

# KEEPING YOUR SANITY WITH A COMPELLING VISION

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(This will be my last column for a while, while I dive

in fully to finish writing my next book, *Mastering The Emotional Side of Money*. In the meantime to continue keeping your sanity I recommend my most recent: the *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions Workbook*)

When we think of what we'll be like ten years from now, most of us imagine that we'll be just like we are now. Yet when we look back ten years, we're usually different than we were then.

We've learned from experiences, dealt with some hardship, maybe suffered some loss, triumphed in some things, been delighted by epiphanies, and came to understand some things we had not understood before.

If there is something we won't do now because we "learned it the hard way," if we have things that we regret having done that we would never ever do again, we can thank our past self for learning that lesson for us – so we don't have to keep re-learning it, and suffering over and over again like some cruel *Groundhog Day* remake.

Of course we are different today than we were ten years ago – unless we've removed ourselves from any experience of living. Life is a continual anti-entropy endeavor. If we don't expend energy to create order, the natural tendency of things to move toward disorder takes over.

If we don't mow the lawn, the lawn becomes a growth of weeds; if we don't use our bodies in some kind of physical activity, our bodies begin to break down; if we don't use our minds to learn and think about new things, our minds will become less active and effective.

If we don't grow and learn and change our behavior over time to adapt to what we learn, we will become stuck in a rut, passively holding on to the familiar while the world carries on without us.

We all must succumb to entropy to some degree of course, but we also all experience things, and learn, grow, and change as a result.

We *will* be different than we are now in ten years. That's a fact of life. The question is, *how* will we be different; and will we be different mostly as a result of events, or through conscious choice?

In research by Quoidback, Gilbert and Wilson, *The End of History Illusion*, they found that while we look back over the past ten years and easily see and expect that we are different now, we don't expect that we will be different ten years from now. Rather, we tend to think that our current age is where we have finally become who we are – and who we are now is who we will be in the future.

So, we will be different ten years from now; that's a fact, a given, a law of the universe even. Yet we don't think we will be different. That leaves a vacuum. There will be change, yet we tend not to think there will be, so the question becomes: "How will that change happen, if we're not in on it?"

The answer is, often the change will happen *tous*. Other people, events, processes outside of our conscious awareness maybe, or outside of our conscious control, will shape us, influence us, and change us over time.

This doesn't have to be a bad thing. Good people can change us in good ways; good experiences can lead us in better directions. The point is not to avoid influence from others; that would be a lonely and rigid life, and it is not really possible to achieve. We all influence and are influenced by one another much more profoundly than most of us are aware.

In their book *Connected*, Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler show that if we gain or lose weight, for example, our friends are more likely to gain or lose weight; if we quit smoking, our friends are more likely to quit smoking; if we become happier, our friends will be more likely to become happier.

But we can take that too far and allow ourselves to be changed and molded *passively* by outside events most of the time; and that's not an approach to living that I'd recommend.

One of the hardest things to overcome with substance abuse is the effect of the peer group. Addicts will go into rehab for several weeks and come out and be right back with the same group of people who influenced them to abuse the substance in the first place. The effect of the rehab fades while the influence of the peers and the reinforcing environment continues on as strong as ever.

This is an example of passive change: letting events or circumstances primarily direct the course of our lives.

If we believe that we won't be any different ten years from now, we'll be less likely to take an active role in our own process of change and growth, because we'll be less conscious of it – leaving it to others and to circumstances to take care of the changes *that will happen*, whether we are in on them or not.

The first step toward owning our own lives, then, is to acknowledge that *we will be different* in the future than we are now. The next step is to think about *how* we would like to be different.

Once we get the idea that we will be changing in the future, then we can also get the idea that we can be the author of much of that change. Not *all* of that change – there is plenty that we have nothing to say about in this life – but much more than we could ever hope to if we don't accept the reality that we will be different in the future, one way or another.

So how would you like your life to be different ten years from now? Five years from now? One year from now? Do you want to be wealthier? Do you want to enjoy better health and fitness? Do you want to have relationships

that feel really good and satisfying? Do you want to be doing something different with your work?

Some of this may be outside of our control. We may have physical limitations; we may have circumstances we have to deal with as they are for now; responsibilities we must attend to – at least for a given amount of time.

But take what's given, accept reality as it is. Now, given the truth of your situation, how would you like to be different at some point in the future? What would you need to do in order to make those changes in your life? How can you go about structuring those changes; what support do you need to maintain them until they are habits?

Once you know *that* you'll be different, then it's an easy question to ask: "*How* would I like to be different?" And that can be one of the most delightful and profound questions that you can ask – because then you can find ways of making those changes on purpose.

PS: My course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* can help you with this part of your life in much greater detail, with deep understanding and practical skills for mastering these systems and living well. And now you can purchase the *workbook* for this course separately for \$29.95 plus shipping. You can still get the online course with the downloadable workbook at a deep discount, for \$99, if you use this code: LB99.

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