

Editorial

Step Up to Tap into Our True Potential

After too many years of unfulfilling work, Bronnie Ware began searching for a job with heart. Despite having no formal qualifications or experience, she chose to work in palliative care. There she had to look after and even counsel the dying patients during their final days. In order to engage them and also out of curiosity she began asking them on their regrets in life. “Are you happy with the live you have lived?” was one of her regular queries. According to Ware, people gained clarity of vision during their last days. They told her things they wished they had done differently and she began scribbling them down. Thanks to these disclosures Bronnie’s life got transformed over the years. One day through her Internet blog she shared her finding with her friends. This blog titled *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* gained so much momentum that it was read by more than three million people around the globe in its first year. At the requests of many, Bronnie published a book with the same title *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*, in which she shared her own personal story. The book tells us how by applying the lessons of those nearing their death Bronnie developed an understanding that can enable anybody, if they make the right choices, to die with peace of mind. In her book, she expresses in a heartfelt retelling how significant these regrets are and how we can positively address these issues while we still have time. The following are the most common and significant regrets of the dying:

1. *I wish I had courageously lived a life true to myself and not one that others expected of me.*

This was the most common regret for all the dying. Being alive presents an opportunity very few realize exists until it is taken away. After looking back on their lives and seeing how many of their

dreams remained unfulfilled because they had lived according to the expectations of others they felt deceived. Trying to fit in, cut back or rise up to the expectations of others they forgot to pursue and realize their own cherished dreams. Time and tide wait for none. One should therefore pursue his/her dreams before it is too late and then time remains only to regret.

2. I wish I had not spent all my life working

According to Bronnie Ware this was the most common regret among her male clients who had missed time with their children and companions. Some women who had been breadwinners also had this regret. They wished they had not spent most of their time at work. Making conscious choices and having a simple lifestyle opens up new opportunities, happiness and space for the most important things in life.

3. If only I had gained courage to express how I felt

In order to maintain peace with others, most people suppress their feelings. This leads to a mediocre life that denies them an opportunity to become the people they were truly destined to be. Bitterness and resentment led to some of the illnesses developed. It is impossible to predict how other people would react especially when we start talking honestly but if we do, the result is either a relationship elevated to a whole new level or the release of an unhealthy relationship from our life.

4. I wish I had remained in touch with my friends

The dying realized the full benefits of having old friends during their dying weeks. Getting caught up in their lives had led to the loss of golden friendships over the years. When dying, everyone misses their friends and they regretted not giving friendship the time and effort deserved. Our busy lifestyles sometimes lead to loss of our friendship but when faced with imminent death, reality hits us. We should not let money or status dictate our lives; love and relationships should.

5. If only I had allowed happiness into my life

Happiness is a choice and most people realize this when it is too late. In their exertion to make a living people can altogether forget to live their life. In pursuit of ascending the social ladder many people put on hold niceties that make life worthwhile. Old patterns and habits hold people back and they are often afraid to get out of the familiar comfort zone which hurt both their emotional and physical lives. Fear of change make them pretend to be content while deep within they long to laugh and be silly again. It is better that we learn to let go and smile again

before it is too late. What others think of us loses significance when on our deathbed.

Oprah Winfrey, the famous TV talk-show celebrity as she turned 60 gave an interview to the O, The Oprah Magazine. In response to the interviewer's query regarding her greatest regret in life she said, "It is recognizing the time that I wasted and the things that I worried about that really didn't matter. That's really the hardest part, that's really the only regret that I have." It is the fear of rejection that often persuades people to conform and confine their lives to the likes and dislikes of others. Both Bronnie Ware and Oprah Winfrey remind us that a remote controlled life is not worth living. We are not meant to be puppets or remote controlled appliances to be at their disposal. The brains that we carry around are not given to us for safe keeping.

Fear Limits Our Life Potential

Bronnie, by means of her book *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*, reminds us that fear is the stumbling block that prevents people from pursuing their cherished dreams. Fear could debilitate us by holding us back from making positive changes in our life. Anxiety can make even the smallest changes seem life-threatening and extremely uncomfortable. For example, we may be deeply dissatisfied with our present occupation, but feel nervous or uncertain about seeking and finding a different career. We may have always dreamt of doing something heroic but fear that the liability would be too much to handle. In the same way fear can prevent us from breaking destructive habits. We might have developed some of those habits to pacify our anxiety and stress. If we try to break those bad habits, once again we will be exposed to the original problem which we do not know how to handle except to run back to our "pacifiers" – the very habits we are trying to break. Fear can prevent us from taking risks. We often shy away from taking risks and then put on a solemn face describing it prudence! One may evade starting a new relationship because he/she was so hurt by the last one or is afraid of its negative consequences. We often forget that risk can also bring great rewards. Avoiding risk may help us avoid negative possibilities but we also miss the excitement and joy that come from positive outcomes. Social anxiety is another issue that limits our potential. It may prevent us from going out and mingling with people. Then we will try to save our face pointing towards our spirituality, workload, and numerous other excuses.

Reducing the Impact of Fear

It is important to note that these fears are most often groundless. They are merely a perception that things "could" go wrong – but that does

not mean they will. Murphy's Law - Anything that can go wrong will go wrong - is not factual. However, rather than trying to force our way through the fear, we may find it easier to explore the many ways that fear can be effectively released from our mind, emotions, and body. When we know how to release the fear, we could handle it as we would any minor obstacle and then continue on our way to creating the best life we possibly can. Besides our personal worries like health, finance, reputation, relationships, etc., we have to deal with many "collective" fears as well. These are transmitted to us through our environment. These fears often relate to situations and events that leave us feeling vulnerable and defenseless. Not only do we see and hear constant references to frightening scenarios in the media and from the people around us, the strain of collective fears also seeps into the very fabric of our reality and continues to resonate around and within us. Since we are all connected to the collective consciousness, we can actually absorb this "fear energy" as we go about our daily lives - even if we do not pay attention to the media hype and mass hysteria.

In other words, if the system, to which we belong, tries to manipulate and control its members by keeping them suppressed in a low vibratory state of fear, it will have a telling effect on everyone. Even when everything in our own life goes well we may still be affected by these collective fears and remain nervous, uncomfortable, edgy, tense, and vulnerable. The moment we begin focusing on these fearful feelings, we begin to magnify the collective fear energy without even knowing it. It is not easy to avoid absorbing these fearful messages, especially when we are surrounded by endless examples of them every day. However, there are a few things we can do to minimize the impact they have on our life.

An obvious first step is to limit our exposure to negativities. Focusing on this force-fed fear programming only makes us feel more vulnerable and adds to the energy of the collective fear. Certainly we can stay informed about world events but it is advisable to seek independent, unbiased news sources or at least be attentive to contrasting perspectives. We can empower ourselves by remembering that most of the things we feared never happened. In fact, when we remember that giving our attention to anything only makes it seem bigger and more intimidating, we can surely see the wisdom in being more discerning about the things we think about. Deliberately focusing more on positive things will help override the negative input we receive day after day. When we take greater control of our focus and place it decisively upon the creation of a joyful and positive reality, we transmit that same energy to our surroundings as well. This helps minimize some of the fearful energy

being contributed by others around the world. It is true that there are many horrible, scary things to worry about – but there are equally as many wonderful, joyful things to think about. By spending time to dwell on the people we love, recollecting happy memories, and the great experiences that may be waiting just around the corner for us. It may not make the scary possibilities go away completely but it will lighten our mood, and leave us feeling happier and less fearful.

The Push

Even if we are not born timid we are under the strong influence of the environment that implanted them. It is simply harping on the strings of fear that salespeople often sell their products. Many business enterprises are thriving like leeches injecting fear into their customers and feeding their life blood. People fall for all sorts of insurances they propose in preparation for the disasters that “might” happen. “It is better to be safe than sorry.” Worry and fear appear to be the key motivation behind our actions. Some of the more common fears are: fear of the unknown, fear of failure and rejection, fear of lose, fear of facing reality, and fear of disapproval. We need to tackle all these fears if we want to realize our true potential. We cannot deny them or banish them to our subconscious, as that will only add fuel to a fire that will probably and abruptly burst out beyond our control. Like fires, fears are easiest to contain when they are still small.

There is a fascinating story of a mother eagle. She gently coaxed her offspring toward the edge of the nest. Her heart quivered with conflicting emotions as she felt their resistance to her persistent nudging. “Why does the thrill of soaring have to begin with the fear of falling?” she thought. This ageless question was still unanswered for her. As in the tradition of the species, her nest was located high upon the shelf of a sheer rock face. Below there was nothing but air to support the wings of each child. “Is it possible that this time it will not work?” she thought. Despite her fears the eagle knew it was time. Her parental mission was all but complete. There remained one final task...the push. The eagle drew courage from an innate wisdom. Until her children discovered their wings, there was no purpose for their lives. Until they learned how to soar, they would fail to understand the privilege it was to have been born an eagle. The push was the greatest gift she had to offer. It was her supreme act of love. And so, one by one, she pushed them and... THEY FLEW.

Do not settle for ordinary!

God has not created anything or anybody ordinary. As science progresses scientists are getting more and more amazed by the diversity and uniqueness of substances even at the subatomic levels. We often marvel at the uniqueness of human fingerprints. But, it is not just the fingerprints; everything has a singularity of its own. It is the lack of depth and clarity of vision that make things and persons appear ordinary. All are in fact, special, unique and extraordinary. It is the failure to recognize, realize, project and promote the God-given 'extra' of persons and things that put them down in the category of ordinary. Salvaging them from the ditch of ordinariness depends on the 'extra' effort one takes to uncover it every day. A little 'extra' will ensure a course correction and lead one away from the self-defeating and limiting behavior. When we settle for ordinary we are defeating the purpose of our existence. As St. Irenaeus testifies, "*Gloria Dei est vivens homo!*" (Glory of God is man fully alive). When we resolve to step up and tap into our resources we are ensuring the full realization of God's creative endeavour, which is a win-win situation. Leading an ordinary life is not only self-defeating, but also is unfair to God and everybody who looks up to us and deserves a better deal from us. Abraham Lincoln said, "And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

In his book *Expect to Win* John Mason relates the story of Sir Sidney Poitier, the first black person to win an Academy Award for Best Actor in 1964. After his first audition, a casting director told him, "Why don't you stop wasting people's time and go out and become a dishwasher or something?" It was at that moment Poitier decided to devote his life to acting. He was not going to let someone else decide his fate. Besides being an Academy Award winning actor eventually Sydney Poitier became a successful film director, author, and diplomat. A strong resolution is essential for success in life. Failing to identify and delineate our course is equal to flowing along the current and letting the external agents dictate and impose their whims upon us. Every accomplishment, great or small, starts with a resolution. It is neither the lack of intelligence nor ability that leads to underachievement but the lack of decisiveness. The moment we categorically commit ourselves, change begins. All sorts of things happen to help us that never would have otherwise occurred. As Paulo Coelho, the renowned Brazilian novelist articulates in his novel *The Alchemist* "And, when you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it." As we all know nobody can score a goal sitting on the sidelines.

Pebble in the Shoes

However, as the world renowned coach Jim Fannin puts it “Everyone has a pebble in his or her shoe”. At different times in life the pebbles arrive. Each pebble intrudes into our lives unannounced and usually at the most inappropriate time. To run the marathon race of life at our most efficient speed, we must be free of worry, envy, jealousy, anger, impatience, frustration and embarrassment. The intangible pebbles of doubt, fear, guilt, rejection, and shame are all inconvenient and crippling. Even the desire for fame, fortune or power can turn into a pebble in our shoe if left undetected. Some pebbles may remain hidden and undetected for years. Others push, prod, and make their presence felt every day. It is such nagging thoughts that weigh people down. They destroy relationships. They lure people into drugs, alcohol and other addictions. They destroy families and alienate friends.

Step Up to Tap into Our True Potential

Hitherto humanity has experimented with various leadership and management styles. Among them styles such as Autocratic or Authoritarian, Democratic, Laissez-faire, Charismatic, Transactional, Situational, and Transformative are well-known. The origin and efficacy of each of these leadership styles depend on the prevailing situation. “Step Up” is the new mantra among the successful executives who try out “transformative leadership” in the corporate sector. The CEOs with vision and passion try to inject enthusiasm in their subordinates and demand them to take charge and step up so as to tap into their optimum potential. This managerial method envisages the leader to see the potential and to believe in their co-workers. Knowing that they can do a better job the leader is expected to push his/her team to their limits.

On the other hand, we see proactive people advancing without being asked to or encouraged to. They just do it, often surprising the people around them. They do not need to be told to step up, or even pushed to. They do not wait for permission to do it. Once we develop the right attitude and know how to tap into our true potential both our personal and professional lives are going to perk up. Taking ownership and responsibility for the outcomes of our actions is the first step to success. A good and honest evaluation of ourselves will enable us to see things in the right perspective. Awareness of who we are and what we are capable of are prerequisites for any successful endeavor. Taking measure of our current state - the good, the bad and the ugly will enable us plan things accordingly. However the courage to take a chance is crucial to press forward. An ongoing evaluation of our life and the consequences of

our actions will keep us on the right track. An attitude of gratitude and appreciation towards all benefactors, beneficiaries and stakeholders in our ventures will create a friendly atmosphere around us.

Telling ourselves that “You are not living up to your full potential!” is not a constructive practice either. In that case we are basically telling ourselves “You are not good enough the way you are right now”, which is a disempowering thought. Living up to our full potential does not mean to remain permanently discontent telling ourselves that we are not doing enough. It is counterproductive to beat ourselves up about not living up to our full potential. Living up to our full potential is not trying to avoid making mistakes. We should opt for an empowering perspective instead. “I am being the best me I can be, right here, and right now. I will be thriving tomorrow thanks to the mistakes I am willing to make today.” Living up to our full potential is being cool with that instead of trying to please everyone else. Living up to our full potential is giving ourselves permission to be who we are and tapping into our unique prospective. We feel empowered, scared and excited, proud and determined, playful and inspired; these are just a few of our new daily companions on this long, fascinating, winding road that is living up to our full potential. And this will not come into our lives by accident. We choose to invite them in. One empowering thought at a time.

People often complain that life had been unfair to them. So what? Had it not been unfair to millions of others? Had many of them not faced far worse circumstances? Had they accepted defeat? Being a victim does not demand anybody to remain a victim for the rest of his/her life. If our reaction is nothing more than blaming, excuse making and finger pointing, it will take us nowhere. If we are ready to hit the road of personal responsibility, victim can soon be a victor. Mistakes do not matter, failure does not matter. What matters is that we continue to move forward and grow from our experiences. It is giving it our all, wholeheartedly, with all we have got. Living up to our full potential is doing our thing, one tiny step at a time, at our pace, in our own fabulous, imperfect way. Some may like it, others may not. Living up to our full potential does not also mean living a life free of fear, failure, and sorrow. Living happily ever after, in some kind of perpetual state of bliss happens only in fairy tales. Living up to our full potential means feeling the fear and doing it anyway. It means realizing we are living up to our full potential because of and thanks to the mistakes we make and what we learn from them. Living up to our full potential means seeing things as they are, not the way we think they should be, and

taking action from that place. It means allowing ourselves to feel the way we do, not the way we think we should feel. It means diving in and exploring why we are feeling the way we do. And that is when we find our answers. That is when we reconnect with our full potential. That is when we start tapping into our brilliance.

Kurian Perumpallikunnel, CMI