—I knew opportunity when it was handed to me, and I gratefully took notes while he spent the next 30 minutes explaining to me how to apply for a job. The Vice-President. For a kid who walked in off the street.

I got a job that week. Later, I even worked selling securities for a few years, earning a position as Sales Manager, with a near 100% closing ratio. But it started with a very nice man taking half an hour out of his day simply to help a stranger.

So ask.

Be prepared (more about all this in a later chapter). Don't waste their time—have your stuff together, and educate yourself about what's going on in that field and even in that company. You don't want to ask things you readily could have learned yourself. Bring your best professional self, and do what you came for—ask for feedback and advice. Take notes. Ask follow-up questions when appropriate.

Keep your word—do not ask for a job. They know you're looking.

But DO ask one final question—Ask them to each recommend a couple other people you should be talking to as well. Take down the contact information. People inside an industry know each other, even when competitors, and in a short time, you'll have met nearly everyone in that industry in your area who might have an opening. And when that happens—they've already met you, and found you're proactive and professional. They may well hear of opportunities and forward your name to other employers too. Even if there truly aren't any jobs (and there always are), you are positioning yourself well for when jobs do appear again.

One more note about the job search—take some time to consider just what **are** you looking to find? Not just what type of work, but why do you want it? What appeals to you about it? Different people do the same job for different reasons, and thus those people would be happy in a variety of other work situations too.

Consider this carefully—skills are transferable, and understanding just where you would like to be and how you would like to do it can open up a series of new employment opportunities equal or better to the ones you're seeking now. And that means even better chances of finding what you want.

Creating a Job

“Your problems are your opportunities.”

Opportunities are created when we combine our likes and skills to address the needs of others; only our fears keep us repeating what isn't working instead.

Even when there are no jobs (or don't seem to be), you can still work. Find and identify a problem in an organization that you have the skills to address, and propose it to management. I've created jobs like this three times, from training to inventory control management to Executive Director.

You can also strike out on your own. It's easier than you think.

Make three lists. Long lists—50 to 100 items for each:

*What do you like? Include everything, not simply what you see as work related.

*What are your skills? Again, all skills, not just what seems work-related. Be specific.

*What needs do you see? Admit it—we all do a lot of companying, backseat driving, and Monday morning quarterbacking. What did you see? What *does* this town need? Or this world, in the Internet age. List them. What problems need solutions?

Then look for three way matches: Likes, Skills, Needs—these are your business opportunities.

Keep in mind that a “business” doesn’t necessarily mean a building and a big budget. It can be one person with a low budget or even no budget and no set location. And you can do more than one business project, aggregating the income from all projects.

Even if that’s not all you envisioned, underemployed beats unemployed...start and grow! One step at a time.

Think in terms of not jobs or “a” business, but in revenue streams; a few projects that you enjoy, are good at, and that serve needs, each with its own revenue stream, can add up to a satisfactory cash flow. In fact, I’d argue you can make more this way than through conventional employment. More on this in a later chapter.

So if it’s that easy, what’s the problem?

Why do we stay frozen? Like it or not, it’s because of fear. So we repeat the same actions, telling people we’re working on the problem, denying to ourselves that nothing is happening. It’s also because people are leery of trying something outside of the norm. Why? Fear. But if nothing changes, nothing changes.

Leaving the Comfort Zone

“Your greatest successes are lying just outside your comfort zone.”

Perhaps the hardest part of getting unstuck is leaving the comfort zone. Take your hands, right now, and lift them into the air, fingers spread. Come on, do it. OK? Now, bring your hands together, fingers clasped (intertwined) in your lap. Good. Now, look down...which thumb is on top, left or right? Now switch your hands and fingers so the other thumb is on top. Ooo. Feels damn strange, doesn’t it! That’s change. We don’t like it...even minor change.

But if nothing changes...nothing changes.

Not an inspirational talk here, but a statement of fact—you must leave your comfort zone to get unstuck. And you should—it’s where all the stuff you want can be found. And you must look at this seriously—no one is immune.

Take writing this book. For years, I've kicked around book ideas, thinking someday I'd sit down and hammer one out, perhaps do workshops, and other than writing articles and columns, never did much about it. All my friends, however, have pointed out, once I started, that I've been talking about starting for years. Years! I honestly didn't know that...or wasn't really paying attention. Outside the comfort zone. Maybe someday.

"So when are you going to write your book?" my friend Louise asked me, out of the blue, in the middle of a casual conversation. Taken aback, I gave the usual middling responses.

I had just brought up the point of a lot of good/necessary advice was really giving people a good and much-needed push, and she was giving me mine. She was having none of my excuses. She'd heard me talk about it for years, has said repeatedly she likes how I think and how I use words, and that I should write a book. That day, she called me on it, all of it. Comfort Zone? Not on her watch!

"You can write 30 minutes a day. Start today. I want an email—send me what you write. Do it—I *am* going to follow up on this!!!" I agreed. She stressed the point several times, to ensure I knew she was serious. And I did it.

Everyone needs a Louise. The very next day, I had a lot to do, I was tired...but I had promised, and I wrote. The following day, I really didn't know what to write, but I had promised, and once I started, I had plenty to write.

I realized that all the inspirational audio books I liked to listen to in the car were telling me similar things—have a purpose, take action, and don't give up, ever. Where to go from here? Get comfortable with set-backs, and maintain your enthusiasm. No, that's not going to be comfortable. But that's the point. Leave the Comfort Zone. Start your destiny.

It's hard to be happy or successful at what just isn't you, and since you feel stuck, what you're doing isn't. So yes—destiny. Embrace who you are.

It's time to make changes. Consistent changes. Purposeful changes. And keep making them, until you're where you want to be.

I thought I was reasonably happy doing what I was doing...until I was pushed to get writing. Once I started, I realized more each day just how much I wanted more freedom, more choices, more impact, something more "me" than what I was doing, what I began to realize I had settled for out of comfort.

Louise was right. Getting going. Take action. Leave the Comfort Zone. It doesn't fit as well as we tell ourselves.

Getting Started? Exercise for Enthusiasm (move a muscle, change a thought)

Daily mood and motivation for change can be helped by getting moving, literally—by exercise, as well as by following healthy daily habits, from diet to sleep to socializing to meditation.

Daily enthusiasm can be difficult.

At first, in the moment, all excited about a new idea, getting motivated just takes a little will power and perhaps a gentle push. Day to day, as fatigue, doubts, and day to day distractions and duties lower that enthusiasm, motivation can slip. Then a day's resolve is set aside, then another's, and without making a conscious decision to do so, we stop working on whatever we were so recently excited about pursuing.

A lot can be done about this on the inspirational side, but one simple thing will help tremendously...exercise.

Exercise, of course, has terrific physical and medical benefits, controlling blood pressure, cholesterol, weight, preventing stroke, diabetes, and even some forms of cancer and arthritis. It also promotes healthy sleep (just don't exercise right before bed), improves sexual function in both genders (the heart isn't the only organ that gets more blood flow), and boosts energy levels (through improving lung and cardiovascular function).

But exercise also impacts mood. Physically, the brain releases endorphins and leaves you feeling happier and more relaxed, combating both depression and stress. The aggregate physical impact of oxygen, blood flow and mental state also promotes thinking and creativity—in the good way, not that mind-racing counterproductive way we all know too well.

The trick, then, is to recognize the first signs of negative emotion/thinking and to take simple action: Move a muscle, change a thought. Go for a walk. Bike to the store. Do some exercises. Whatever...but MOVE, physically. Your emotional/mental state will change, and along with it, your productivity, enthusiasm, and motivation.

Now, recognizing the importance of exercising for positive energy as it starts to grow takes getting past the inertia that wants to sit and wallow instead. So make exercise a regular activity...preferably daily, but at least 3-4 times a week of real, vigorous exercise (not just a brief period).

And make it fun! I live in the country, and I like to either run or cross-country ski, depending on the season, through the nearby forest trails with my dog for an hour or two each day. Some days I bike or kayak for an afternoon, or I'll take off for some mountain hiking for a day here and there.

But that's just me. I have friends who love going to the gym (something I hate) or to the pool (which I do like). Some people team up with a buddy to get them going regularly (but don't use your buddy's flagging interest as an excuse to stop yourself). Others regularly play tennis, golf, or any number of other sports. Or use a Stair Master or elliptical machine or treadmill at home. Doesn't matter really, as long as you are (1) having fun and (2) getting your heart rate over your target rate for a significant amount of time. [For vigorous exercise, aim for a target heart rate of 70 to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate (MHR). Your MHR (roughly calculated as 220 minus your age) is the upper limit of what your cardiovascular system can handle during physical activity.]

Beyond exercise, follow a routine that supports this healthy lifestyle. Get a good night's sleep, at a reasonable time. Eat healthy foods, and at regular meal times. Stay in contact with friends, and talk to them about what's going on with you. Get out and enjoy life. Do nice things for other people. Start your day with spiritual/inspirational reading. Meditate. All this will, if practiced day after day, build into a nicely flowing cocoon of energy that will support you and leaving you feeling alive and ready to follow your desires.

It's important. Take care of you, and you'll have a much easier time following your dreams.

I once thought I was too busy to exercise; now I know I'm too busy NOT to exercise.

Our bodies and souls are made to move and grow!

Getting Past Fear

"What you fear most is what you most need to do." -- Tim Ferriss

Waiting for a good time doesn't work, because there will never be a good time, other than now; that's the voice of fear.

If you're like most people—and trust me, you are—you are telling yourself that your plans will have to wait. If you just had more money. If you just had more time. Or right now just isn't a good time. Or you just haven't got all the pieces in place yet.

Guess what—there will NEVER be a good time. Not to start a family, not to change jobs, not to go back to school, not to start a business, not to start a relationship, not to take an extended vacation...never.

And that...makes this the perfect time! There's nothing to wait for.

Sure, I know...you just need to finish this project, or you just need to get through the next few months, or you just need the current conditions to shift...and then when that happens,

there will be another project, another few months, some other current conditions, over and over, forever.

Look around your home and see how many things you've set aside to get to one day. When's the last time you got to any of them? In years? No. Waiting doesn't work—it's self-delusion. And as for the important things you want to achieve, the things you really want to do, but never do...it's fear. Yes, fear. Your dreams are in storage.

Anytime you aren't living in your purest bliss, doing what you most want, what you most love, you are holding yourself back because you fear something, whether you admit that to yourself or not. And because of that fear, perhaps of the consequences of taking action, you remain inactive—and stuck.

Face your fears. Your greatest success is where your greatest fears lie. And they do lie! False Expectations Appearing Real. What's the worst that could happen? If you took action, even small, steady action, what would happen, worst case scenario? Now, if that happened—how bad would it be, really? Could you live with it? Could you pick yourself up and start again? On the other hand, the worst that can happen if you don't is that you'll remain stuck—forever. Later, better times aren't going to come when you're stuck. Get unstuck now.

When my friend Louise gave me the push to finally get busy writing this book, I had been thinking for the longest time how great a help it could be, but I had one major stumbling block. I'd had experience in multiple areas with people needing help getting unstuck, but bent on justification, in fact, in defending all the reasons they were unable to get unstuck and why nothing at all would ever help. Complete victims—and it's common, because all the excuses are in place, and they feel absolved of any personal responsibility. That was my audience—how could I ever get them to listen? I was stuck.

But Louise's friendly push changed that. I was never going to get writing while stuck in that hopeless space, and help I never even offered certainly wasn't going to help anyone. So I started writing, working it out as I went along...and was unstuck.

That's it. You don't wait for the right time, or for the complete vision, or for all the parts to magically build themselves. You just start, and once you do, unstuck again, the rest will come flowing to you. I tell writing students this all the time. Just write, anything—it will come, and probably pleasantly surprise you. Works magically, and not just for writing. Just start.

There is no good time. That's a myth. The time is right now. Until you believe that, and act upon it, you will be stuck. But the power to become unstuck rests with you, right now, right this moment. That change in thinking will start the change.

You just start.

"Faith is taking the first step, even when you do not see the whole staircase" --Martin Luther King, Jr.

Stop Doing What you Don't Want

Stop doing what you don't want to do—that is also the fear talking.

In my early twenties, as a struggling artist, I took every music job offered to me, every one, no matter where it was or how much it paid. I was trying to build my reputation, and I was afraid that if I turned down a gig, I'd never get another call from that person. So, I drove all the state, often facing long drives to a rehearsal, then a long drive home again, just to repeat the trip the next day, and maybe the next, and again later that week. This...would be on top of my day job. It was grueling. I worked and worked and worked and worked, but never got ahead.

Meanwhile, my health caught up with my work habits. Drinking a pound of coffee a week, sleeping often just six hours for days running, not to mention the continual stress of a performance lifestyle, finally did me in. Or at least my stomach. I had to slow down. I just couldn't continue as I was. Regretfully, I was forced to make major changes.

So I went through all the music gigs I was doing, and sorted them, first by pay, then by distance, and finally whether I liked playing there. It hurt to start turning down calls. I worried I'd killed my career. But I had no choice.

Then a very interesting thing happened—I made more money. I had cut my music work to a tenth of what it had been. A tenth! And I made twice the money. That's right—I made twice the money on a tenth of the work. I had discovered something magical, and I noticed.

Two things were at play—fewer costs, and higher value. First, I was saving not only fuel money, but also the wear and tear on my car, returned in lowered repair and maintenance bills (or, more accurately, less frequent bills). But more importantly...people stopped asking me to play for low fees. I was taken seriously, and paid far better. In a pinch, the more distant places I'd eliminated even paid me what I asked to make it worth my while to come play when necessary. I had marketable value. More importantly—I learned that I had value.

Take yourself seriously. Yes, it's a cliché, don't sell yourself short...but many people do just that. Don't. You won't save a gig...you'll cost yourself both time and money. Know your value. Be ready to say, "Sure, I understand. I'd be happy to recommend someone else" when the terms are not what you want.

And did you catch the last criterion I used in sorting out my gigs? —whether I liked playing there. Today, with a lot more experience—this would be my first criterion, not the last.

Do what you want in life—yes, you can do it. How? Stop doing what you DON'T want to do. I know, that sounds silly—and not a little simplistic. But it's flat out logical. Get rid of what you don't want, and you'll have room to do what you do want.

And stop telling yourself you can't. Of course you can. Get yourself unstuck and get moving. Enjoy life!

When we're listening to fear, we're not listening to love.

Stop listening to the reasons why not, so you can move into what you really want.

All those practical reasons preventing us from growing into something greater are the voice of fear. Being avoidance-driven, we listen to fear, and take it quite seriously. But when we're listening to fear, we're not listening to love. We're not doing what we love—we aren't even headed in that direction. We aren't even trying. That may sound harsh—but it's true. We're clinging to fear, and the only way to move toward love is to let go of the fear. It isn't dragging you—you're hanging on to it. Let go and stop being dragged. Stand up and move toward what you love.

There are always reasons why not. Always. If that's what you're waiting for, you'll always be stuck. It will never end. You have to stand up and say, "I'm going anyway. What I love is more important than what I fear."

That's why Vision Boards and Mission Statements and similar focuses on guiding principles are so powerful—they get you to anchor your direction toward what you love, what's important to you, what you're driven to create. They ignore the practical concerns, assuming the way will be worked out as you move toward your Vision. And they get you to get clear about what you want, rather than just reacting to the status quo.

No shortage of people will explain to you why what you want can't be done. And there's no shortage of happy, successful people who did precisely what other people said they couldn't.

What do you want? Start there. What do you fear? Start working through those mirages.

Good Luck!

More tomorrow!

