



Life Reviews: A Tool to Shape Your Future - Part One

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"And in the end it's not the years in your life that count; it's the life in your years. "

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865); 16th U.S. President

One of our favorite clients once said to us at the start of an interview session, "I never liked to look back, because usually when you do, all you get is a kink in your neck!" How true this can be for the busy involved life of a visionary leader. But is it really so?

Edward L. was and still is a highly successful entrepreneur of a fourth generation family business. His belief when we first met was that there is no point in reflecting backwards, rather that it was best to look forward to try to see the path that very few of their competitors see and which would enable their company to be a leader in its industry.

After a few months of regular Life Review sessions with us, Edward began to open up. He started to tell the history of the family business in perfect detail: although he may have said he never looked back, there was nothing he couldn't remember about anything that had ever

happened! In doing this life review of his family's business, he quickly realized that along the way the challenges, and some near-failures, were in fact the important milestones from which exponential growth was achieved. Edward's belief has since changed and he regularly reviews at regular, planned intervals what has transpired and what new lessons have been learned.

In fact, the reflection process ended up putting a lot of things in perspective, including the changing tides of a century-old industry as characterized by the ebbs and flows of the manufacturing technology. More importantly for the family it captured the strong values Edward's grandfather had passed on to him in his business and personal life.

The production he hired us for was for 2-3 days of shooting. However, after this process developed, we were engaged for six additional days and shot in three different cities where the business operates. The resulting corporate biography included the mission, vision, and values statements that all employees and stakeholders and family members know and live by.

When we begin a life review process for a personal history, we divide it up into decades lived: 0-10 years old, 11-20, 21-30, etc. up to the present. Another method is to break it up into life event transitions - i.e. elementary school, high school, college, early career, and so on.

This gives the individual a chance to relive the experiences of each of those periods and truly discover what events helped to shape who they have become. To understand how important this is for our society, the International Institute for Reminiscence and Life Review was founded in 1999, with one of its goals being to "promote increased awareness, knowledge, and skill development in direct practice of reminiscence and life



review." In other words, there is value on this looking back and in capturing learnings from it that can be used going forward.

In our personal history discovery work at Memoirs, we like to focus on the early childhood years since they are ripe and rich with influences that truly affect us all and the adults we become. Often we uncover with individuals a unique skill or story that they have forgotten for decades, and it becomes as intensely real for them as if it were yesterday.

A case in this point is one of our clients Richard C. When we interviewed him in his mid-seventies, he reflected on his love of sculpting with clay as a hobby he loved as a youth. As he was reared in the depression years, he had to quit high school in the 8th grade and go to work with his father as a bricklayer.

Fast forward many years, Richard has become a highly successful real estate entrepreneur whose company built many large apartment complexes and high-rise condo developments in a major city in North America. These properties are noted for their great design and aesthetic integration with their environment.

Through his Life Review, Richard realized that what he had really been doing was "sculpting" with concrete all his working life, to create these wondrous edifices, like the sculptures he had once made. Shortly afterwards, he decided to take courses in sculpting and soon opened up his own public sculpting studio Public in an unused commercial space in one of his properties, where he works on his art among others with the same passion. The studio provides free use of the equipment, and instructors offer classes. The only rule is, to join and use the facilities, you have to be over 70.

So the moral of this story is, if Richard had not really focused on the past, in this case, his early childhood love of sculpting, and applied it to his current life almost seventy years later, an opportunity would have been missed. Many other elders would likely never have had the chance to express themselves through learning the art

of sculpting had Richard not taken a good look back.

A footnote: he enjoyed sculpting so much in his late seventies, and now continues in his eighties, that Richard has made it one of his life's missions to install on the grounds of each of his properties one of his sculptures - some of which are cast in bronze and stand at a height of 30 feet!

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