

*the*  
**navalent**

*quarterly*



**AIM**

*HOW TO MAKE IT CLEAR AND COLLECTIVE*

SPRING 2016

**purpose** *steps to find it in your work*

**diversity** *why don't our orgs have it?*

**offsites** *how to make them effective + meaningful*



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## "Line up ducklings!"

I shout into the expanse of the park. "Time to follow the leader duck!"

I am not screaming at actual ducks. Nor am I a duck. I'm beckoning my three young children to get in the car. My three year old comes running. The 18-month-old twins do not. They have found a captivating piece of tin foil on the playground and have no interest in responding to their father's request.

In this life stage, I have found that a game of "follow the leader" is a quite effective parenting tool when I need my kids to go somewhere. However, the game seems to break down when the ducklings that I am communicating with are distracted or cannot grasp where it is we are going or why.

This playground parenting experience is not far from our daily organizational experiences. As leaders, we have well-articulated mission statements, strategic objectives, or pithy campaigns. We have ideas for new products, the best markets to be in, and efficiencies to realize. And while we are aiming our efforts at the right things, there is often a gap between our clear vision and whether or not others align with that vision to help it come to life.

Too frequently a leader will articulate a vision and proudly sketch it out on the whiteboard only to be surprised and disappointed when their proposal isn't adopted immediately (or even eventually). Just as common is the leader who assumes those around her will be clairvoyant, reading her mind to discover the self-evident brilliance of the direction toward which she has set out. Having your sights clearly set on something is important. Articulating that vision is the first challenge. The second is ensuring that the clear direction is shared and understood.

And then, once shared and understood (far more difficult than it sounds as any leader whose tried will attest), it must be personalized. Deeply embraced and owned. Creating conditions for this shared aim is the platinum standard of leadership many feel only gods achieve. Turns out it's not some mysterious force that

aligns an organization into this shared aim. It's hard, unrelenting work. We laud leaders like Steve Jobs for the intensity by which he held onto his vision for products and technology concepts. But what we miss is that Steve Jobs, even as he left Apple for NeXT, was able to articulate his vision in a way that others felt connected to it. He was able to create a clear and shared aim.

We see the same dilemmas at the individual level. Many leaders lament after being in a job for a decade, "I just don't know what I want to do with my life." Worse, mid-life crises that begin with the angst, "Is this really all there is for me?" Whether aiming one's own life, or aiming an organization, good aim happens on purpose, with hard work that doesn't end.

When vision is clear and shared, employees can show up to work every day, work autonomously, and trust that good things will come to both themselves and the organization. If the vision is not shared, then they may show up with cynicism ("I'm not sure how what I am doing today really matters") or resentment ("I'm not going to work a 10 hour day so that my boss can afford that new yacht"). When one's purpose in life feels well defined and values and career choices consistent with that purpose, we are deeply gratified, joyful, and make great impact through our choices. When our lives unfold rudderlessly, with an aimless meandering through jobs, relationships, and hobbies, life feels empty and meaningless. Organizations, and our lives, need not go that way.

And we want to help.

This Navalent Quarterly will tell the stories of organizations and leaders who have aimed clearly and collectively. Through interviews, our points of view, and a couple of tools, we hope that these next three months of posts will help both yourself and your organizations be the kind of leader that others line up behind.

*team navalent* 



*AIM + ACTION: Why Are We Still Talking  
About Gender Diversity?* *By Mindy Millward*

*Oh Alison, my aim is true, my aim is true...*

In his classic to an old girlfriend, Elvis Costello (laced with sarcasm), swears pure motives. Companies aiming to promote gender diversity and equality in the workplace sing a similar chorus today.

“The aim is true, the aim is true.” But what if we took the time to evaluate organizations’ success at diversi-



ty goals as we do their financial performance? We'd be trading most of them as penny stocks.

So is the aim disingenuous? Perhaps in some places. Is it pointless? Obviously not, as there are companies that continue to make significant strides in finding ways to promote and develop gender diversity among their leadership ranks.

The ability to understand the issue actually requires a complex and connected way of thinking about organizations and how true change is conceived and executed. This is not an issue that can be carved out and put on a single board agenda or recruiter's goals for the year. Understanding this complicated and nuanced desire requires that we think about the whole of the organization.

**Motives**

The first critical step, in communication both internally and externally, is that boards and organizations come clean about their motive for "increasing gender diversity." This is the strategy behind the decision. If it is just a mandate ("get a higher percentage of women in the company"), it is unlikely that the supporting processes, mechanisms, and development will be in place. A more comprehensive aim of increasing diversity in order to increase perspective, diversify style, and increase performance would likely lead an organization to explore the mechanisms necessary to make this successful. Unfortunately, many stop after building the recruiting arm to find women and attract them. Little thought is put into the managerial and development structures that would actually ensure success after the recruiters have left the room.

**Milieu**


The next step is to understand the context surrounding the organization, its leaders, and the cultural milieu in which they exist. If a board sets out to have a female CEO within five years, and yet the highest ranking female leader is somewhere in the depths of middle management,

the board is ensuring failure. Imagine it. An external CEO will need to be brought in to meet the gender requirement. This new CEO will lack the context and organizational history. Having come from outside and being the only female leader in the board room, she will also likely not have the informal connections or stakeholder relationships that would ensure her success; and with the added microscope and pressure of being the first female executive above middle management, it is unlikely she will be given the time to mature, the support to fail, and the help to right her path before the experiment is deemed a failure. So even with good motives, if the existing organizational architecture (organization structure, employee development processes, compensation, and benefits) is not ready to support the diversity you require, your diversity initiatives may cause more harm than good. For a current example of this, see CEO Marc Benioff's recent move to adjust women's salary at Salesforce. It cost him \$3M dollars, but he knew it was necessary if he was going to realize his larger gender diversity goals.

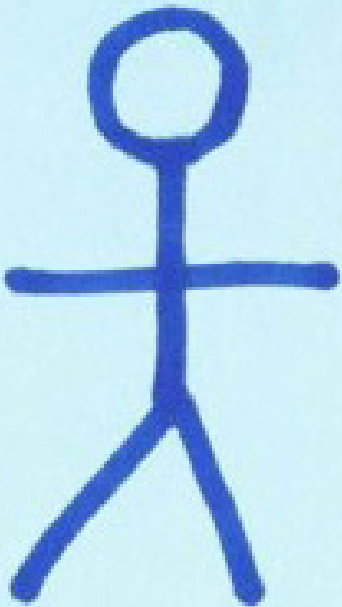


## Metrics

Perhaps the most important step is to understand how we measure success. What does true progress look like? Too often it is a percentage-based equation or a head count of top-level positions. This is a start, but what if from there we focused on increased performance and a better business? Perhaps we would be making different choices about who we hire, how we ensure they integrate, and how we work to make them successful in the long term (not just counting them as they come in the door). The recent McKinsey study finds that companies with the highest gender diversity, as compared to the industry average, see a much higher return on equity (10%), a higher operating result (48%), and a stronger stock price growth (70%). In addition, having at least one woman on the board decreases bankruptcy by a full 20%. These are simple, bottom line, dollars and cents statistics that point to the relationship between gender diversity and success.

Gender diversity is more than a cause. It's a strategic advantage, but in order to realize this strategic advantage, our organizations have a great deal of work to do. We must admit our motives, understand our contexts, and be clear about our metrics. 

*DIVERSITY IS NOT A CAUSE, IT IS A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE*



# SQUIRREL! HOW THE ALLURE OF GREENER GRASS CRIPPLES FOCUS AND RESULTS

By Ron Carucci

*“He just can’t say ‘no’ to any idea, especially his own.”*

*“She flits from one new project to another. She never finishes anything she starts.”*

*“He’s got the worst adult-ADD I’ve ever seen!”*

These are comments we often hear about leaders. So often the frustration with leaders is not that they lack vision or direction, but that they can’t keep to a direction once set. In Pixar’s 2009 animated classic “UP,” there is an iconic scene in which Dug, the talking dog, is suddenly distracted and yells, “Squirrel!” We now kindly refer to the leaders referenced above as exhibiting SQUIRREL leadership.

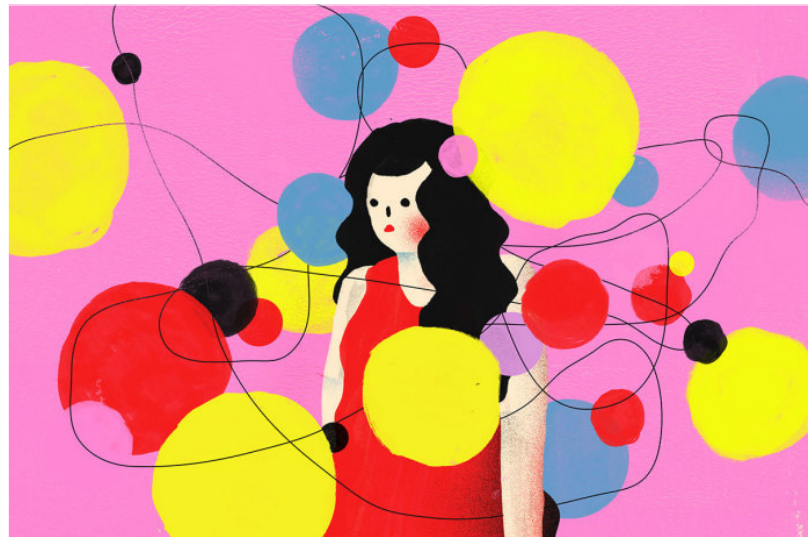
So how do leaders with uncontrollable instincts to pursue new shiny objects remain opportunistic while guarding against the destructive consequences of SQUIRREL Leadership? Here are four doses of self-honesty to take if you feel as though you may be your organization’s “Squirrel.”

### Don’t dismiss the costly consequences

Your ability to generate a new idea a minute isn’t “strategic,” “creative,” or “entrepreneurial.” The truth is that it’s costly. The capacity you are draining from your people and your organization has real dollars attached to it. The psychic motivation you are exhausting from them is incalculable. Worse, you are likely diminishing a genuine strength that you could bring as a leader by using it to excess. The greatest way to ensure your, and others’ ideas, have maximum impact on your strategy is to narrow the focus of your team and organization on the few initiatives with the most promising potential. Stretching capacity too thin by bouncing it from one thing to another ensures your strategy will likely fail to realize the results you hope for.

### Own your FOMO

Whether its excessive ideation as a leader, or job-hopping from one assignment to another, your fear of missing out may be a detrimental factor underlying your unconstrained impulses. Pinpoint the anxiety that triggers how you respond to new ideas (especially your own) or opportunities that arise. Are you really drawn to them on genuine merit, or are you simply afraid of grandeur you may miss out on? Learn to eval-



uate ideas and opportunities on measurable criteria for what potential they hold. Do your best to emotionally detach from them. The more you can depersonalize the idea or opportunity, the more objectively you will evaluate it.

### Accept not every great idea should be born

No matter how brilliant an idea may be, no organization has the capacity to pursue them all. Walking away from the obviously mediocre ideas requires no leadership feat. Saying no to great ideas so that greater ideas can prevail is what exceptional leaders do. If you struggle saying no, especially denying yourself your own pet projects, recognize others will eventually conclude your leadership to be weak. Every “yes” you dole out means previous “yes’s” get diluted. Learn to be gratified by the hard work to see one great opportunity through to completion no matter how many others you must forfeit.



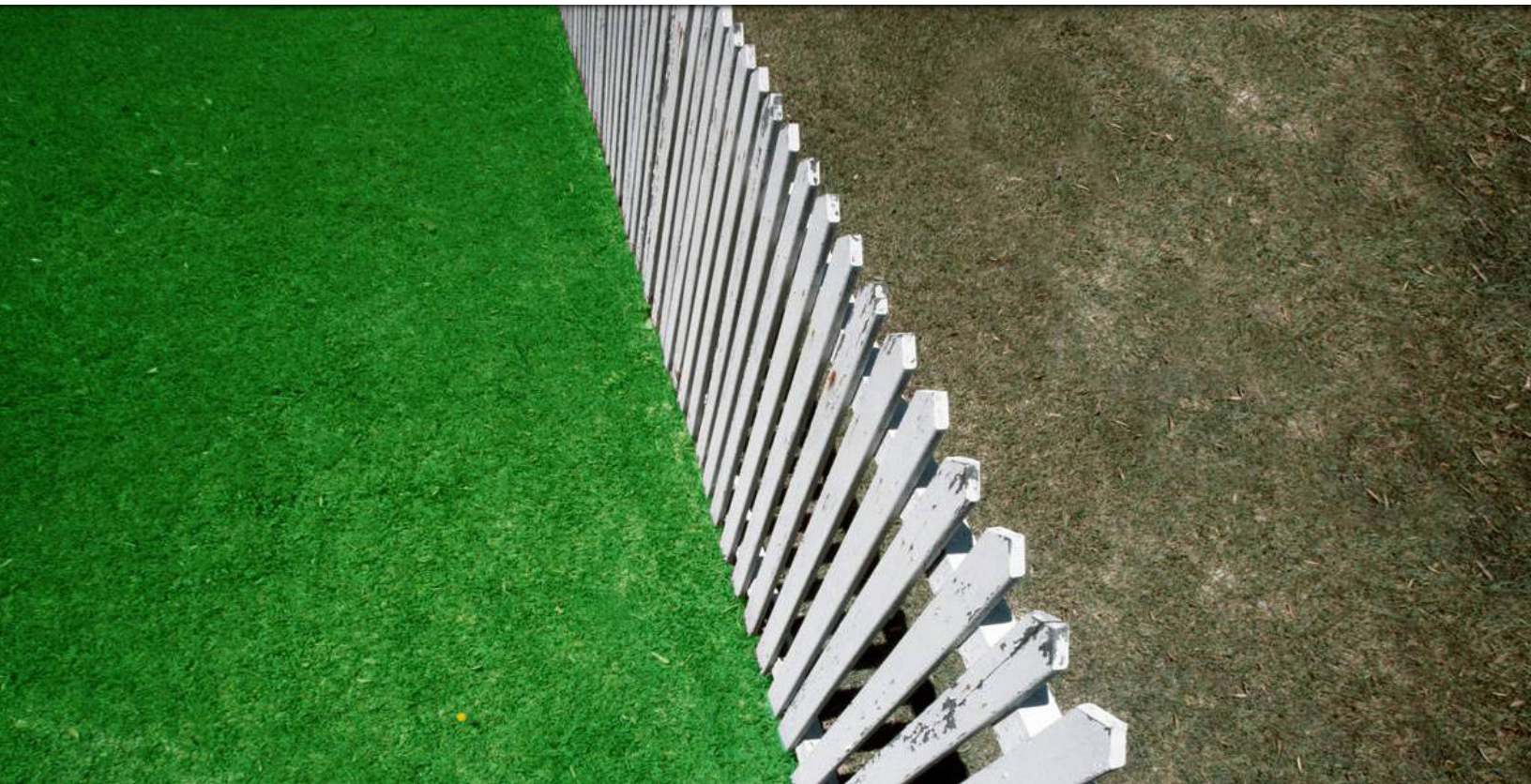
**Dig up the underlying pathology**

It's very likely that your inability to control impulsive instincts stems from deeper issues. It could be that your sense of significance and identity are overly rooted in your need for affirmation. Having your ideas acted on validates you, and forfeiting your ideas makes you feel inadequate. It could be that you do have ADD and your need for immediate gratification impairs your judgment when new opportunities arise. Or it could be that your envy of others' ideas triggers your "greener grass" impulse to compete and prevail so others don't outshine you. Finally, your unrestrained sense of discontent may create persistent restlessness that makes it impossible for you to sit still long enough to let ideas or opportunities mature. Regardless of the root, accept there is one to be dug up, and that your behavior is more than a personality quirk.

*SAYING NO TO GREAT IDEAS SO  
THAT GREATER IDEAS CAN  
PREVAIL IS WHATS  
EXCEPTIONAL LEADERS DO*

Whether it's managing your career or your organization, your SQUIRREL leadership impulses come with a cost. If others have raised this with you, even in jest, take it seriously. Step back and do a ruthless assessment of your decision-making, focus, and leadership. Ask for hard feedback, even if it has to be anonymous, to see if others are suffering in silence from the repercussions of your impulsive flitting. SQUIRREL leadership has destroyed many a career and organization.

Don't let it do the same to yours. 





# 12 WAYS TO ENSURE YOUR OFFSITE IS A FAILURE

By RON CARUCCI



Big summer off-site planning season is upon us. Whether to finish off the fiscal year or to make sure you start the next one strong, feverish preparations are underway. Organizations spend billions convening some collection of senior leaders. “The Annual Meeting,” the “Senior Leaders Forum,” the “Global Leadership Summit,” the “Executive Retreat” are common names given to the annual mecca at which executives converge to reflect on past year’s performance and discuss the future. Tragically, these costly convening’s frequently fail to be more than boondoggles at favorite golf resorts. If you do the math, the hourly run rate of attendees’ combined salaries is staggering. The simple litmus test of whether or not value is being created by assembling top leaders is this: would you invite your shareholders to watch the meeting? And if you did, would they want to buy or sell your stock?

The irony is these gatherings, usually ranging two to five days, have tremendous potential to galvanize commitment, build needed capability, deepen understanding of strategies and market dynamics, and yes, rejuvenate weary leaders after hard seasons. They are mechanisms that could serve as major forces of accelerated change, but often don’t. These off sites need to be aimed.

Having been frequently called to rescue impending big off-sites from the jaws of failure, here are twelve painfully common ways to ensure yours goes off the cliff should that be what you want.

**1. Set expectations too high.** “We will look back one day and see this meeting as the turning point in our organization’s story” is one of the most common openers and parting refrains of CEOs at these meetings. When you raise the bar too high, you set people up for emo-

tional letdowns when they come back off the mountain. Saying “this will be a transformative time together” might be possible, but better to under promise and over deliver. Let inspiration follow.

**2. Randomly draw the invitee cutoff line.** When the guest list dips layers into the hierarchy, where to cut it off becomes a major pain point. “Senior Director and above” gets declared and immediately exceptions are made. So invitee-criteria looks capricious, and some executives are faced with “why wasn’t I invited” from those who feel unjustly excluded.

**3. Call the golf and spa agenda items “team building.”** There is nothing wrong with providing time for rejuvenation and fun. Trying to cover up appearances by calling it “team building” is disingenuous and causes people to feel guilty. So they end up going back to their room to do emails instead of the enjoyment you in-

tended.

**4. Pack the agenda with dozens of 7-minute “updates.”** Either from ignorance about how adults process information, or not wanting anyone to feel robbed of air time, it’s astounding how many three-day agendas are packed with nine days of content. And no matter how many times the facilitator declares “you have 7 minutes,” presenters show up with 50 slides.

**5. Pick a really exotic location so the rest of the organization feels bad.**

There’s “nice” and there’s “decadent.” You don’t have to take people to the ends of the earth to make the location feel special. To really overachieve, don’t schedule any free time for participants to enjoy the beautiful surroundings. Then everyone feels bad.

**6. Don’t try and tackle substantive issues.** Banality and superficiality often appear like design criteria for these meetings given the complex challenges leaders should be discussing. Worse, agendas feign addressing hard topics with one-way content dumps followed by “we’re going to take this discussion off line.”

**7. Go off agenda early, but don’t alert presenters you won’t get to them.** Because of an agenda careening off course from overages on poorly timed segments, those scheduled for later in the agenda are left wondering if they will get to present their “critical data.” So they stew in anxiety until someone tells them “we’ll have you come to next month’s business review instead – you’re too important to rush through here.”

**8. Have an expensive, celebrity speaker with irrelevant content.** Drop \$50,000 to \$150,000 on a former president, movie star, or athlete who comes and tells the same war stories they’ve been telling for years. Then, leave it to the MC to retrofit the high-priced shtick to appear applicable to the organization’s challenges. Finish with autographs, photo ops, and cock-


tails.

**9. Encourage hallway collusion by keeping honest conversation out of the room.** As soon as tension arises because that one “mouthy” executive asks the provocatively undiscussable question, call a break.

**10. Have break-out sessions with confusing directions.** I’d love a dollar for every time I’ve heard people wearing the same colored dot on their name tag walk into the breakout room asking, “Now what are we supposed be doing again?”

**11. Don’t finalize the agenda until the day before.** Why give people a confident sense of what to expect when you don’t know yourself? Better to keep them guessing and have your facilitator make jokes about it that start with, “I know it says Bill is next on the agenda, but actually...”

**12. Do cheesy activities intended to build cohesion.** Who doesn’t love a scavenger hunt, right? Paintball? Team cooking school? How about kayaking or hiking with mixed groups ranging from those in Olympian shape to morbidly obese. Then, to ensure it’s declared a waste, don’t provide time to debrief the activity to see if any cohesion was actually built.

Convening leaders whose collective influence has the potential to change history for an organization is a massive undertaking of massive proportions. With a clear aim, creative design, and careful planning, you actually can create transformative experiences. While leaders are gathered, trust that the rest of the organization is fasting and praying in hopes they come back with meaningful news. Don’t squander invaluable (and expensive) opportunities to advance your organization’s story. Treat these gatherings as precious resources, assemble the right expertise to build them, and you’ll get the lasting impact you intend. 

*DON'T SQUANDER  
INVALUABLE AND  
EXPENSIVE  
OFF-SITES*



## I SIGHT: Part I Aiming yourself

By Josh Epperson

### *Am I really doing what I love?*

Questions like this often surface when we experience dissonance between our values and our behavior.

*"I love my family, but I am spending 70 hours a week at work."*

*"I love my work, but all my time there may get in the way of my desire to start a family."*

*"I have an amazing career, but I don't feel like I am making a difference in the world."*

*"I love the piano, but can't find the time to take lessons at this stage in life."*

*"I love volunteering, but I wish I could make a living doing it."*

These tense feelings always seem to butt in when our behaviors aren't entirely aligned with our values. So what then? How can I do what I love?

An entire industry has been born to help us answer these big existential questions about purpose, meaning, and how it intersects with our work. Personal mission statements, purpose workshops, and self-knowledge retreats are all geared toward helping us identify "the one unique thing we were born to do." Yet all these sources of professional purpose often carry a fatal assumption: There is ONE answer to the question.

Purpose is more akin to the joy and fear of a roller

coaster than finding the one perfect theme park. Or at least that has been my experience.

In '97 I captured one of my foundational beliefs and I've attempted to integrate it with my work ever since. I am here to help others successfully journey through difficult transitions.

I've lived that conviction in a variety of ways. For seven years it took the expression of a therapist working to help children who had developmental delays or had experienced trauma. In that work, I was confronted with the reality that a great 50-minute session may be for naught when that 8 year old boy returns to the family structure and mental health system that belies the growth he achieved during our session. I experienced dissonance because I wondered if my work would have lasting impact. That dissonance sparked a desire for large scale, systematic transformation.

Nearly 20 years (and three different Master's degrees) later, my desire to "help others through difficult transitions" is manifested differently. Today I help industry experts and seasoned executives become more effective and productive business leaders. 50 minute sessions have become 90 minute meetings. Playgrounds have become corner offices.

What I continue to find is that purpose grows. When you actively engage the dissonance you feel, your values and beliefs take on greater depth and complexity. The dissonance beckons deeper ownership of your identity and how you do you.

I still feel dissonance today. But rather than ignoring it, I listen to it and engage it. Listening and engaging that dissonance has extended my impact to completely new contexts. Over the past decade I've helped multi-billion dollar companies redesign their enterprises to deliver value in competitively evolving ways. I've worked with next generation leaders of a nation who were desper-

PURPOSE IS MORE  
AKIN TO THE JOY AND  
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COASTER

ately in search of a reason to stay, build a career, and raise a family in their motherland. Navigating difficult transitions is an understatement. This repurposing has not only opened new arenas of impact, but it has also enabled me to reenter the non-profit world I came out of with experience and expertise I previously did not have.

Last weekend I was with my wife and her board colleagues planning to revolutionize women's health care in Romania. HealthBridge Global, in partnership with Clinica Pro Vita, is working to build Life Medical Cen-

## *IF YOU LISTEN CLOSELY THE DISSONANCE BETWEEN YOUR WORK AND WHAT YOU LOVE WILL ALWAYS BE THERE*

ter, a fully functional maternity center that dignifies women from pregnancy through early pediatric services. It will be the first of its kind in Romania, and in a post-communist country, that's no small feat. I get to join these stories and so many others, because I choose to wrestle with my dissonance. I choose to listen for opportunities to align my work with the beliefs I hold dear.

Are you experiencing dissonance in your life or career? Are you willing to wrestle with your purpose and risk it taking on a life of its own? If so, three quick points.

### **1. Do you know what you value?**

We often live values that were given to us unknowingly by our family of origin, workplace, or larger society. Start by acknowledging the beliefs and values you hold dear. Regardless of what you do, identify foundational truths that are uniquely you.


### **2. Are there choices you can make right now to be a little more you?**

Make one. These choices afford tremendous learning;

learning about yourself and your purpose in the world. As you learn, stay flexible. Don't be so dogmatic that you can't adapt and change along the way.

### **Are you making excuses?**

Are you rolling your eyes, saying, "It's not that easy" I agree, it's not. But rest assured, until you make a choice to engage the dissonance, how you feel about your life and work will stay the same. At some point the pain of staying the same will be greater than the pain of change. My vote is for the least pain possible.

Maybe at some point you'll take those piano lessons or leave your job for one that allots you more global impact. But those won't be THE destinations either. If you listen closely, the dissonance will always be there, calling you to align your behaviors with what you value. 





A silhouette of a person wearing a hooded jacket and pants stands on a beach, looking out at the ocean. The sky is a gradient of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The ocean has gentle waves, and a few small figures are visible in the distance.

# *I SIGHT*

## *PART II: STORIES FROM THE FUTURE*

*By Josh Epperson*

**AS** A CHRISTMAS GIFT FOR A GOOD FRIEND, I GAVE 12 SMALL JOURNALS. I GIFTED MYSELF A SEPARATE SET OF 12. ONE JOURNAL FOR EVERY MONTH. BUT WHAT TO FILL THEM WITH? [...]

Have you ever read an old journal? Or even old emails from a pivotal life moment? We see so clearly how events unfolded (and what we would have done differently) when looking into the past. Hindsight is 20/20. Which had me wondering, what if our present-sight could be closer to 20/20? What if there was a way to better understand in the present?

With that in mind, the premise behind the 12 journals was to shift attention from figuring out the future to capturing a deeper understanding of the present. Often when we set out to create our future we focus on variables and uncertainties – both positive and negative. But perhaps, as our 12 journal experiment taught me, you can't get clarity about your future if you don't have clarity about your past and present. If you separate conversations about your future from the past or present you'll end up feeling anxious, disconnected and disengaged from your choices.

Martian Heidegger, a German philosopher, captures this idea brilliantly. "A curious, indeed unearthly thing that we must first leap onto the soil on which we really stand." (Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?) We spend an exorbitant amount of time and energy (not to mention money) looking to the future while attempting to escape present realities. Are you living into the best possible future? For your leadership? For your business? For your family? Answering those questions requires a giant leap into your present versus an exodus from it.

Storytelling, through personal narration, is a powerful way to gain direction for hopes and aspirations that are grounded in the present. Stories, when told well, ground the teller and listener in the now. Think about the best story you have ever read, seen, or heard. The best stories, whether they happened decades ago or will happen decades from now, are the ones that are experienced as if they're happening right now. That's why the conversation with a spouse minutes after hearing you were promoted, or fired, is so powerful; the thought and emotion are recent. The experience of the present is what shifts a story from informative to transformative.

In the Healing Power of Stories, Daniel Taylor says it this way,

*"You are your stories. You are the product of all the stories you have heard and lived - and many that you have never heard. They have shaped how you see yourself, the world, and your place in it... Our stories teach us that there is a place for us, that we fit...the more conscious we are about our stories, and our roles as characters in them, the more clarity we have about who we are, and why we are here, and how we should act in the world."*

We regularly work with leaders and their teams to craft and learn from these "present tense" experiences. Unpacking these stories yields a wealth of insight about where they have been and where they need to go in the future. Our Stories from the Future®, push leaders and teams look at what has been or what could be through a completely new lens. Ultimately helping decrease the need to rely solely on hindsight and begin building true foresight. Storying provides individuals and groups a safe context to coalesce around common potential, reflect on and plan for that potential, and






not wreak havoc on the business in the process.

Here's a high level look at the process. You can personalize it for your own use, or can follow the tips as you invite others to pen their Stories From the Future.

<i>STEPS</i>	<i>TIPS</i>
Begin with the premise that futures are not predetermined, but written	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gain clarity about author's mindset or the cultural mindset of the future</li> <li>• Work to overcome any "victim" mentality</li> </ul>
Decide the story's scope and desired impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the story need to accomplish (e.g. transform a leader's behaviors or reinvent their leadership for a new role or career)?</li> </ul>
Set the story in the past (e.g. a record setting performance) or future (e.g. Washington Post story on your success)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on 3-5 past or future stories versus mixing past and present together</li> <li>• The goal is to learn from a set of like stories versus one story</li> </ul>
Create guidposts for your authors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide some general topics for authors to cover in their writing</li> <li>• Be directive, but not over leading (e.g. "your effort made a fundamental difference for others and you knew it" as opposed to detailing the different they made)</li> </ul>
Have authors write their stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life/relive the event versus tell/retell it</li> <li>• Don't edit, let your impulses run</li> <li>• The most difficult part is starting</li> </ul>
Debrief stories to identify patterns and insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What recurring themes or dissonance surface? What implications do they have on your core purpose and/or future endeavors?</li> </ul>
Create an action plan based on the findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pick 2-3 things to work on</li> <li>• Find a partner to journey with you</li> <li>• Make hypothesis based on your work and test them</li> <li>• "Learning Labs" create a safe environment to skin your knees</li> </ul>

For my friend and I, the 12 journals told a profound story of our past year in present tense narrative. At the end of the year we booked a long weekend to reflect and play. We skied and did après to the full. During fireside moments we discussed how our reflections on the near-present may impact our future. Our vision for the future improved because our vision of the present was clearer. That was a gift much greater than 12 stapled piles of paper. 



## I SIGHT: PART III

### 3 Practical Options for Your Next Move

By Jarrod Shappell

With the tassel still hanging on the right side of their caps, the class of 2016 listened to the words of those who have come before them. This year J.K Simmons, Matt Damon, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Larry Ellison delivered moving commencement speeches. Their summary? “Do what you love!”

The message is not just relevant for the graduates. We all want to enjoy our work more. But...

*“I have three children and a mortgage.”*

*“I’ve been here 9 years and my pension is about to vest.”*

*“I think this company is really going to turn around.*

*Why leave?”*

Ask a 2016 graduate about this list of real life concerns and it sounds like excuses. Ask a boomer about this list and they see real challenges that contradict the notion of doing what they love. Both are correct. We commonly create a false binary between leaving the job we are in for something we would love more, or staying in the job that is less than enjoyable because of the tangible benefits it brings us. This binary is not helpful and often stands in the way of meaningful action.

In previous posts we’ve made the case (as has endless amounts of research) that doing what you love has long-term benefits for yourself, our workplaces, and even our economy. But realistically, with so many more tangible responsibilities in front of us, what action can

can we take to love our work? We see three options: **ROOT, SUPPLEMENT, or LEAP.**

### **ROOT**

When we are unhappy in our current job we look at job listings, LinkedIn requests, and networking events as a means of escape. We believe that the grass is greener elsewhere. But perhaps as our eyes have wandered for greener pastures, we have missed the things we could enjoy in our current context. The old adage, “Bloom where you’re planted” may have merit here. Especially if the alternative to quitting and leaving is quitting and staying, and becoming a victim of your company’s deficiencies. You can actually find more of what you love in your work if you root down where you are. What was it that drew you to the job and organization in the first place? Has some disillusionment obscured seeing the potential in front of you? This means creatively and strategically identifying things that you love or value in the work itself, or ways to influence the environment toward what you want it to be. Bored of filling out the same project management template? Take notes of the ways in which your organization adds value or notice how your positivity connects disparate colleagues. Frustrated by what feels like a cold or soulless corporate environment? You could advocate for the creation

## *AN OCCUPATION IS JUST ONE LOCATION OF YOUR VOCATION*

of more innovative products, invite your colleagues to happy hour to strengthen team collegiality, or show your customers more kindness and generosity. Tired of the lackadaisical culture? You could show up early and encourage others to do the same, engage your colleagues in a mindfulness practice, or ask your manager if you could organize weekly events that encourage professional development. Author and Wharton School professor Adam Grant calls this “Job Crafting.” He says, “A couple of colleagues and I studied this at Google and we found that there were all sorts of ways that they could make modifications to their own jobs that made them more meaningful, more motivating, and still allowed them to be very effective.” If we are

honest with ourselves there are always opportunities for job crafting but this is often more difficult (because of politics, perceived lack of authority, etc) than dreaming of leaving for something seemingly more rewarding.

### **SUPPLEMENT**

Not all workplaces or managers will be interested in making space for your “rooting.” An alternative pathway is to donate your skills to nonprofits, churches, or agencies that can make good use of your particular skills and experiences. As we have written about before, living your purpose is something you need to see holistically. An occupation is just one location of your vocation. Your job is 40 hours a week. Maybe it needs to stay that way and you can use the other time available to you to do what you love. This is especially relevant if your passion is not necessarily a skill. It’s all well and good to want to activate your passion through the work you do. But if you have a passion for something you actually have little aptitude for, you could end up very passionate while starving. Balance what you are passionate about doing with what you are actually good at doing. For many, those things are compatible. But don’t assume aptitude and the ability to earn a living at something will follow just “doing what you love” as so many cliché commencement addresses have advised. Supplementing may allow you to do what you love, and also do what you are good at.

### **LEAP (with calculation)**

Perhaps it is time to make the leap toward a different position, organization, or industry that is more in line with your passion and purpose. If you feel like it is time to draw upon your skills, knowledge, expertise, influence, and networks to launch a new effort...don’t quit your day job. It sounds counter intuitive, doesn’t it? In his most recent book, *Originals*, Adam Grant suggests that some of the most original thinkers and entrepreneurs of our day actually enabled the future success of their organizations by not jumping too early. These entrepreneurs, like the founders of Warby Parker, actually maintained other streams of income and even had occupational back up plans. It is Grant’s estimation that this derisks the early stages of a start-up and helps the entrepreneur risk, fail, and recalibrate. The same could be true of changing positions or organization. Al-



lowing space for exploration while still in your current position, allows for a more calculated leap. So rather than giving your two weeks now so you can go find the job, organization, or start-up that truly matches what you're passionate about, consider how you can design your time to both look to the future and keep one foot in the present.

We should heed the words of our commencement presenters. They have deep experience and can speak to how they have succeeded and what lessons they wish they'd have had. But we must also be cautious to not confuse doing what we love with NOT doing what we are doing now. There is a time for rooting, supplementing, and leaping and there is great wisdom in knowing when it is time for which. 