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Vision Wealth Wisdom Work Worry Yesterday

Truth
Picks
Observations
on This Thing
called Life

Peter de Jager

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Advance Praise for Truth Picks

I share these Truth Picks across my organization, and stand to say that at least weekly I receive feedback about how these simple reflections are fundamentally changing people's thinking.

Dave Dean

Based on your excellent record of public service you should be a thousand years old; Based on your energy, enthusiasm and creativity you match a five year old.

V. V. Kumar

The "experiment" with "truth picks" is intriguing, most especially your perspective toward any given saying. Each Truth Pick is relevant and the assumptions built into each comment refreshing. Keep up the good work!

Matthew Pentney

I'm enjoying the Truth Picks immensely. I also share them with coworkers, church buddies, and friends. I'm getting lots of compliments from them.

Gavin Nichols

I read the Truth Picks at the end of the day as a distraction from the day's frustrations. It is a great way to change your mood, and I enjoy seeing an alternative perspective. Keep up the good work!!

Alisha K. Casey

Dedication

Nothing is ever achieved alone. My wife, lover and friend Antoinette, is as much the creator of this work as I am. My sons, Karl & Jason make me both proud and provide the inspiration that allows me to find the better side of life.

This book is dedicated to them as humble thanks, for the joy they've given me.

Foreword

I don't know when I came across my first "Truth Pick", or where it came from. It seemed to appear in my in-basket from nowhere, from the ether, or more practically from the Internet like a stone thrown at the window or a blip on the radar screen.

I don't know why I read it; yet another piece of unsolicited mail I usually acknowledge with the clink of the delete key as it joins its friends in the recycle bin.

I don't know why I forwarded it to a few of my friends with a note saying "read it, it's neat"; an excuse to pause for thought and think of someone like me in a day filled with demands, opportunities and time pressures... It says "STOP!"

I don't know why I did any of these things, but I did them. And it would appear that so did thousands of others, all over the world; reading, pausing, passing on.

I didn't know Peter then, I do now. This series prompted me to email him to ask if he could produce some Truth Picks just for me, about the future; something I could use to enlighten people about the Global Future Forum. I knew Peter as a faceless name who appeared daily in my in-box like a mug of hot chocolate on a cold day. Little did I know that this huge bear of a man was "the" Peter de Jager of Y2K fame.

I call it serendipity. This chance rogue email, opened at the right moment has led to a happy and, I hope, long association with Peter, now as one of the driving forces behind the Global Future Forum in North America.

The first series is over now, only a few privileged people; "connected" people, got to glance at the insight of his nearly daily Truth Picks. It's such a joy that Peter decided to publish his insights and observations on the human condition.

I've no idea which Truth Pick is my favourite. Perhaps The soul would have no rainbow, if the eyes had no tears (# 102), or maybe The applause of a single human being is of great consequence
(#084)

Some of them made me laugh, some challenged me and got me quite cross, but all provoked some response or emotion. None more so, of course, than the mini-series following 9/11 that so evocatively expressed the frustrations and impotence felt by a nation and its allies.

I will never know how truly devastating these events affected the lives of everyday folks in North America but, through Peter's writings, I think I had a glimpse at the pain, and shared that pain with you.

As I sit at my PC, in my study at home in Stratford on Avon, birthplace of the great bard William Shakespeare I am reminded of the line “The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together”.

I wonder what Peter would make of that?

Christine Carroll
CEO and Mother
The global future forum
www.thegff.com

The Truth Picks

Why an e-book version? Why not? I don't think it will impact sales except in a positive manner. I'm not hurt in anyway if someone reads this version and never even sends me an e-mail... and I'll be enriched by any feedback, eventual purchases or spin off interest in my other activities.

So enjoy and pass this e-copy along to your friends.
Drop me a line if the mood takes you, but above all else... enjoy.

Peter de Jager
pdejager@truthpicks.com
October 17, 2002

#001

*A decision made at night
may be changed
in the Morning
Samoan Proverb*

A decision, especially a difficult one, is invested with ego. It is the final end product of all that you were at the time you made the decision. It takes on a life of it's own and comes to represent your own vision of who you are.

Going back on a decision, changing 'your mind' as it were, is a direct challenge to your credibility, integrity, even your worth as a decision maker. All of which is aggravated if someone else trying to make you change your mind.

How much does the person who wakes in the morning light owe to the one who made the decision last night? It is a form of slavery to handcuff yourself by yesterdays perspective.

A night of sleep offers a time to rethink decisions. Even restless sleep provides a chance to think deep.

A decision is a tool, not an ego composition. Whenever information or perspective changes so should those decisions which they originated.

When better than at the dawn of a new day to trade in a past position for a new take on life?

#002

*I despise quotations
tell me what you know.
Ralph Waldo Emerson*

That's the perpetual challenge isn't it? To speak from the heart and not to just regurgitate what someone else has said, or written?

It doesn't matter what an 'unknown', 'famous' or even 'infamous' person said, what's important is whether or not, what they said is of any value... And nobody decides value but the listener.

How do you determine the value of a quote? By mulling it over, thinking about it, testing it against what you know to be true and comparing it with what you've found to be false.

Some quotes possess a magic about them. The words alone invoke a sense of power, but to merely recite a quote without being able to add thought to it, demonstrates, not necessarily a lack of understanding, but at least a reluctance to think for ourselves.

In an age when billions are spent on advertising, media and communicating the promises of politicians to the masses, the benefit of thinking for yourself is increasing beyond measure.

A quotation without reflection is seldom worth the breath necessary to speak it.

#003

*It isn't that they
can't see the solution.
It's that they
can't see the problem.
G. K. Chesterton*

Our effectiveness at solving a problem always, without fail, depends on what we think is the problem. It's the difference between building walls on top the banks of rising rivers, and building houses on top of hills.

“What causes it to break?” Is a much more effective question, than “How do I fix it once it is broken?” Trouble is, when you're fixing an individual problem, you seldom have time to consider the common source of scores of problems.

Being able to see the real problem has got very little to do with your ability to perceive, and everything to do with the time you allow yourself for examining the big picture.

Everyone can see the problem, whatever it is, if only they'd budget the time to look at what they've done in the past. When you've run across the same problem, time and time again, then it's time to sit down and ask “Why is this happening all the time?”

If it happens once, it's a problem.

If it happens twice, it's annoying.

If it happens three times, it's a pattern...

Fix the pattern.

#004

*Little minds are interested
in the extraordinary;
Great minds
in the commonplace.
Elbert Hubbard*

Being interested in what stands out against the pattern of our daily life is easy, perhaps even unavoidable.

To escape notice in the wild, all animals need do is stand still. Their natural camouflage makes them invisible. To move, to add a change to the background, is to immediately become visible, and sometimes to die. There is a strong survival strategy behind 'being petrified with fright.'

Noticing what doesn't stand out, requires attention beyond the ordinary. It requires a deliberate search, a pointed question, a challenging of assumptions. Asking 'Why is it this way?' of even the most mundane of events, is likely to result in amazing answers... If there are any answers.

Children do this best. They have no fear of stupid questions. Why is water wet? Why does glue stick? Why does ice float? Why do you make faces when you shave Daddy? Why do clocks tick? Why are yawns contagious?

Why don't all adults ask these questions? No... It's not because we have all the answers.

It's said that fish can't see the water in which they swim, they could if they blew bubbles.

#005

*Although the connections are
not obvious,
personal change is inseparable
from social
and political change.
Harriet Lerner*

Let us make the connection very obvious, “I don’t have to kill anyone today.”

That may seem like a bizarre statement, a personal one, an obvious one, but never the less, a bizarre one. Is it true for you? Is it by its very nature, true of everyone? Or are there people who have no other alternative but they have to kill today?

Is it too simplistic to boil down the very worst of our political and social problems to the single kindergarten level statement? “I don’t have to kill anyone today.” If so... why?

Perhaps this assertion is too big (too small? It’s all so confusing) to start with. Perhaps we should start with something less restrictive? Like “I don’t have to be rude today” or “I don’t have to frown today”?

Which of these, the decision not to kill, or not to frown, is more difficult to achieve?

Regardless of the size of the problem, the history of the problem or the potential consequences of the problem... There is no change without personal change. No change without personal commitment. No change without personal involvement.

#006

*It takes a lot of time
to be a genius,
you have to sit around so
much doing nothing,
really doing nothing.
Gertrude Stein*

In our increasingly connected world, there is little time for doing nothing. When you are disturbed by a cell phone ringing/beeping/chiming in the stall beside you, you might suspect things have gone too far. When the person answers it... There is no longer any doubt.

It's not just the incessant call to action, it's the maelstrom of thought which wears us down.

Even when we finally achieve sleep against the onslaught of constant thought, our nights are restless, filled not with dreams of fancy, but like television, with ruminated reruns of recent events.

Doing nothing is a lost art. Sitting against a tree, lying on the shore, gazing at the clouds, listening to a stream are beyond most of us. We've neither the time nor the inclination to take time for ourselves. Why is it necessary? Constant motion, constant thought, constant attention are not 'normal' states. Doing nothing, truly doing nothing, allows us to return to our natural state, whatever that may be.

How important is that? Is that where genius lies hidden? Until we get there, and stay awhile, we'll never know.

#007

*And scribbled lines
like fallen hopes
On backs of tattered envelopes
Francis Hope*

The pen flows effortlessly over paper, an idle thought, a line in time, a beat of life, a bird in flight, unawakened dream. Your attention caught again, the note's discarded, back to work, no time for gathering wool, for dawdling, for doodling.

"I'm not creative, can't draw, can't paint, can't write..." Yet blank paper is consumed when attention fades and pen's in reach.

Ultimately creativity is not something you learn, grow or cultivate, it's something you let loose, uncage, set free.

It's imprisoned by fear of what others will think, by insecurity, by low self esteem. Mostly by things inside us.

No matter what the creation, there is always an audience for it. There are just too many of us for anything not to be enjoyed by others of like mind.

Allow yourself to respond to what you find around you. And capture that response. Too often we let what moves us be forgotten in the rush of living. Tattered envelopes, rather than collected notions.

Find your voice, the audience finds you.

#008

*When great changes
occur in history,
When great principles
are involved,
As a rule the majority
are wrong.
The minority are right.
Eugene Victor Debs*

Seek the definition of “Great Change” and the above is what you’ll find.

Galileo knew this. To change the orbit of Heaven, he shifted mass perception, transformed everyone’s view of the world and battled established institutions. Was there any other way? More to the point? Should the power to shift, literally, Heaven and Earth, be easy to come by?

Change makers are always the minority. If they are not, then the work has already been done, the change is complete.

There’s a consequence to this reality. Proving the majority ‘wrong’ is risky business. For some reason, it’s not a recommended strategy for winning friends, even though you will certainly influence a lot of people.

Careful though... While it is true that once the great change takes place, it is possible to claim, with 20/20 hindsight, the minority was right all along... being in the minority doesn’t make you right from the start.

Every time a change fails... The Majority was ‘right’ and the Minority was ‘wrong’

#009

*A library is thought
in cold storage
Lord Samuel*

The written word is a civilization's memory, allowing for both growth in the future and analysis of the past. Provided of course, they're accessed and thawed back to life on a regular basis.

Cold storage is fine for fish, but ideas need the warmth of an interested mind if they are to flourish.

Whatever is true for civilizations is equally true for organizations. if they are to avoid the mistakes of the past, both require a history to learn from,. Most organizations have no 'organizational memory', no record keepers to record past successes and more importantly, past failures.

If the notion of a library as thought in cold storage appeals to you, then ponder this... Libraries are an ancient technology seemingly pushed aside by corporations as ineffective in lieu of newer glitzier technologies. But imagine the impact of a organization where the use of a library is as common as the use of the cafeteria?

The true measure of a nation's, individual's, or organization's wealth are the combined measures of literacy and access to ideas in the form of living, not frozen thought.

#010

*I can't figure out
where I leave off
and everyone else begins.
George McCabe*

The connections are evident at every turn, in even the most mundane of events.

We walk down the street and approach a scrap of litter.

We can ignore it and walk on, leaving behind us a world where pollution is accepted. After all, we're not the one who dropped it there. We know it looks ugly, but we didn't create the problem and therefore we have no responsibility here. We walk on.

We can take the time and effort to bend over and remove the offending litter, proving through our actions that we prefer a world of order. We didn't drop it here, but it offends us, so we pick it up. We can't stop the litter from appearing, but we can remove it when it does. We walk on.

Or there's the other option we often choose. We mutter to ourselves, that 'Someone should do something about that!' We walk on.

Which raises the difficult question of who is this someone who should do something, if it is not ourselves?

Is there someone more responsible for the state of the world than the person closest to the problem at hand?

#011

*The butterfly counts
not months but moments,
And has time enough.
Rabindranath Tagore*

Time enough... Enough for what? That's the key. Work is infinite, your time, tallied by months or moments, finite. So consciously select what you place between the start of your allotted time, and your ending.

Your time is measured, by four score and ten or nine to five. So the time you chose to use, and task you use it for, deserve careful measure.

There's work enough for having, it piles both high and deep. And others will gladly offer... to keep it steep, not neat.

Time ignores any attempt at 'time management' it flows at its own pace. All you can do is choose what you're doing while it flies on by.

Set a goal, or goals, and ask yourself at every moment if what you've chosen to do (or find yourself doing) is advancing you towards your goals. If not... Either the goal you've chosen isn't the right one, or an unworthy task has snared your time.

There is no such thing as 'time management', there is such a thing as the conscious selection of your attention.

#012

*To solve a problem
it is necessary to think.
It is necessary to think
even to decide
what facts to collect.
Robert Maynard Hutchins*

Of all the lessons learnt in school, one in particular serves us worst of all. The notion that when you're solving a problem, it's cheating to refer to a book, your notes or a person who knows the answer.

Problem solving is like being in a maze, there's only one objective. To get out.

You don't have to walk in the dark, light a lamp.

You don't have to stumble around on your own, buy a map.

You don't have to follow the path, dig a tunnel

You don't have to suffer in silence, shout for help.

Your objective is to get out, not work alone.

You can certainly try to solve it on your own, that's no crime, providing you have the time. Books could teach you to remove an appendix, but when fever is soaring and pain is raging, it's time to call the doctor, not the library.

Restricting yourself to what you know is a self inflicted handicap. Seeking answers elsewhere is not only allowed in life, it is the true mark of a problem solver.

#013

*If you take big paces,
you leave big spaces.
Burmese Proverb*

We're obsessed with 'progress', we measure it by speed and quantity, rather than need and quality. We're more concerned with moving forward than we are with enjoying the landscape once we've arrived. It's always go, move, shift, never slow down, appreciate and protect.

There's a bewildering contradiction built into our motivations and actions. Our reason for moving forward is to arrive at something better, but once arrived, we're never satisfied. It's not only that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, it's that we never value what we've struggled so hard to achieve when we arrive.

If the reason for moving forward is a good one, then once we get there, it should also be reason enough to linger awhile. Or where we lying when we argued for progress in the first place?

Progress cannot be stopped any more than the rising tide, but it should, if it is to serve a meaningful purpose, be savoured for a little while before moving on again.

We've become nomadic technologists, technomads, searching for the final version of the future, not realizing there are always new features in the next release.

#014

*Would the child
you once were,
Be proud
of who you've become.
Unknown*

In the entire world there is only one who can see through all our lies, ourselves.

This is either our greatest weakness, or greatest strength, depending on our integrity.

When we encounter an internal lie, and we do from time to time, it creates a gap between who we'd like to believe we are, and reality. That gap, if we're honest with ourselves, is at least disconcerting.

There are not too many ways to close that gap. We can either change our perception of ourselves, or change reality, or a little bit of both.

Looking to that child of the past for guidance might help. Children possess the innocence necessary to provide the necessary unrelenting constructive criticism.

We might not like the final verdict, but at least it comes from someone we hopefully respect and admire, ourselves. Such analysis has one additional thing in it's favour...

It's the most private of feedback, do with it what you will.

*All perception of truth
is the detection of an analogy.
Thoreau*

Analogies are plagiarisms of pattern, performed in the interest of understanding. Being able to say 'this is like that' allows us to build upon what we already know, as well as knowing in what direction we might learn more.

The discovery of an analogy is like finding a rough and ready map for newly discovered country. It doesn't provide the full lay of the land, but highlights the most prominent and visible features.

An analogy allows for general statements and the quick and easy communication of the terrain. A danger arises only when 'this is like that' is taken to mean 'this is that.' Like a poorly plated mirror, an analogy will not reveal tiny crucial details, only an outline of what is reflected.

The power of analogies lies not just in their unexpected arrival. They're a multifaceted tool suitable to a wide variety of tasks. They naturally facilitate understanding, insights and communication and can also be forcefully drafted to aid in innovation.

The question, 'How is this like that?' extracts by force, unexpected relationships and connections. Everything has something in common with something else and innovation arises when those connections are made visible and utilized.

#016

*Treat people
as if they were,
what they ought to be
And you help them
become what they are
capable of being.
Johann W. von Goethe*

If I treat you as incompetent and offer nothing requiring competency, then talent remains hidden. You can't paint the Mona Lisa, if all you're asked, and expected to do, is paint the fence.

An expectation of a favourable performance creates the potential of a self fulfilling prophecy. We succeed in part, because others expect success and then willingly support our efforts to perform.

A good manager selects objectives just outside our grasp, but within easy reach if we move forward just a little bit, and then a little bit more.

Asking for the impossible is not the answer, it merely proves that management is too far removed from the front lines. Asking for the possible, but the never yet achieved, is different, it creates a goal that rewards the participants with growth and achievement.

Being asked for more, pushes you against the wall of past achievements. Being pushed against the wall gives you the momentum necessary to get over it.

An expectation too low stifles growth, too high stifles hope.

#017

*Nothing great in the world has
ever been accomplished
without passion.
George Wilhelm Hegel*

A desire to achieve a great goal will fail, if not fueled by emotional, goal directed, single minded passion. Accomplishing anything of note is an uphill battle against the way things are, if it were easy, it would already have been accomplished. The difficulty of achievement becomes the measure of greatness.

Passion is a gentle private insanity. It allows us to ignore every obstacle, naysayer, and hurdle. It doesn't guarantee success, any more than being right grants victory, but if we succeed, then passion wears the crown.

Passion isn't always admired. It has a way of highlighting and focusing attention on what is sometimes lacking in others.

Passion is sometimes envied. We sometimes live lives of ambiguity, searching for purpose. It is not unusual to experience a sense of incompleteness when comparing ourselves to someone with crystal clarity of vision.

Passion is a choice. We hold back from passion, we fear a loss of self. When passion takes control, it pushes everything else aside.

Dancing in the fire of life, comes with its own dangers. Passion is exhausting and exhilarating at the same time. Unchecked passion, especially without final victory, is all consuming.

If you didn't have to work a day in your life, what would you do? Our first response to that question, especially if there is any hope that it might become a reality is 'Nothing!' Imagine... No need to work. No alarm bells. No deadlines. No pressure. No Stress. Sounds wonderful.

Really? I wonder. It would be great for a month or so, even perhaps a year, but after a while it would wear thin. How to fill the hours? Not everyone would feel that need... To fill the hours, but for those of us who do? Not having anything to do is the first step towards insanity.

Sooner or later, we'd volunteer our time to do this or that. Or we'd pick up a hobby or craft, something rewarding, something challenging. It'd be work we choose to do. We'd Bless the work.

On the other hand, when we need work, but have none? We're grateful for any amount of it, in practically any conditions. We Bless the work.

Which leaves most of us in the middle. We're unlikely ever to be free of it by either choice or circumstance. Do we Bless the work?

#019

*Don't fight forces;
Use them.
Buckminster Fuller*

Ships sail against the wind, waters behind a dam give it strength, the weight of an arch bestows suspended flight. In all of these, the forces that work against success, make it possible.

Physical force has direction and energy, but no motivation or intention. Manipulate what works against you, into working for you.

Our first reaction to any opposing force is to push back, it's an instinctive, simple, uncomplicated strategy, and often brings success.

In unrelenting heat, ice cold water is scarce, unless you place the water into a slightly porous canvas bag or terracotta pot. The evaporation from the surface, chills the water, just as perspiration cools the body. Don't fight the heat, use it.

The forces we encounter as obstacles to our goals aren't always physical, sometimes they're political, spawned of human nature and desire. The advice doesn't change, don't fight the forces, use them.

If someone is an expert at finding fault with a project, place them on the project with the task of avoiding fault.

If someone's ego is in the way of a change, then work it so the success of the change feeds their ego. Make the force be with you...

#020

*Every child is an artist.
The problem is
how to remain an artist
as he grows up.
Pablo Picasso*

Put anything within reach of a child's grasp and it'll be hauled to the eager mouth.
What does that taste like? What does it feel like? What'll sound like when I drop it?

No! Stop that!

Put paints within their reach and they'll smush them together. What does that feel like? What'll it look like? And again... What does it taste like?

No! Don't do that!

Place a child near anything and they'll peek and they'll poke, they'll grab and they'll push, all to answer the questions; Why? What? How?

No! Stop touching that!

Show a child any object with a hole and they'll try to fill it with something. Why? To see if they can! This includes Peanut butter sandwiches in VCR machines.

No! Don't ever do that again.

The purpose of all this activity is to explore the world. How is put together? How is it taken apart? The path is chaos and mishaps, the destination is order and understanding. The strategy is an effective one... Look how far we've come! But we end the exploration too soon. The problem is we are taught to k-NO-w too much.

#021

*It's amazing
how much people
can get done,
If they don't care
who gets the credit.
Sandra Swinney*

There is value and some pride, both in achieving a goal and receiving credit for doing so, but the two are not inseparable.

It is possible to take credit for something not earned, and equally possible not to receive rightful credit. When either of these things happen, someone is cheated.

Perhaps it's just hubris, to feel a need to be appreciated? Regardless of the reason, it's a fact of human nature and a clue to our behaviour.

Since 'credit' is of such value to us, it automatically becomes a motivator and demotivator. When contemplating a task beyond your individual resources, can you trade final credit to others for increased involvement?

Or is the credit more important to you than the task? Tough question. To some, it's not enough to do good, but one must be seen as doing good. To others, the task is everything, credit nothing...

Or perhaps more honestly... Credit isn't 'nothing' but it's not enough to stand in the way of the task.

That which others value, we can use in trade, as coin.

#022

*In violence,
we forget who we are.*
Mary McCarthy

Rage erases reason. It drops the red veil of tooth and claw over us, and while survival might be the prize, it shames us forever.

Rage is all the rage today. Road rage, air rage, going postal, even IT rage, all new phrases recently added to our lexicon. All referencing the act of losing 'it'.

The question is not 'Where does rage come from?' Or even 'Why do we choose to lose control?' It's not enough to answer, "it's not a matter of consciously 'letting go,' rages escapes when something snaps. "

That answer fails because it ignores the larger more pressing question. How have we let a world evolve in which the mere act of driving to work places us at risk of snapping?

Why the rush? Why the importance of arriving on time? Why the pressure? One answer lies in our drive to compete, always in a race. Never a moment for a day of rest. The race is always on, someone's always gaining. The Jones' might be moving ahead.

Even machines need to be switched off for maintenance from time to time, nothing works well if always working.

#023

*Have no fear of perfection
you'll never reach it.
Salvador Dali*

The biggest obstacle to success is fear of perfection. It is so overwhelming, it halts progress before it begins. People fail to get to all the destinations they'd like to visit, not because travel is difficult, but because they fail to buy a ticket.

What if it doesn't work? What if they don't like it. What if I fail? What if they laugh? All asked with the firm conviction that unless the result is perfect, then all this, and more besides, will come to pass.

Ask instead;
If it doesn't work, is it 'good enough?'
Will enough people like it, to make it worthwhile?
Is it enough that we get pleasure in the attempt?
What if in failing, we learn something and grow in the process?
What if the success we do achieve, is enough to make a difference?
If they laugh at us, can we laugh with them?
Or will we care more for their laughter than for our achievement?

As a goal, perfection isn't perfect, goals should always be within reach of honest effort, perfection isn't. Perfection is a tar pit in which to snare doubts and second thoughts.

#024

*How old would you be,
if you didn't know
how old you are?
Satchell Paige*

Imagine, just for a moment, you knew nothing of calendars, clocks, time stamps, dates or other scratches on the passage of time. Now ask yourself, how old am I?

How do we measure our completed time of passage? How many unique winters or summers can we recall? Or do they all merge into one? How old are we and how do we know?

Why do we care? A year is nothing more, than a dance around the Sun. Age itself means little, except counting down an uncertain three score years and ten.

Rather than counting years, perhaps recounting how we've lived them, makes more sense? What have we done? Who did we love? Who did we help? What did we build? These achievements are less easily forgotten than the number of winters we endured.

The years behind are tallied, and for better or worse, are now beyond changing. What lies before us is unknown, and regardless of our age, uncertain. We are left with only today, this moment, now.

Let us add to what we've done, on our dance around the Sun.

#025

*If you think
the problem is bad now,
just wait until we've solved it!*
Arthur Kasse

Lightly touch, even a single thread of web, and we disturb the spider.

We exist in a world highly intertwined. The interconnections aren't simple. They're mostly invisible... until touched. When we rush towards solutions, we do more than lightly touch a few threads.

Most things are the way they are for a reason... Even problems. We seldom ask... What are the reasons? Instead we rush to the glory of the battle. Fix the problem! Throw enough resources at a problem, and we overcome most of them. And create others.

Elegant and powerful word processors are a solution to the time taken on manual typewriters. They're also a wonderful way to produce memos suitable for framing.

E-mail... It's faster to send an e-mail than writing a letter or a memo... And because it's faster, there're more of them to read... and write. Is the solution worse than the problem? Are Truth Picks an example? By making people more productive, have we made it possible to do things that were never, and never will be, worth doing? Just because we can now do them faster?

Touch the web, wake the spider.

#026

*Life is like
playing a violin solo in public,
and learning the instrument
as one goes on.
Samuel Butler*

No matter what we're doing, if we're doing it for the first time, then it's a given...
We're doing it badly. Bluntly? We're incompetent.

We're making mistakes, lots of them, again and again and again. How does that feel? If we're like most, it's at least frustrating, embarrassing and annoying. We don't like being incompetent. Welcome to the club. We're just like everyone else.

But our reaction to our own incompetence is a bit peculiar. Why does doing something wrong the first time, frustrate us? Do we really expect to paint like Picasso, jump like Jordan, or sing like Sinatra, the first time we try?

Nevertheless, we feel the way we feel, and it takes a bit of doing to overcome our reaction to the failures in learning.

If we know how we feel when faced with something new... do we extend that knowledge to cover others? If I'm uncomfortable with incompetence, are others? If so, can I choose to ease their discomfort with the goal of making their transition easier?

Not going in the water until we can swim, is not an option.

#027

*It isn't the mountain ahead
that wears you out
it's the grain of sand
in your shoe.
Robert Service*

Huge tasks are omnipresent and ill defined. Looming before us, they're impossible to ignore, even if the details aren't clear.

The larger and more distant the task, the easier it is to interpret any action as progress. When shooting at mountains with a shot gun, even a novice hits the foot hills. We keep our spirits up!

The more determined we are to reach a daunting goal, the less likely we are to pay attention to the little annoyances in our path. We ignore the little things as they slowly pile up and gather strength.

That grain of sand by itself isn't a hindrance, by itself it can't stop us, and in relation to our real task? It's nothing, we ignore it.

With each step, the annoyance grows. The phone call, meeting, memo and the minutes. Left to themselves they never organize their attacks on our effort, they just pile up at random, until they obscure the goal. Better allocate some attention to them each day, regardless of their individual insignificance, otherwise they win.

I would have climbed Everest, if it weren't for the hiccups.

#028

*Be not afraid
of growing slowly,
Be afraid only
of standing still.
Chinese proverb*

One step a day towards a goal, no matter how distant, is progress. It's not much, but it's progress.

Want to write a book? Okay... one word a day. A sentence if you wish. All right then, a paragraph if you must. But not more than a chapter...

Want to draw? A blank piece of paper is a start of sorts. Holding the pencil is the next obvious step. Putting pencil to paper is the breakthrough. Now stop! I dare you. You can't. The pencil moves and the muse awakes.

Starting is the hard part, not the moving onwards. Moving is easy. Moving fast, without error, with confidence, that'll come later, maybe.

But in the meantime, it's one foot in front of the other, and the horizon rolls towards you; another word and another one, until out of the sentences a character forms and begins speaking; another line on top of a curve to form a suggestion of a shape, until the mountain rises from the paper.

The longest distance between two points, is the time it takes for you to decide, not to travel.

#029

*Not a day
passes over the earth,
but men and women
of no note do great deeds,
speak great words
and suffer noble sorrows.
Charles Reade*

The true history of the world is never recorded, headlined, or applauded. It takes place in hospital rooms, charitable acts and in great efforts for everyday causes.

Working long weary hours to put a child through college; donating to those deserving of help; the last shared moments of a long and painful death... All these, and more, are no less worthy of respect and comment, just because they're part of our common experience. This is who we are. This is what we share.

Tragedy, heroic effort and determination are the norm, not the headlined exception. By raising the acts of those well known to greatly lit heights, we banish equivalent, and even greater achievements, to the shadows.

There is a world outside the spotlight. There are events more important than headlines. And people of stature, with no biographies.

This worthy world is within our community. As close, and as solid, as a handshake. As accessible as involvement. It's the world we live in. Not just the one we read about.

Let every life be celebrated, every act respected.

#030

*Take advantage of
the ambiguity in the world.
Look at something and think
about what else it might be.
Roger von Oech*

Creativity is an act of definition destruction. To use a hammer as a paperweight, we must destroy the existing definition of 'hammer'. Definitions while useful, serve us as functional straitjackets. They restrict things to their original, possibly obsolete, purpose.

If the goal is useful creativity, which definitions, and rules, to break? We're surrounded by them. To start questioning, or ignoring every definition is the road to madness.

Yet we are presented with ambiguity on a daily basis. We make typos and misspeak words. Some suggest these are 'Freudian' slips. Hints of deeper thinking that bubble (babble?) to the surface at unexpected times.

What if your typo was the right word? What would it mean if 'babble to the surface' was the right way of thinking about a slip of the tongue? Every mistake offers an opportunity to something new, something unique.

Looking for a tooth pick... the phrase 'Truth Pick' entered my mind. "What's a Truth Pick?" was the question. You're reading an installment of the answer. What's your next mistake. What will you do with it? Creativity is mind over matter.

#031

*It does not do to leave a
Dragon out of
your calculations,
if you live near him.
J. R. R. Tolkien*

The great myth of decision making, is that decisions are made after careful consideration of all the data. The fatal flaw is the word 'all.'

'All' the data is never available, instead we make do with what we have on hand. Whether we do this blindly or with deliberate intent, determines the quality of our decisions.

To decide with intent, implies a necessary tolerance of ambiguity. We see where the gaps are in what we know, and fill them full with conscious assumptions. Knowing full well Dragons may dwell therein, and taking precautions when possible.

We force ourselves to make cautious and deliberate decisions once we run out of time for data collection and analysis. Zero tolerance of ignorance is never a viable policy. Ignorance is infinite, knowledge finite.

To decide blindly, is to assume that all we know, is all there is. Or worse, we unconsciously fill in the blanks, assuming things that just aren't so. And unintentionally lean up against the sleeping Dragons.

Conscious assumptions are the stepping stones across ambiguity, unconscious assumptions are catnip for Dragons.

#032

*To escape criticism -
do nothing,
say nothing,
be nothing.
Elbert Hubbard*

Pity the poor critic, in our imperfect world, their life is filled with work.

Don't dare to try and help them, by building something new. You'll only increase their woes, by attracting them to you.

And their work is unappreciated, though flawless through and through. Their only goal? Perfection! And they'll achieve it when you're through.

No matter what you build, be it big or huge or small, it's filled with imperfections, and the critic finds them all.

Ignoring them is difficult, they're fast and mean and tiny. No matter how well intentioned, their words are dark and spiny.

They stick in cracks in ego, they pull down self esteem. They weaken built up confidence, and disrupt the strongest team.

Avoiding them is easy, under camouflage is best, crawl inside a deep dark hole and shhh... that'll put 'em to the test!

Oh and one more thing? They'll never like this little pithy ditty... my, my, my... what a dreadful, awful, pity!

Criticism like lightning, is a fact of life, rise above others and it'll strike.

#033

*Whenever you fall,
pick something up.
Oswald Avery*

Success is great. We see a problem, analyse it, find a solution, set an objective then strive towards it. We learn lots of new things along the way. Feel rewarded by that learning and grow from it. We have our ups and downs, but in the end we win through to the end and celebrate our success. Mission accomplished. On to the next project!

Surprisingly... failure is almost, but not quite, the same. There are problems we examine. Solutions we consider and then settle on. We identify the necessary goals, and begin to move towards them. There is also lots of learning, and if we pay attention, we grow and benefit from all of it. We have the same ups and downs... then after one particular 'down'... we stop.

And then we focus on that down. Nurture it and wrap ourselves around it, and in so doing, forget what we've learned, and consider it all a waste.

It's not a crime to stop moving towards a goal. Sometimes, the goals set are too high, too soon, too big. The crime is in downplaying what we achieve while coming to that conclusion.

We let final failure swamp initial success.

#034

*The truths of the past
are the clichés of the present.*
Ned Rorem

We suffer from a curious affliction called, truth exhaustion. It's something we're all susceptible to and the only known cure, is too distasteful for most of us.

In its most debilitating form, we become totally deaf and impervious to all attempts to help or alleviate the problem. The consequences are as trivial as lost opportunities or as severe as sudden, tragic, death.

The most prominent symptom the patient displays is annoyance when they are told something they already know. For example, when they're told they should wear their seat belt or shouldn't smoke.

The disease is in its final stages when the patient states they've heard it all before, they know everything they need to know about the subject, but they continue to do what they know they shouldn't do.

What causes truth exhaustion to take hold in an otherwise healthy mind? All the research points to a hardening of the Ego as the primary cause. Each time we resist the obvious, we reinforce our stubbornness, until finally we become 'safe' from reason.

The repetition of a truth, doesn't make it false.

#035

*There are no secrets.
There is no mystery.
There is only common sense.
Onondaga saying*

We live in an age where the complicated and complex are revered. If an observation or answer is simple, obvious, and available to anyone willing to look, then it is discounted... devalued... discarded.

The value of advice is measured no longer by its inherent worth, but by how far the messenger traveled to deliver it. We seldom ask 'Does the answer make sense?' we ask instead, 'How much did it cost?'

The simple answer is usually the right one. It's the one we've been telling ourselves for ages. But... we ignore simplicity and search for the difficult and costly wisdom.

Why? The answer isn't very complicated... it's simple... It has to do with how we strive to protect our ego. Our sense of importance. Our 'value' to ourselves and others.

If an answer was obvious then we would have thought of it, and acted upon it. We didn't, therefore it must be difficult. It must take a genius, not an ordinary person like ourselves, to arrive at the answer.

The fault lies not in our wisdom, but in our reluctance to act upon it.

#036

*Laughter
is the shortest distance
between two people.
Victor Borge*

Laughter is more intimately contagious than a yawn. A child's bright laughter in a crowd ignites a ripple of response. Turned heads, smiles and nods of acknowledgment from strangers to parents.

In a street where wordless unconnected strangers brush closer than lovers embrace. We find ourselves laughing together, when a street corner magician pulls grins from an empty face. Sitting at a play or a show, we're alone in the dark, until we're joined in the laughter of those around us. Even if only for a short time, we've become part of a joyous community.

In laughter we see a reflection of what's inside each other. If we laugh at the same thing then perhaps, just perhaps, we're not alone. There's someone else like us. At least like us enough, to see the same humour in something outside of ourselves.

Nothing is more effective at intestinal butterfly dispersal, than a roar of laughter from the audience. If they're laughing they're listening. If they're listening then they're learning.

Want to measure how close a relationship? How strong a team? How healthy a culture? Count the laughs. Birds of a feather, laugh together.

#037

*Education is not
the filling of a pail,
but the lighting of a fire.
William Butler Yeats*

A fact by itself, is all but useless. It comes to life only when connected with something else. Learning isn't about adding more facts to the pile, but about seeing the links between them.

To truly know something is to know how it relates to everything else, including, how it might be related in the future. Asking 'How might this fact affect something else?' is a premonition of usefulness.

Which has more value to you? The answer to "What is this?" or to "How does this work?" Knowing what something is, draws a static picture of a thing, useful for hanging on walls or writing in dictionaries, but little else. Knowing how it works, describes how it interacts with itself and the world around it. Knowing how it works provides you a tool, an opportunity, and always a responsibility.

When education takes hold, those dry facts, the kindling of knowledge, are consumed in a flash of comprehension. All of a sudden we know not only the facts, but what they mean.

Teachers teach, in order to see the lights go on.

#038

*Imagination is
the eye of your soul.
Joseph Joubert*

Imagination is the ability to see what is not yet real. It provides us with a future we can choose to strive for, or choose to ignore. It offers alternatives to the past and choices for tomorrow.

Without imagination, our horizons lie too close to our feet. Travel and growth are impossible without destinations which exist beyond our sight. The whole purpose of travel is to see things, we cannot see. To see things which exist only in the mind's eye, until we actually arrive.

Who would we be? What might we become? Why invest in learning or striving if we possess no grand, private visions which serve as answers to these questions?

Starting a new project? Imagining the finished product is necessary if we expect to persevere and overcome the trials and tribulations we'll encounter on our chosen path. It's even more important if we need to enlist the assistance of others to achieve that distant goal.

Who we are, is always a product of our past. Who we chose to become is a product of our dreams. Imagination is ultimately how we shape the 'I' of our future.

#039

*Better encounter a danger
than live in continual fear
William Browne*

We live in a world bounded by our fears. They limit our reach and diminish our dreams. Only by stretching out to touch what we fear, can we determine if those fears are justified.

The nature of fear is to protect us from danger, but when we imagine dangers where none exist, we destroy a world of possibilities. By avoiding non-existent dangers, we reduce the scope of possible experience.

Not only does fear find danger where none exists, it is adept at transforming little annoyances into full blown panic attacks. Does the fear of failure really justify not writing a short story? Is the fear of rejection a good enough reason not to seek life long companionship? Is the fear of being incompetent really a good excuse not to take up tennis?

None of the fears mentioned, even if you failed horribly, dramatically, pitifully, are good enough reasons to avoid trying something new. In not one of the cases mentioned would you lose any body parts, no death, no life long dishonour, not even a long term period of poverty.

Fear works too hard. It puts up roadblocks, where only warnings are necessary.

#040

*Habit is a cable;
we weave a thread
of it each day,
and at last
we cannot break it.
Horace Mann*

All actions, if repeated often enough, become part of who we are. To cease these activities, is to lose a part of ourselves. It matters not, if the habits formed by random repetition, are bad or good.

We frequently practice the art of breaking bad habits, and fail far more often than we succeed. Entire industries thrive on the difficulties we encounter. They, and finally ourselves, recognize that the woven cables are far stronger than expected.

Even with these transition industries in place, bad habits thrive. Regardless of all the information and support available, bad habits are difficult to break.

Should good habits break more easily? Far less often, but with increasing frequency, we're asked to break habits which we wove with determination and support.

We made these habits as strong as possible and were rewarded for our efforts. The threads we chose were those of steel. The resulting cable, supported proven methods.

Industries exist to support the breaking of bad habits... what do we put in place to support the breaking of good ones?

Breaking any habit is a form of amputation.

#041

*If you don't miss
at least one aeroplane a year,
you're spending way
too much time at the airport.
Unknown*

Think about it. In order to make sure we don't miss a flight, we arrive an hour, maybe two, ahead of schedule. Then we sit, and wait, and sit some more, and wait some more. Then revisit the bookstore...

If it were not for those of us who arrive early and have time to kill, there would be no such thing as 'best sellers'.

Over a year, we might spend 10, 20, even 40 hours cooling our heels. If we arrived later, we could save time, even if we missed a flight or two. Unless you're pushing that boundary, we're wasting an opportunity to save time.

There's a simple pattern here... if you've never bounced off a boundary, you don't know where it is!

If you've never been turned down for a raise, you're not earning enough.

If you've never run out of breath, you're not running hard enough.

If you've never laughed until you've cried, you're not laughing enough.

If you've never loved and lost, you're not loving enough.

In order to know how far to go, you have to have gone too far.

#042

*How pleasant
just once not to see
Fuji through mist.
Basho*

Monday; dawn's rays break through gloom of night to kiss the slopes awake. We stretch in reflected glory.

Tuesday; beams like fingers from the distant Sun, lightly touch the snow capped heights. Smoke rises from early fires.

Wednesday; frost reflects the setting stars, but melt in face of rising Sun. Children wake and cuddle closer.

Thursday; rising from the sea of mist, like a whale the ground breaks through, and reaches room to breath. We raise a toast around the fire.

Friday; dying embers of a fierce summer day, remain at the foot of heaven. We bathe, as family, in cooler waters.

Saturday; climbing down from the mountain we put the Sun behind us, entering into sudden shadows. A glow from home beckons us.

Sunday; like a priest offering thanks for life, the crest stands taller than billowing clouds. The week is done, we rest before starting over.

Everything, including beauty and wonder, can bore in repetition. The absence of an event offers a opportunity to recover our power of appreciation.

We're not designed for sameness. We grow bored of anything that's commonplace. Change is the spice of life. A storm creates appreciation of the Sun.

#043

*Progress is made by lazy men
looking for easier ways
to do things.
Robert Heinlein*

Necessity is considered the Mother of invention, but, laziness is its cradle. There has never been a virtue more needful of an Image Consultant than laziness. Known as 'Sloth' by some, it has been libeled and slandered through the ages, and no lawyer has seen fit to file suit. For shame!

Laziness is a belief that if you're going to work towards a goal, then expending as little effort as possible makes sense. If not for the lazy, wheelbarrows and levers, wheels and pulleys, would have never seen the light of day. All praise the layabouts!

The damage though is done, laziness is now the Seventh Deadly Sin. Shunned by all. Never listed on a résumé. A virtue darkly hidden, concealed from judging eye. Rather than standing tall, it cowers behind a lie.

I'd rather relax, and sharpen the axe, than break my back, upon the task.
A better tool makes more sense, than working 'til my body's tense.

Arise ye layabouts and shout!
We're lazy and we're proud of it! We seek the optimal path.
Every ounce of effort, should remove its pound of chaff.

#044

*Never cut
what you can untie.
Joseph Joubert*

We have it in our power to make things worse.

The simplest way, is to disrespect the effort it took to get into a situation in the first place. Regardless of how it looks, nobody deliberately creates a problem.

We build our world with the best of intentions, and sometimes find ourselves boxed inside our creations. No fault, no blame, just plans that go astray.

A more complicated way, to turn from bad to worse, is to discount the value of existing achievements. We should not ignore that the walls that hem us in, also support the roof.

The facts of a problem are the resources we have at hand, they've already been mined and gathered. To toss them aside without due consideration is at the very least, wasteful.

We can think of problem solving as either problem removing or, solution finding. There's a nuance of difference between the two. In the former, we're clearing the ground and starting anew. In the latter, we're standing on what we've built and peering outward. Both work, sometimes the latter is better.

Create a solution on the foundation of our problem, not the ashes.

#045

*I have never in my life
learned anything
from any man
who agreed with me.
Dudley Field Malone*

Agreement is like an echo. It's familiar, even soothing, but adds nothing to the conversation.

There is, of course, great variety in the way we express disagreement, starting with, "I think you're a Bozo..." This immediately, for good reason, shuts down the lines of communication and strangely enough, reinforces the existing behaviour.

While the approach, "I came to a different conclusion, here's why..." raises the suspicion we can learn something together.

Disagreement, in an agreeable manner, is a search for understanding. At the very least it's a search for the reasons behind the difference of opinion. What do you see that I don't? What am I aware of that you've overlooked or weighed differently? How, and why, does my experience not match yours? And who is ultimately right? Or at least, less wrong?

Much of what we encounter is the "Bozo" approach, and sometimes, even when it isn't... (here the fault lies with us...) we perceive it that way.

Positive, and real or perceived "Bozo" feedback, keeps us doing what we're doing. Only agreeable negative feedback can open new courses of action.

Keep the "Bozo" out of your disagreements.

#046

*Without change,
something sleeps inside us,
and seldom awakens.
The sleeper must awaken.
Frank Herbert*

We're like a type of seed, which must fall to the ground, and await the heat of fire, before springing to life.

There's change and then there's crisis. With change, we overcome the obstacles and hurdles, by drawing on past skills and resources. Regardless of how difficult these changes feel at the time, they're well within our power.

Crisis is different. Most everything we've depended upon in the past is lost. The hurdles and obstacles are higher, the canyons wider, the way ahead darker. Who we thought we were, isn't enough. We have to go deeper, seeking untapped resources.

Do they always exist? Is there a guarantee of success inside who we are, no matter what the crisis? I doubt it. That belief creates a culture of blame. "They didn't succeed, because they didn't try hard enough!" Only the person carrying the burden, can make that judgment.

Do they often exist? The evidence surrounds us. The world is filled first with tragedy, then with triumph. When we dig deep, we often find more to ourselves than expected. We find someone stronger sleeping within.

Crisis is our crucible.

#047

Thank God it's Friday
Unknown

There's a familiar phrase... "Thank God it's Friday!" It's offered as a prayer of thanks at the end of a long weary week as we trudge home to rest.

Ours lives are sheer drudgery from Monday to Friday. As we crawl through dark tunnels, breathing and coughing dust, hauling coal from the unwilling ground, we look forward to the end of the week, when we can chorus... "Thank God it's Friday!"

The irony is too thick. No one claims their lot is that difficult, but the prayer remains... "Thank God it's Friday!"

Somewhere we've short changed ourselves. We live for two days out of seven and wish the rest away. We're grateful beyond belief when the week is over and we can leave our jobs behind us.

We all have days, even weeks, where things could have gone better, but for that to be the norm is a symptom of deeper problems.

There's something wrong when we choose to spend the majority of our days at tasks that don't please us, or when we create tasks that aren't pleasing.

The solution? Start by imagining a company where people chorus... Thank God it's Monday! and either build it, or join it.

#048

*Maturity is the capacity
to endure uncertainty.*
John Finley

To comfort a young child during a storm, hold her close and tell her it'll be all right. As the waters rise and lightning flies, she'll sleep sound, safe in her certain trust of you.

Telling her the raw truth, that it'll most likely be okay, is not what she wants to hear... as a child, she needs to hear that it'll be fine. That you'll protect her. She can't sleep wrapped in the cloak of uncertainty, it lets in cold wind.

As she grows older, we'll honour her with more and more reality. But for now, the security of certainty is all she can cope with. If nothing else, childhood should be free of fear.

When we hold the truth back from adults, we insult our audience, and burden the speaker. Without access to uncertainty, it's impossible to plan for the future. We become dependent on what someone else thinks is best for us.

Fact? Tomorrow is uncertain, to think otherwise is to be a comforted child in a storm. We've grown too large for security blankets... they're only sold in children's sizes.

The acceptance of risk, is a rite of passage.

#049

*If you walk, just walk.
If you sit, just sit;
but whatever you do,
don't wobble.
Ummon*

On the left is one path, on the right another; walking either one is always more peaceful than having to decide between them.

Flip the coin or roll the dice, use reason and intuition, but once decided move forward. Living at the cross-roads of indecision serves no useful purpose, except to delay your journey.

It would be nice to know in advance the outcome of our choices, but we never do. The purpose of deciding is to make our best decision with the information available.

It's only when there is little difference that we're caught in indecision. When the differences are obvious, decisions are important and easy. Even without certain knowledge of the outcome, we rest easy in the knowledge that we chose the 'best'. We act, we don't wobble.

Ironically, our wobbling starts when the differences are so small it's difficult to see a difference. We forget to recognize that when it's six of one and a half dozen of the other, then which one we choose is of little consequence, as long as we choose one.

When the difference is trivial, so is the choice...

#050

*Computers are useless.
They can only
give you answers.
Pablo Picasso*

Answers - often reinforce our illusions of certainty. Good questions - entice the mind to pull back the veils of certainty, and peek out at worlds of possibility.

We have a fear of good questions. They hold within them, the power to reshape the world. To hide the value of these questions, we've labeled them to confuse the average viewer. They're called the 'obvious' questions, the 'stupid' questions and even the 'childish' questions. All clearly questions we should never ask.

There are also the hidden questions. The questions we never even think of, and can therefore never ask. These are the gems. These are the world builders.

Answers, especially those that explain and confirm what we think is true, are a refuge. They add nothing to the future and reinforce the past. A truly good question invalidates these ritual answers and forces us to find new responses.

Who, what, where, when and why, especially why, are the tools of wisdom. We're born as masters in their use, and in aging, lose mastery by degree.

It's said we grow wiser as we grow older... but only if our questions grow more childlike.

#051

*What may be done
at any time,
will be done
at no time.
Scottish Proverb*

Knowing when something is due, contributes greatly to the doing. The abundance of time is a curse on motivation. There is always a tomorrow for what didn't require doing today, and another one after that. A due date stops that infinite recession.

We order our lives by priorities, where priority is importance times urgency. As urgency grows greater, all tasks, regardless of importance, eventually rise to the top of the busiest to-do lists. Without urgency, a task loses buoyancy, and sinks out of sight, beyond hope of any action.

A deadline is more than a reminder - it's a motivator. Yes, it can hang over our heads like a sword of doom. It can also serve as the unavoidable stepping stone to a larger goal.

Setting a deadline, is much more than determining when something should be done, it's an efficient person's way of making sure they move forward from one achievement to another.

Ultimately a deadline is a binding contract between a person and their conscience; executed by their ego; delivered by their planning and judged by their work ethic.

A day without deadlines, is a world without work.

#052

*'Twas brillig,
and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble
in the wabe;
All mimsy
were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.
Lewis Carroll*

Sometimes we require the letting go of reason, and a sinking into silliness. We've all experienced the delight of evenings when laughter rules. All cares cast aside, all obligations put on hold, and for a while we live again.

Success and achievement are worthy goals, but not at any cost. Neither are worth everything we hold dear. No project is worth the loss of love or life.

When the project is late, deadlines looming, tempers fraying, the best management tactic is a surprise early closing and party. The motive is either altruistic or selfish, your choice... the result is the same - a refreshed, more productive group, and possibly even renewed team spirit.

Hard work and dedication have their place, but so do laughter and recreation. (examine that last word carefully) The elusive goal of team spirit, requires a dollop from each side of the human equation. Without it, we're dysfunctional.

That topics such as laughter and joy seem out of place in the human activity of business, is proof that they're sorely needed.

Work is too important, to be taken too seriously.

#053

*The first step
in the evolution of ethics
is a sense of solidarity
with other human beings.
Albert Schweitzer*

Do I lose, what I bought, that you stole?
Do I own, what I found, that you lost?
Do I sue, when I break, what you sold?
Do I know, what is right, when we differ?

Ask these questions of 'Law' and there's one set of answers. Ask them of 'Justice' and there's another. Ask them of ourselves and there's debate. Ethics is the act of deciding the rightness of action.

What we hate, is the lack of eternally correct, internally consistent answers. Even the great religions disagree on what is right at all times. Our closest approach to agreement is the Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Even on this Golden ground there's room for conflict. In some countries, bribes are forbidden, in others... they're required, common and normal. The question isn't only, 'Is it ethical to offer a bribe?' it's also paradoxically, 'Is it ethical not to?'

Ethics is rightness of personal choice in social context. With guidance, we draw our lines in the sand, and choose to act within them. Without the issue of ethics, we'd lose the art of argument.

#054

*I know you believe
you understand what
you think I said,
but I'm not sure
you realize,
that what you heard,
isn't what I meant.
Unknown*

Get the picture? Communicating is difficult. No matter how hard we try to speak clearly, chances are we're doing a lousy job of it. And if we think that through carefully, we can assume it's just as difficult for the person speaking (or sending an e-mail) to us.

Misunderstandings, are mostly miscommunications. A word poorly chosen, a typo, even a pause before a thought, all change the meaning of what I'd like to tell you. Do words even have the same meaning for you as for me? Does 'customer' mean the same as 'client'? Are you sure?

Words pick up baggage in our childhood and carry them the rest of our lives. When used by strangers, or even loved ones, these loaded words literally rub us the wrong way. The source of the irritation is often unknown to either ourselves or to the speaker.

Each attempt to communicate is a barefoot dance on eggshells. It's impossible to avoid the sharp shells, but possible to ignore them, if we choose.

Speak to me from the heart, I'll use mine to listen.

#055

*To know the road ahead,
ask those coming back.
Chinese Proverb*

There's little that we do, that others haven't done. No matter how new it is to us, for others it is mere recollection. They've scouted out the pitfalls, and from painful experience, know their depth. More importantly, they know how to climb out.

If allowed by pride, their experience is there for the asking.

There's shame associated with asking for help. It implies the other person is smarter than we are, which for some, translates into 'superior' and 'inferior'. The most common example is asking for directions. Somehow 'asking' is a sign of weakness, while wandering aimlessly is a sign of strength?

No matter what the problem, others have either solved it, or learned something useful in their attempt. Ignoring that knowledge is a self inflicted handicap. What do you know? What did you learn? What can you tell me? These are more useful, less painful, than enrolling in the school of hard knocks, at the request of false pride.

Human experience, strangely enough, covers everything we're experiencing. There isn't any burden, which others haven't carried, or are still carrying, and burdens shared are lighter.

Experience is knowledge awaiting harvest.

#056

*One person with a belief
is equal to a force
of ninety-nine
who only have an interest.
John Stuart Mill*

Strong beliefs are curious. All attempts to destroy them, serve only to strengthen them. Adversity causes them to prosper. In extreme cases, great sacrifice incites increased fervor through martyrdom.

When you believe in something, every attempt to steer you off your path, strengthens your resolve. For those on a mission, when they've run out of energy and are low on resources, conflict becomes their fuel, their motivator.

If you're the one with the single minded goal, then these behaviours are a blessing. You're comforted by the knowledge that obstacles are fuel for your passion. Especially when there's no shortage of obstacles.

Countering a belief is a challenge. Pushing them down, only lifts them up. Ignoring them, leaves them space to grow or falter, but the result isn't in your control. Joining them? Well, joining them is always an option. In an way, it solves your problem, by removing the conflict.

We're lucky strong beliefs are rare. Imagine a world, or a family, or a company, where we all had strong beliefs, not passing interest, about how things should be? Imagine if obstacles motivated? Imagine?

Obsessions are antidotes to obstacles.

#057

*But I have promises to keep,
and miles to go before I sleep.
Robert Frost*

The path of least resistance is tempting. Putting down a burden, laying off a task, taking our well deserved rest, are the options we face each day. When we've done our share and even more, it's not unfair at end of day, to chose to end the chore.

Unless of course, there's something pressing left undone.

Not just any thing. For there's work enough, to fill the days, and overflow the nights.

Nor a thing for just anyone. For the demands made upon our time, exceed by far, the time at our command.

Just those things we choose to raise above the rest. Things we promised, and must now deliver, with zeal and zest. Our word once given, becomes our chosen burden, but once fulfilled, becomes our proven strength.

A promise is a contract, more between who we are today and who we'd like to be tomorrow, than between the one we promised and ourselves.

We have few possessions truly ours, a promise is one, our credibility another. To increase the latter, we must keep the former.

Promises are gifts which, if given and not kept, are cheapened.

#058

*It is a very sad thing
that nowadays
there is so little
useless information.
Oscar Wilde (1894)*

What fluff of information flitting across our path, will matter in the future, and how do we decide? There's one hundred eager e-mails, three dozen moaning memos, sloping piles of snail mail, and 12 hour days to squeeze into 9 to 5 cubicles.

It's not just that we can literally no longer give our full attention to everything, it's that even when we do, errors in judgment are costly. How can we possibly know today, what we will value tomorrow?

We can of course, try to keep on top of everything, all the time. We can, with the latest gizmos and gadgets, hook up, link in, connect to, and stay in touch with the world for as many hours as we can stay awake.

And while we sleep the night away... the information piles higher, opportunities are missed, potential is lost, the world moves on without us.

The problem is unsolvable. There's more printed in a day than we have eyes and time to read in a lifetime, more music played than we have ears and time to listen.

An over abundance of information, compels us to admit to our ignorance.

#059

*Only a mediocre person
is always at his best.
William Somerset Maugham*

Success, by definition, is achievement beyond the norm. Not only from the perspective of the viewer, but also for the doer. If it is easy for us to accomplish something above average, time and time again, then it's not our best work, it's merely mediocre. Our best work is always defined in terms of personal best.

Doing something better than we've ever done it before, is a rare occurrence. Could it be anything else? Achieving those rare moments takes careful preparation, dedicated focus, exceptional effort and the courage to risk failure.

To do it better than last time, and the time before that, requires that we do it differently in the future, and therein lies the risk. In reaching beyond existing boundaries, we often lose our balance and fall backwards for a time.

We have words for falling backwards in search of higher goals. Slide is one. Slump is another. They focus on the resulting direction of performance, rather than the intention of surpassing past achievement.

Slumps and slides, surprises and suspense are part of the landscape in front of boundaries. The mediocre never travel there.

The tallest mountains lean up against the deepest valleys.

#060

*You cannot wake those
who pretend to sleep.
Native American Saying*

In back of little cars, live silly little dogs, with heads that keep on going nod, nod, nod.

They've nothing to look forward to, except a constant rear view, and a furry little dice that's hard to chew.

Escaping is in order, so they thought about it further, now they wander 'bout as free as me and you.

Hiding 'mongst us was a task, but their nodding is their mask, it conceals their true intentions from our view.

In any game of finding, when we're forced into deciding, know that nodding doesn't prove what's false or true.

Proof is found in action, not merely cheap reaction, to logic, commonsense or hullabaloo.

To avoid a painful burnout, do a graceful gentle turnabout, instead of growing old and mad and blue.

Leave the nodding to the dogs, even dressed in fancy togs, their view is still that rear one as they bid all change adieu.

Instead choose your battles with care, select those who always act fair, disagreement ain't bad, it's the nodding that's sad, from those who pretend to be there.

Nodding's just movement, it doesn't mean approvement.

#061

*Today's to-do list:
Satisfy a customer,
Satisfy a customer,
Satisfy another customer.
Sign in back of a diner.*

Does it get any simpler? Whatever our purpose, if we depend upon others or if they depend upon us, then they are, in a sense, our "customers."

When we concoct business plans, strategic plans, grand glorious visions and mission statements, it's all too easy to forget... it all boils down to... Satisfy the Customer. To do this effectively, we need answers to two questions. Who're the customers, and what would satisfy them?

Who are the customers? Our first, and most obvious answer, is probably shortsighted. Customers aren't only those who buy the results of our labour. The economics of living are important, but not the only thing in life.

What would happen if we saw everyone we encounter as the customer? Is there a downside? What would satisfy them? That's not as easy to answer, sometimes even they don't know. But when they're satisfied, they'll come back for more, and tell others of the satisfaction received.

On the other hand? We could just ask what satisfies them. It's not perfect, but it's a start.

"How can I be of service?" isn't just a question, it's the purpose of life.

#062

*He who has never hoped
can never despair.
George Bernard Shaw*

To speak frankly of hope, to one who has never had the need of it, is to utter sounds devoid of meaning. Hope is an enigma, beyond understanding, until experienced.

To speak frankly of hope, to one currently clinging to it for life and sustenance, is to commit an act of profanity and sacrilege. Hope is our final defense against despair. If it is to be taken down, let the one who raised it, be the one to lower it.

To speak frankly of hope, to one who has passed through its grip, is to share compassion beyond the power of mere words. Hope is a thin thread we hold in common. At the darkest hour, it raises us up, until either it breaks, or by chance, we achieve our heart's desire and require it no longer.

To speak frankly of hope, is to admit that when reason and rationality tell us there is no hope, that is when hope is strongest, and needed most. Hope doesn't guarantee success, it merely gives us time for fate to run its course.

Hope marks time while fate catches up.

#063

*Do what you can,
with what you have,
where you are.
Theodore Roosevelt*

If our tools were better, and the problem smaller, the hours longer and our skills stronger, then we wouldn't have problems... except we'd be out of work. We don't always see it that way. The very things that make creativity necessary and problem solving possible, would, if we had our wish, be wished away.

Haikus and Limericks, Golf and Fishing are proof positive we know the joy of self imposed challenges.

Haikus are easier, when longer.
Limericks simpler, sans rhyme.
Golf a breeze, if we can carry the ball
and Fishing, with explosives? A crime!

But easier isn't the goal, and rhyming is part of the fun,
And hitting that ball? Well, there's no accounting for some
and fishing gets you out in the Sun.

Lack of skills, scarce resources, poor location, bad timing and even reduced budgets, are the Haikus and Limericks of life. They're no worse, if our expectations are reasonable, than standing 500 yards from a tiny hole and trying hit a ball into it with a stick.

We're not judged by the hand dealt, but how we dealt with it.

#064

*Friendship needs a
certain parallelism of life,
a community of thought,
a rivalry of aim.
Henry Adams*

I do not know you. You do not know me. This is our shared mutual ignorance, which sometimes leads to fear. Our lack of knowledge isn't perfect, it's flawed with fundamental facts. We both eat and sleep, were both born young and hope to grow old. These at least, we share in common.

But we've more in common than the basics. Appreciation, joy, love, success and security are also jointly held in trust. They motivate and sustain us. They're the common ground upon which we build the bridge between us.

Then there's more to explore, if we're brave enough. What did you feel the first time you saw a shooting star? Or when you first earned a dollar? Your first love? First job? Your first death of a friend or family member?

Should we really be surprised to learn our private thoughts are painfully similar? Or that when they differ, we're both curious and wonder why?

It seems I do know you! You know me! Hail and well met! Shall we work and play together? On the common ground between our entrance and the exit?

#065

*The small courtesies
sweeten life;
the greater ennoble it.
Christian Nestell Bovee*

Please & Thank you, Dozo & Domo, Bitte & Danke, it doesn't matter what language you speak, Mom was right, these are "Magical" words.

Magical because they cost so little, merely a breath of air, and mean so much. Like a secret incantation, they open both doors and minds. Nobody is safe from the power of a sincerely spoken "thanks", or immune to a polite request of "please".

Both words, even when we say them out of habit, serve an all important function. They say "I see you!" and "I acknowledge your existence!" These are not little things. These are huge things, if we're to live and work together.

To say "I see you!" is to grant you the same respect I expect from you. To offer assistance in even trivial tasks, is to acknowledge we can do more when we help each other.

Being conscious of those around us is crucial to the continuation of community. When offering courtesy to another, neither I nor the receiver are diminished,. and when I fail to acknowledge you, I strip you of all rights and expectations.

When courtesy ceases, community is lost.

#066

*The harder you work,
the luckier you get.
Gary Player*

Luck is looked upon as a random act. Like an uncaring gust of wind it sometimes drives us back, other times it pushes us forward. Our feelings towards it depends just as much on the direction we're facing, as on the direction it's blowing.

Is Luck random? The answer would seem to be yes. It strikes both good and bad, with both fortune and tragedy.

Is Luck mean spirited? No, it just catches our attention when the good are unfortunate and the bad are seemingly blessed. But this is nothing more than our sensitivity to acts of irony.

Are the consequences of Luck random? No, and this is where the opportunity lies. The results of Luck are under our partial, not total, control. If we want to catch fish, we lay out nets. If we want to catch animals we set snares. If we want to benefit from Luck, we must build something to catch it in.

The more we lay out nets and snares, the greater our chances of trapping this thing we call 'Luck' and putting it to work for us.

If it's true that opportunity 'knocks'? Then be in the business of building doors.

#067

*Nobody belongs anywhere,
even the Rocky Mountains
are still moving.
George Bowering*

If we were lost in the heavens, our home would be on Earth. If we were lost in a city, we'd mention a street. What we see as 'home' depends on how far from it we've traveled.

Home isn't where we were born. Nor where we currently live. Home is where people notice when we aren't around. Home is where we're missed.

As we grow older and make our way in the world, the circles we travel in grow greater. Each advance into new territory turns us once again into strangers. In leaving home we enter places where no one will notice our arrival, nor our departure.

Settling in, is not just a matter of becoming comfortable with our surroundings, it's a matter of becoming known and valued, by our neighbors.

True wealth isn't tallied in a ledger, that's just the residue of achievement. True wealth is measured by the number of people who know your name, and think kindly of it when you're not present.

We belong, not just where we started, or where our journey ended, but all along the path we marked with our presence.

We belong anywhere we would be missed.

#068

*In the City,
time becomes visible.
Lewis Mumford*

Sit today under a childhood tree and you sit in the shade of yesterday. In the countryside, time moves slowly enough for the seasons to dance in stately circles. From year to year the changes are inconsequential, minor and repetitive.

Sit at a corner cafe and you sit in the path of an oncoming future. In the city, time is pushed aside, hurried and harried. It piles up upon itself, incapable of making way for the next great thing, it then topples over like a breaking wave washing away reflection and solitude.

We and we alone, separate the country from the city. We're the cause of the differences and the reason time takes flight. Other than the acts of God, where the ground shakes and wind blows, change doesn't just 'happen.' It isn't a random event, there's always a cause. That cause is us.

Somewhere between the lazy shade of a leafy tree and the center of a twenty lane highway is our preferred pace of change. Examining where we are, in relation to where we'd like to be, is a personal choice.

Left unconstrained, there's no speed limit to change. Change can shatter time.

#069

*A proverb is no proverb
to you
till life has illustrated it.
John Keats*

Just as the map is not the territory, the word is not your path, until you walk it. The most eloquent of words and pleasing of phrases offer the facade of understanding until applied and made habitual.

Strange how we can accept the truth of a phrase and even preach it, but seldom practice it. 'Take time to sharpen the axe!' we cry, knowing without doubt, to the depths of our very soul, that the advice is truth and worthy of attention.

But then we struggle at some task through lack of proper skills. Never taking time to sharpen our axe. We offer as excuses, that we're too busy, times are tight, the deadline is too close... all the time ignoring what we know is always true... taking time to sharpen the axe, pays back a hundred fold.

Experience is a painful harvest. How many times must we reap it, before we allow it to sustain us?

The above is only one example, the truths we know are legion. Chose a handful. Live them to their fullest, and benefit from your wisdom.

Wisdom is worth nothing, 'til you live it.

#070

*The greater the ignorance
the greater the dogmatism.
Sir William Osler*

Facts are just facts and foster no sense of ownership, but an opinion formed from the ether of ignorance is a personal creation we'll protect with all our might.

When we base our view on facts, then it's easy to back down when proven wrong. All we need do to save face is point to the source of our errors and declare "That's why I was wrong!".

When we've based our position on nothing but our opinion, then the only direction we can point the finger of blame is at ourselves. To back down we have to declare so all can hear "I was wrong!" Which does nothing to save face and makes us look foolish.

Which is of course why we'll avoid admitting we're wrong for as long as possible. We're protecting our ego. A thing so fragile that if it merely looks foolish, it dies never to rise again. Well, maybe not, but that's how we act, so it might just be true.

The longevity of an argument is directly related to fragility of the egos involved, and the heat of an argument is determined by the amount of ignorance which fueled it.

#071

*The drop of rain
maketh a hole in the stone,
not by violence,
but by oft falling.
Hugh Latimer*

Persistent perseverance can wear anything down. Just keep up the pressure beyond the dark of dusk, and the strongest stone is turned to dust.

As long as the Sun shines, and into the night, keep pushing and shoving, striving and sweating with all your might. Keep the pressure up. Steal slivers of time to aid your quest. The objective of course, is to do more than your best.

Something's wrong? Right! Sometimes good advice is twisted out of sight. The persistence of rain drops is based upon patience, not urgency -- a minimum of effort, rather than a maximum of force.

Urgent striving has the effect of creating a rain drop called stress.

Stress keeps up the pressure beyond the dark of dusk, and turns the strongest person to a gray powdery dust.

As long as the Sun shines, and into the night, stress keeps the pressure up. Unseen and unheard, it steals slivers of our sleep. The result is of course, that we do less than our best.

Before you build a shrine to persistence, are you the rain drop, or the stone?

#072

*To live with fear
and not be afraid
is the final test of maturity.
Edward Weeks*

Risk is as common as the air we breath. Every step forward is a step into the unknown. Only in reflection of the past can we discover the safe harbors of certainty. Welcome to the world we live in.

We deal with risk and the fear it carries by making choices. We can choose to ignore risk by pretending it doesn't exist. Some of us find comfort by stepping blissfully with tight shut eyes into oncoming traffic. We reason that if we don't acknowledge it, we might be hurt by it, but we won't have to worry about it. In its own limited fashion, this works.

We can cower from it. Find a hole in the world and pull the edges in on our heads. If we keep silent enough, don't move and don't breathe, risk can't find us. If the goal of life is safety, this is the optimal solution.

Or, we can analyze the risk, weigh the dangers, and when the balance swings in our favour... choose to move forward.

Fear has the strength of a shadow shape, and under the glare of close scrutiny, it loses form and substance.

#073

*Ah! the clock is always slow;
It's later than you think.
Robert W. Service*

We're created with a terrible flaw. We know our days are numbered, but can't accept the number is always within reach. We believe we have time enough, for all that would make our life complete. We live each day as if their continuation was a given.

We use our tomorrows as storage space for all the endings we think can wait 'til a later time. We intend no slight, our intentions are sincere, the things we should say today are left 'til a later year.

Our mistake is that we discount the little acts of life, thinking them of small importance. Our focus is on the larger goals, those that cannot fit into the moment. We think the endless flow of tomorrows, is where we'll find time for completion.

The time we have is time enough, for what's worth doing. A friendly open greeting is a task complete. An uninterrupted conversation is a full moment shared. A hearty handshake leaves nothing undone. A hug is a parceled memory. Each human interaction, if fully lived, leaves nothing unfinished.

We need to say hello in leisure; before we're forced to say good-bye on deadline.

#074

*That the birds of worry
and care fly above your head,
this you can not change;
but that they build a nest
in your hair,
this you can prevent.
Chinese Proverb*

Worry serves a strange purpose. In the servitude of stress, he builds wrinkles in your forehead, tight clumps of muscles in your shoulders and more of those wonderful sleepless nights. He's motivated by the mere hint of danger and the smell of fear. His biggest reward? The unexpected heart attack.

Worry feasts on inaction, grows strong when rooted deep in the mold of hesitation, and rises to full power when cloaked in our low self esteem.

Worry has no power to change anything. He just marks time with our beads of sweat. If we can take our mind off him, he like a Leprechaun, vanishes.

Not much of a resume, but it's enough for most of us. We carry worry on our shoulders like a hero, when we should squash him like a parasite.

We can't defeat him directly. Paying attention to him is his success and our defeat. So, focus on the problem... solve it if you can... accept it if you can't.

Worry is the opposite of action and a synonym for paralyzed.

#075

*The perpetual obstacle
to human advancement
is custom.
John Stuart Mill*

When on the open ocean, good habits, like billowing sails, drive us forward without conscious thought. When rocky reefs rise ahead, it's best we forget the countless leagues behind us. We trim sails and grasp the rudder.

"But, we've always done it this way!" isn't an argument, it's the sound of a good habit crashing against the rocks of a shifting future.

It takes effort to create a habit. It's an investment that pays back a thousand fold. Changing habits, takes a different form of effort. We need to recognize that nothing, not even a successful habit, is permanent. Otherwise, good habits can quickly turn bad, sinking the most successful of enterprises.

Nothing's easy though. Questioning the validity of a good habit every minute is counter productive. Strike a balance, place lookouts in the crow's nest and when they shout "Reefs Ahead!", it's time to pay attention and grasp the rudder again.

In the real world, we're all lookouts, each bestowed with the right to ask why are we doing it this way?

Butterflies aren't convinced by caterpillars arguing they'll never fly, because they've always crawled. The biggest obstacle to progress, is past success.

#076

*One should count each day
a separate life.
Seneca*

Yesterday is but a memory, forever beyond our reach. Whatever happened, whether right or wrong, fair or not, it is the way it is forever. Regrets and what ifs are all for naught. It is.

Remember it? Yes! Learn from it? Of course! But it's done, carved in the diamond hardness of the past. Move on to the present.

Tomorrow? An ill focused memory of what hasn't happened yet. It's given form by actions made both today and yesterday.

Think about it? Yes! Try to predict it? Of course! But it isn't real as yet. It's nothing but a wisp of thought and fancy, it's still ours to fashion out of action and desire. Come back to the present.

Between these two, there is a cusp, a point of action, it's called the now and it's in motion. Unlike these two, this is reality. Malleable, under our control to a large degree. We choose, if we wish, how to act. Each instant we create our future. Each instant we carve our story in the past

Search between what we are already, and what we might become, and we find the opportunity to act.

#077

*Management that wants
to change an institution
must first show
it loves that institution.
John Tuss*

We are, where we are, for a reason. Our present situation took effort. To get to where we stand today, required an investment. Good or bad, it represents what we've done. Regardless of its ultimate quality, we possess a strong sense of ownership, if not pride, in our achievement. Show disrespect to it, and you show disrespect for us.

Understanding how something got from where it once was, to where is now is, is the first step towards moving it somewhere else. What motivated us to build what we built? Does the answer to that question suggest what might motivate us in the future?

Institutions are comprised of people. To think of any organization as anything but the combined efforts of one person piled on the efforts of the next person, is to give substance to something that doesn't exist. It's all about people, taken one at a time, or in crowds of thousands, it's people who change, not 'organizations.'

To change an organization, step away from the edifice in which we stand in awe, and step closer to those who make it move through their daily actions.

#078

I have a dream.
Martin Luther King

Ultimately that's what it takes. A dream and the ability to communicate it. A dream and the passion to work towards it. A dream and the willingness to share our deepest feelings about it. Dreams like this can lift history from one track and set it firmly upon another.

Some dreams sweep over us regardless of who we are or where we live. Some dreams are larger than the individuals involved. Some dreams have the power to change the world and all its future history. Sometimes these dreams are based upon the simplest of ideas.

Some of us fear to dream, because our dreams seem tiny compared to others. We shy away from sharing them because we fear they are not shared by others. Left alone, these dreams shrivel up and wither through lack of support. A dream, any dream, requires openness to grow strong and prosper.

The words "I have a dream," regardless of the speaker or the dream, contain within them the seeds of their own strength. "I have a dream" implies a clarity of vision, a willingness to share and a focused purpose.

"I have a dream" is a foundation for change.

#079

*There cannot
be a crisis next week.
My schedule is already full.
Henry Kissinger*

We can't do it all. This is one of life's most difficult lessons. No matter how good we are, no matter how dedicated, no matter how devoted, the fact remains. We can't do it all.

If we refuse to accept this as truth, then our destiny is perpetual discontent and frustration. There will always be something left undone. Our day's labour never ends. Tasks become a never ending shackle. What we do achieve, passes uncelebrated due to lack of time.

What we see undone ahead is always more important than what we've left complete behind.

To accept there is more to do than time to do it, offers the freedom and control of choice. If we can't do it all? What do we choose to do? And how do we make that choice?

Depends on where we want to get to... Taking any form of action points us in a direction. The clearer our final objective, the easier it is to choose from the chaos of problems facing us. Knowing where we want to go, defines the path to get there.

Crisis only occurs when we lose the courage to choose between problems.

#080

*We dance round in a ring
and suppose,
but the Secret sits
in the middle
and knows.
Robert Frost*

We can, when we set our minds to it, turn our heads away from nearly any view. When we add the silent support of peers to a determined denial, then, for a while at least, nothing intrudes on our inattention.

As we blindly circle in complacent conspiracy, the nonexistent problem, bides its time and grows in strength. Watching from the shadows of the boardroom table, it purrs with patient contentment. Problems aren't offended when ignored, they merely take the time to position themselves before they pounce.

Ironically, it requires a tremendous amount of perception and dedication to consistently steer our attention away from any hint of a problem. It takes great awareness, of every aspect of a problem, to avoid even accidental mention. No matter. When we're motivated to follow a course of action, anything is possible.

One cannot help but wonder what happens if the circle of conspiracy turns about and pays attention to the problem instead of ignoring it? Is the real secret that problems wither under an attentive gaze? Only one way to find out.

Problems gather strength when we look the other way.

#081

*If we want things to stay
as they are,
things will have to change.
Giuseppe di Lampedusa*

There's no avoiding it, things change, that's the way of the world. Of all that we possess, what's most important to us? What are we willing to change, to protect these core values from changing?

With no clear idea, no inventory or accounting of what we value, we will choose either to value everything, or nothing.

If the former, then we are doomed to frustration, powerless to stop the world from changing.

If the latter, then we are lost, entirely cut adrift, rudderless in a maelstrom of change.

What's important, and what's just there? What defines who we are and what are just the accidental trappings of our existence? What can we afford to lose and what is so important that if we lose it, then we have lost ourselves? What's worth fighting for and what can we slough off without a second thought?

The value of these questions is determined by whether or not we see ourselves in control of our destiny or at the mercy of powers beyond our control.

To protect the centre from change, be prepared to change the borders.

#082

*You're either part
of the solution,
or you're part
of the problem.
Eldridge Cleaver*

If we can perceive a problem, then we are always close enough to touch it. Too much traffic? Don't drive. Too much pollution? Reuse and recycle. Don't like our politicians? We can get elected, or at least exercise our vote better or assist those we trust more. Always a choice. Always an opportunity to act.

"It's not my job. You ask too much." Is the typical response. No one's asking anything. Look to the person attached to the arm attached to the hand with the finger pointing towards the problem. To point out a problem, is to assume ownership of it. The question is, what do we do when we identify that something needs to be done?

"Someone should do something!" Isn't an answer. That's asking someone else to do something. It's asking too much.

We live here. There's no one else but us. No caretakers, just us. What we see wrong, we either choose to set right, or live with. That's either depressing or exciting depending on your world view.

Our ability to make a difference, depends not on the strength of our ability, but on our determination to make a difference.

#083

*We have no more right
to consume happiness
without producing it
than to consume wealth
without producing it.
George Bernard Shaw*

Considering how easy it is, to increase and create happiness, it's sad we don't do it more often. It doesn't require money, an education, good health or even a huge amount of effort.

Why should we do it? Sadly enough, that question requires an answer. There are those who would question the benefits of happiness and feeling good. They'd ask for a return on investment. How will their efforts be amortized across the future?

What's the benefit of an absence of depression? What's the value of team spirit? What's the cost of low morale? Does an increase in joy increase productivity? Would looking forward to a positive future, avert a recession?

There are no miracles involved, no strategic investments, no corporate missions. Just a "thank you" here and there. A note of appreciation left on a desk, anonymous if you wish. Some public praise, some private encouragement.

An unexpected hug. A kind word when needed. A gift for the joy of it. An announcement to celebrate a past achievement. The result is a more joyful world.

Invest in the future, deposit joy in the bank of hearts.

#084

*The applause
of a single human being
is of great consequence.
Samuel Johnson*

We each live alone in our thoughts, and through our actions we communicate with the world. It is through the reactions of our fellow travelers, that we judge our progress.

We can get drunk on praise, and die of thirst without it. Recognition, the knowledge, and proof, that we make a difference, is not something we can easily ignore. It cuts through the hardest curmudgeon's shell, and brings a blush to the faces of the eternally shy.

As much as we need praise, we're not too good at receiving it. Being the centre of attention, for even a fleeting instant, is more than most can bear. For all that we need a dose of "you did good!" from time to time, we find it embarrassing. All that's required in return is a simple "Thank you."

Why give praise? It isn't the mercenary reason that "They'll work better if we cater to them" it's simply that, like ourselves, they deserve it.

It feels good to recognize another. Each round of applause is a tonic, it raises the maker as much as the receiver.

To praise another is to recognize the good we see in ourselves.

#085

The best mirror is an old friend
German Proverb

The finest mirrors can only reflect a well lit image - they never reflect the dark side. Through self biased eyes, we see what we expect and want to see, and fail to notice our eyes are unnaturally constant.

Our self image is overpowering. Convince yourself you're worthless and depression sets in. Consider yourself all powerful and the world is your oyster. No mere mirror can cut through these clouds of self delusion.

Friends, true friends, potentially possess true vision. They can see us with other eyes, as those around us see us. They also hear how others view us, when in absence we're discussed.

There's a value in knowing what others think. The smallest of public actions can generate the largest of private misunderstandings.

But... with honesty there's risk. Mirrors have it easy, they run no threat of censure. Friends have it worse, they risk the loss of friendship when speaking out the truth. "This is how others see you!" is a message filled with peril.

It's said, to break a mirror, brings seven years bad luck. How much worse the curse, to spurn a friend for honesty and trust?

Mirrors, though silver backed, are silver tongued.

#086

To thine own self, be true
Shakespeare/Hamlet

Unlike a new toaster, we don't arrive with a user manual. If we did, the above advice would take up most of the pages.

After each decision we make, each action we take, we sit in judgment on ourselves. Did we do the right thing based on all the information at our disposal? To the best of our ability? Were we fair? Honest? Ethical? If the answers are no, then we have only ourselves to blame.

If we try to blame someone else for our decisions and actions, then we're attempting to side step the issue. We're the ones who decide how we act and how we think. We can try to pass the responsibility to someone else, but ultimately that strategy fails.

It fails because we really can't be anything but honest with ourselves. When we try, we sense the incongruity between thought and deed. Our conscience hears the sharp click as we disconnect reality and erect an illusion in its place.

We sleep better when we know in our heart of hearts that we leave no contradictions behind us.

We can lead many lives, but the only one worth living, is our own.

#087

*Grief can take care of itself,
but to get the full value of joy
you must have somebody
to divide it with.
Mark Twain*

Communal celebration of a task completed, a distance gained or adversity left behind, is as necessary to the human spirit, as sunlight to a flower.

We find little joy in our daily actions and make no time to search for it. We've replaced the idea of the autumn harvest fair, with yet more pressing deadlines. We take no time to reflect on our marvelous accomplishments.

Work which was once a part of life, has become all there is in life. We've postponed living as we would choose, until a far future retirement, not realizing that every moment is here and available to savour.

When was the last time you had a party, not to celebrate an event, but just to celebrate life and living? When was the last time, if ever, that your entire company got together just to celebrate the joy of working and succeeding together?

Celebration is the backbone of team spirit. If others rejoice in our company it enables them to overlook our flaws.

Laughter, dance and song are symptoms of a healthy community.

#088

*Joy shared
is joy increased,
grief shared
is grief diminished.
Rabbi Earl Grollman*

Grief is a hole inside us, filled with echoes of the past. We react to it in different ways. For some, quiet reflection is what heals us, for others, a drawing closer is the soothing balm.

Grief is a common bond. Neither riches nor poverty, religion nor origin are sufficient to make our experiences significantly different. In dreadful personal loss, we find we share a simple humanity. Our tears all taste of salt.

That we can finally recognize this connection, is the one true gift of grief. Life is strangely fair, in losing one thing, we always gain another. When we both lose a loved one, we also gain a rare common understanding. We're never alone, not even when we're lost.

Like many human rites of passage, grief is becoming a topic we'd rather not explore. There's no room for grief in the ledger, no place for it in the boardroom... until we encounter it ourselves.

We can try to hide it inside, but grief is not to be denied. When it arises, it comes with a simple inescapable message. I'm a person too... just like you.

#089

*It is a great nuisance
that knowledge
can be acquired
only by hard work.
W. Somerset Maugham*

The natural human condition is ignorance. We enter the world primed and ready for knowledge, but the vessel is empty. The goal? Fill the vessel with the knowledge around us.

There's a catch of course. The vessel isn't truly empty. It's filled with ignorance. Harder than diamond, capable of reproducing, and contagious to a fault. Ignorance requires effort to displace.

Ignorance provides us a safe harbour, protecting us from worry and concern, but also from the illumination of new ideas.

Somewhere along the line we get lucky, we learn something by accident. Once the shell of ignorance is cracked, we're presented with an opportunity. We can compare the state of knowledge to that of ignorance.

With that in hand we have a chance. We can examine all the areas of our ignorance and make the assumption there is always something better... even if we don't know what it is. This is where the hard work is required. It takes personal effort to move forward.

There are two key lessons in life. The first, and least important, is that you must learn the important lessons yourself.

#090

*We think
that if we can label a thing
we have understood it.
Maha Sthavira Sangharashita*

In order to understand the world around us, we trap it inside a cage of words. We naively believe that to name a thing is to know it.

Labels facilitate communication. The disadvantages, on the other hand, are subtle but powerful. Names and labels, by their very nature, constrict our view of the world. Labels shape the world, and can also reduce, rather than expand our potential.

To build a tower out of a deck of cards, we must stop seeing them as 'cards'. We're not allowed to fold, spindle and mutilate 'cards' so the tower slips and slides into oblivion.

To construct a monument of cards, we must see past the label and recognize them as stiff pieces of construction paper. Perfect for bending into rigid components of a stable tower.

Is the 'Internet' a 'New Economy' or merely a faster way of moving information. Does it matter how you perceive it?

Is 'Business' an activity separate from the act of living, or is it merely how people achieve a goal together? Do we even share the same understanding of the word 'Business'? Does it matter if we don't?

#091

*If you don't know where
you're going,
you'll end up somewhere else.
Yogi Berra*

There's work enough for all. Sorting sand by size of grains, will keep us busy all our lives. Dedication, hard work and concentration, will even increase our efficiency at this task, but to what end?

What's our goal? It's a question asked never too early, nor too late. Considering we're all in motion anyway, it's not unreasonable to set a direction.

What's our purpose? That's one of "those" questions. One of the big questions - supposed to be beyond answering by mere mortals.

We set our purpose. We chart our course. We steer our ship.
Or we choose not to.

We all start out by sorting sand. Our first job is often just for pocket money. Our next? For paying the rent. And before we know it, if we're not careful, we're getting by, we're sorting sand.

How to choose? It's not necessarily what we're good at - we all start out incompetent. It's what we love to do. What we'd like to do better. What we'd do without reward, because the act of doing, is the reward.

At least have sand castles in mind while you're sorting sand.

#092

*Unhappiness is best defined
as the difference between
our talents and
our expectations.
Edward de Bono*

We suffer from too many options, enticements and temptations. The possibilities before us, make us richer than Kings. But a nagging desire for even a fraction of what we see but cannot own, can make us feel as poor as paupers.

The definition of happiness for most, is to possess everything. For others, it is merely to appreciate what they have.

Defining happiness for yourself is worthwhile. It starts quite often, as a definition of possessions and therefore of wealth. "I'd be happy if I had..."

Sometimes the most desired possession is... Time. A commodity in equal supply and beyond price if you require a single second more. Make do with what you have.

Keep following your definition of happiness for a while, and it all boils down to simple things. Pick anything you think would make you happy if you owned it, and keep asking why that would make you happy. Seek out the root reasons. It's always personal, so you're on your own... again.

It's all too easy to judge happiness by the measure of what we don't have, rather than by what we already possess.

#093

*Whenever you see
a successful business,
someone once made
a courageous decision.
Peter F. Drucker*

To make a decision is to step forward with grace onto an unknown path. Failure to decide doesn't stop us from moving forward. It causes us to stumble blindly into the future, instead of stepping lightly.

A decision is always an act of courage. The future is always unknown. A decision is always a risk. As we move forward and encounter decision points we must choose, A or B. This or That.

We can put off choosing in order to gather information. That itself is a choice with consequences. If we weigh those consequences carefully, then we've made a true decision. If we're ignoring consequences then we haven't made a decision, we've abdicated responsibility.

Sometimes the right decision is to wait. Standing still while the lion charges, ready to act when the time is right. That's an act of courage. Being too scared to act, isn't.

If we hold off from action, merely to avoid the alternatives, then we're giving ourselves up to the maelstrom.

We're always in motion, moving forward into the future. We are propelled by time and circumstance and our ability to decide is our only rudder.

#094

*Where there is no imagination
there is no horror.
Sherlock Holmes*

In the best horror movies, we never see the monster. The director has hired our imagination, a special effects artist, who works for free and asks for no royalties.

Fearing the unknown is a supreme act of creation. Out of nothing but a pain in the chest, we easily imagine the worst. There's no need to fill in the blanks, every reader has sat in dread anticipation for test results for ourselves or a loved one. It's another trait we share in common.

No reason or logic can beat down the eagerness of an active imagination. Regardless of assurances, the monster under the bed is real to a child... and the one in the closet is worse.

Imagination, while drawn to the dark side, is just as powerful at raising expectations. Holidays gleam brighter in the future than the actual experience. The new project will succeed beyond belief. The new technology will solve all our problems.

Imagination is an emotional magnet gone mad. Magnified by ignorance and then tempered by experience, it pulls us towards our desires and pushes us away from our fears.

Coffee never tastes as good, or as bad, as it smells.

#095

*Nothing is impossible
for the man
who doesn't have
to do it himself.
A. H. Weiler*

One of the big lessons we all learn sooner or later, is that we can't do it all alone. Our burdens differ. From the challenge of getting to the Moon, curing a disease, to just squeezing eighty hours work into a single day. Our tasks are heavier than a single back can carry.

Big tasks are drawn, as if by gravity, to those most capable of completing them. But even the most capable are eventually weighed under by the burdens of success. Even the most capable need a helping hand.

Those hands will never do the task as would those of the one needing help. This for some, is the tripping point. Loathe to hand the task to someone else less capable than they, they stumble under a burden already beyond their means.

I can do it better! Is how they reason against delegation, forgetting that their plate is already full. They can't accept that they'll never get to do it better, because they can't get to it at all.

Delegation isn't just handing a task to someone, it's making that someone your right hand.

#096

*Take calculated risks.
That is quite different
from being rash.
George S. Patton*

From when we open our eyes to the light of a new day, until we close them to join the shadows of the night, we live our days tied to the spin of the wheel. Nothing certain, nothing known, everything balanced between 'maybe' and 'perhaps'.

It boils down to the same thing time and time again. We make choices. No matter the situation, we make choices. None of them certain, each one a risk. Not even a chance to avoid it all, by shutting eyes and standing still in a self made dark, hoping the world will pass us by...

One choice is to rail against the world. Lashing without thought against the unfairness of it all. Moving forward without thinking, crashing upon the indifference of cold hard odds. Each ill-considered attempt will beat us down. Reality is impervious to determination without reason, and luck too nebulous to sustain reasonable hope of success.

Another choice (there are others), is to sift through the risks and steer towards the least adverse.

Calculating the odds requires intelligence and effort. The intelligence we have in abundance... it's the effort we have to make.

#097

*Basic research is
what I'm doing
when I don't know
what I'm doing.
Wernher von Braun*

We unknowingly share a deep dark secret... we don't have the answers beforehand. We make it up as we go along. We then look backwards and place unjustified order on the chaotic path we walked. At best, we repeat fortuitous accidents, for no other reason than they worked.

Some believe there is a proven path to success, glory and/or contentment. Experience proves otherwise. Most great discoveries are preceded not with great plans and deliberate intent, but with the mumbled words... "Huh? What's this?"

Why are manhole covers round? Not for any brilliant thought or reasoning. Not because it's the only shape with the same diameter in all directions. But simply because the same round pipe used to make the tunnel, is the one used to make the access way. How do we cover the end of a round pipe? With a round cover.

Stumbling forward without knowing how it'll all turn out, is the fun, the adventure, the very meaning of Life.

Instructions for Living:

- Try anything and everything until something succeeds.
- Repeat that success until it fails.
- Start over and try again.
- Enjoy the Process.
- The End.

#098

*Entrepreneurship is
the last refuge
of the trouble making
individual.
James K. Glassman*

Not being a team player isn't always negative. New ideas, great thoughts and inspiration, are weak and shy of crowds at first. They wither under the shadow of even constructive criticism or well-intentioned skepticism. They need a single parent, devoted to their upbringing, in solitary if necessary.

When we see an answer, or think we do, we owe it to ourselves to see it through. Our peers might think us wrong, they might even be right. But unless we convince ourselves, we trade individualism for conformity, and lose our sense of self in the bargain.

It is not that the crowd is at fault. New ideas and individual beliefs prove wrong at least as often as they win out. The majority view must protect itself against the outlandish, or else progress is risked on mere whimsy

Is it unfair that new ideas, and the people possessed by them, must fend for themselves, to serve the purpose of protecting the group? Perhaps. But it's also the foundation of the Heroic sagas that stir our souls. The loner who wins through in the end.

You can't lead a crowd when surrounded by it.

#099

*This taught me a lesson,
but I'm not sure what it is
John McEnroe*

We're all trapped in a university with no walls, admission fees or desirable exits. We're presented with exams every moment of every day. They're all open book, nothing's forbidden, everything's allowed. You can collaborate or work alone. What could be easier?

For starters, there are no clues as to what the next test might cover. Each one is tailored to the individual, totally unique - every one a pop quiz. With no warning it suddenly matters what we know.

What should we know? What really matters? From one moment to the other we will never know what the next test is about. Can you swim? When you find yourself in deep water, it's too late to start learning. Of course, we can get lucky and have swimming as a hidden talent, but it's better to prepare.

Is there guidance? Or is it rigged from the start for our failure? Guidance surrounds us. Every experience teaches those intent on learning, though the purpose of the lesson might elude us.

There are even common, simple, proven truths. How long must we study before the simplicity of 'Doing unto others...' makes sense?

#100

*Success is a process,
a quality of mind
and a way of being,
an outgoing affirmation
of life.
Alex Nobel*

"Success" is achieved long before a climber reaches the roof of the world and touches the heavens. It's not a single solitary moment in time, carved out and set aside from our daily experiences. Success is a life style, a determination to do our best whenever, and at whatever, we focus our minds and bodies.

"She's an overnight success" is a common unintentional insult. Success is never "overnight." Our "recognition of effort" can happen in an instant, but achievement has a long history. It takes time to acquire skills. Nothing great happens in a moment.

We unknowingly discount effort, when we only reward those who come in first. Anyone who enters a marathon, and runs as long as heart, legs and lungs will carry them, succeeds... regardless of their position in the pack.

Success is an exultation of human spirit. It is what drives us towards our goals. Not concerned with how we place against others, its sole purpose is to celebrate life in the glory of personal achievement.

We diminish the size of the mountains we've climbed, when we focus our attention only on the peaks.

#101

*Confusion is a word
we have invented
for an order which
is not understood.
Henry Miller*

Confusion is either a doorway to opportunity, or a pit leading to despair. There are few guarantees in life, but when we don't know how something works, that's a guarantee we've got something new to learn... if we can make it through the learning period.

Confusion is a temporary, but repetitive, state of mind. Each new experience is ushered in by confusion... we might as well get used to it.

Step one? A deep breath. We've been here before. We'll be here again. Confusion is seldom, if ever, a matter of life or death, so relax. Learning takes time. It can't be rushed.

Step two? Step back...

Gain perspective. How are others coping? What can they teach us? What do we know about the new situation? How is it like old ones?

The above advice is deliberately out of context. Confusion has a sameness about it. How we approach it, must exhibit a similar sameness. There's some small comfort in that... if we choose to see it.

We balance, precariously at times, on the rocks of confusion, between knowledge and ignorance.

#102

*The soul
would have no rainbow,
If the eyes
had no tears.
Minguass saying*

Hot has no meaning, without the chill of cold. Deadlines lose importance, when they become the norm. Sunrise and sunsets exist only where light and dark collide in beauty. Like figures captured in old photos, we, and all around us, are made possible only by contrast.

It's not just that thirst makes water sweeter, or that hard work makes relaxation more enjoyable. It's that without thirst there is no need for drink, without effort, no need for rest.

So what? For starters, at the most mundane of levels, problems exist to make problem solvers valuable. We never find work, where nothing needs doing. We can be of service, only where there are problems and pain.

Obstacles, no matter how 'inconvenient', give purpose and meaning to our lives. A life empty of challenge is devoid of achievement.

"You're granted three wishes!" is the snare of the Genie's lamp. We're presented with the opportunity to gain our heart's desire. We would, if we could, and we do, wish away grief, and loss and defeat -- and unknowingly erase joy, growth and success.

Though painful, obstacles make the journey worthwhile.

#103

*Laws alone cannot
secure freedom of expression;
in order that every man
present his views
without penalty
there must be a spirit of tolerance
in the entire population.
Albert Einstein*

I'm not like you. We come from different places, we tell different stories, our humour is different, as is our spelling. We don't look the same, smell the same, believe the same things or even eat the same meals. We're different. Now what?

That question never goes away. The above litany is always true. It's true, no matter who we are, where we live or who we work/play with. It's true, regardless who we compare ourselves to. We're different. So?

The differences in skin colour, looks, wealth, intelligence or religion ad nauseam, are easily used to build barriers. Anyone can do it. No education or skill required. The more ignorance, the better. Obstacles and barriers, chasms and canyons, created while we wait in growing fear.

To revel in diversity requires effort. The recipe is simple. Take one part education and mix thoroughly with another part humour. Simmer slowly, don't let it come to a boil... and tolerance rises.

When confronted face to face, if we blink... we lose, when we wink... we win.

*A King,
realizing his incompetence,
can either delegate
or abdicate his duties.
A Father can do neither.
Marlene Dietrich*

Remarkably, though it requires no license, has no schools of great learning, and relies on only memories for guidance, the role of 'father' is crucial.

On the childhood screens of our mind, memories of what parents do, flicker past at different speeds... but the reality of fatherhood isn't a rerun. This time we're in the director's chair, we're producing a life, with every scene, a single take.

The responsibility and fear of failure is overwhelming, but we cautiously keep moving forward. What we've forgotten, if we were ever aware of it, is that children are almost blind and impervious to parental failures. In their eyes we do no wrong.

The goal? Transform dependent offspring into independent adults... nobody transitions from parents 'can do no wrong' to a teenager's 'I know it all,' without struggle and strife.

The cosmic joke on all of us, is that we go through this transition twice... first as a teenager, then as a parent. But, as a teenager we didn't pay attention and as a parent we can't remember.

Fathers succeed when they are no longer necessary, just loved and appreciated.

#105

*We are
changing the world faster
than we can change
ourselves,
and we are
applying to the present
the habits of the past
Winston Churchill*

The grand irony is that in learning something new, we have both accepted, and beaten, the challenge of the future. In doing so... we have invested in old, possibly outmoded, behaviours. Each success under our belt, a weight anchoring us to a particular way of doing things. Each past achievement, a burden against future progress.

Play a game of chess against an opponent, and with each win based upon a favourite strategy, we become more vulnerable to a change in tactics. Winning in a proven way, is an obstacle to progress.

Our strength lies, not in past success, but in our ability to unshackle ourselves from both losing -and- winning strategies. The first is easy, the second rare. It requires flexibility, a keen sense of judgment and courage.

Flexibility - because a willingness to change, is a prerequisite of change.
Judgment - because knowing when to change, is an art, not a science.
Courage - because we could be wrong, and must accept risk in order to achieve success.

Nothing remains the same, not even the steps to success.

*To most of us
the future seems unsure;
but then it always has been;
and we who have seen
great changes
must have great hopes.
John Masefield*

No one can predict the future beyond, perhaps, that things will fall to the ground. By the time the future is easy to predict, it's history. All of this is all too painfully obvious to anyone who's planned for tomorrow.

The future is, at best, obscure. At worst, steered by a ferryman with a funny, sense of humour.

Why then, if failure is all but guaranteed, should we bother to peer beyond the present? Because with each attempt, we learn how our tomorrows are shaped by subtle cause and accident. With each view of distant ambiguities, we grow in flexibility. Knowing the future is different, is enough to spawn resourcefulness.

The future belongs to those who'll see the most of it. There comes a point in our three score years and ten, when more lies behind than before. The burden then passes to those behind us.

There are many lessons to pass to those who'll inherit the earth. Of them all, is the strange, undying hope, that whatever they ultimately build, will be better than what we left them.

#107

*No snowflake in an avalanche
ever feels responsible.*

Stanislaw Lec

It is difficult to justify righteous dismay at the loss of panoramic views, when standing behind windows of a mountain home. When we're part of the scenery, we're part of the problem.

It is the lifeboat problem writ large. We're all both cause, and potential solution, to the problems we encounter. When we act as if we're alone, we're in conflict with those who act as us.

This is true in the smallest of encounters. When we both argue as if we each have the monopoly on truth, then nothing is achieved save strife. Two rocks never merge, they grind each other down.

Do nothing more than recognize that not only 'you', but 'we' exist, and solutions present themselves. It's more than 'give and take', it's an acceptance that your needs are rightfully the same as mine. Conflict with me, is conflict with yourself.

We're all part of a global association with many local chapters. We formed no constitution, we have no written rules, we signed no binding contract... but as surely as an honest judge, our deeds decide our consequences

In the frustration of a traffic jam, it's hypocrisy to ignore the car we're seated in.

*Adventure is the result
of poor planning.
Col. Blatchford Snell*

What went wrong, is always more memorable, than what went right. The vacation stories most commonly told, are those in which nothing went as planned, in which the whole world conspired against us, and yet we survived. Our adventures, when remembered through stories, are badges of honour.

This makes little sense.. Holidays and projects are designed with the purpose of either relaxation or success. Yet when plans fail, they take on a reality more valued than when they succeeded. With perverse pleasure we never tire of retelling our 'terrible' experiences.

A perfect holiday yields no great stories. Retelling of resting for hours in a hammock, swaying in a cool sea breeze, raises no laughter, no bursts of disbelief. It's boring to listen to... perhaps boring to experience?

We live a paradox. We believe we strive for the quiet life, but seek entertainment in strife, hardship and danger.

Not too much of course, just enough to keep us guessing and alive. It seems, in our memories at least, we prefer 'adventure' over tranquility. Ironically, it's the plans that fail that we enjoy the most.

Only when we lose the map, do we experience the countryside.

*The fleas were appalling,
but the honour was great.
Laurie R. King*

We demonstrate our respect and gratitude in a variety of ways, from a simple phrase of thanks, to elaborate gifts and celebrations. Our depth of respect and personal resources, determines the quality of our gift.

In turn, we accept gifts and honours with a critical eye, weighing each in turn against personal and private measures. The honour we feel we've been bestowed, is determined by hidden valuations.

Which is the greater honour? To be invited out to dinner, or to be invited into a home to eat? The answers will vary according to taste...

The question is not... where would you rather eat? Or even... which serves the better meal? The question is... Which, according to the giver, bestows the greater honour?

To feel slighted, when only honour was intended, is ironic comedy.

What greater social error can we make, than to misjudge those who do us honour? The gifted bottle of wine, regardless of the vintage, is still a gift. The surprise party, a gathering of friends. And the public and embarrassing praise, still praise.

Sometimes sincere intent is the reality, and uncompromising perception, the problem.

*It is impossible
to make anything foolproof
because fools are so ingenious
Edsel Murphy*

The ingenuity of fools is powered by the innocence of the beginner's mind. Not knowing what they can and cannot do, they are open and attracted to every possibility.

Knowledge at first glance is far superior to ignorance. By adding order to the chaos, knowledge can, with sweeping gestures, open fields of new possibilities. But it sometimes sees order where it doesn't exist and in so doing, closes off avenues of possible exploration.

Fools know no boundaries, and are carefree in their efforts. Their actions are not considered 'wasted', because from the start, they lack purpose as a motive. Geniuses on the other hand, husband every effort, considering only actions with the possibility of success. Why try something which cannot succeed, when other, more profitable, avenues exist?

When pitted against fools in efforts to prevent abuse, genius is always the underdog. Fools, ignorant of the rules of reason, never play fair. They will attempt what no rational person would ever attempt, and in so doing, side step all precautions.

A fool is blind to reason, and stumbles on success where genius feared to tread.

#III

*Achilles absent,
was Achilles still.
Homer*

Even the mere thought of leaders we've never met, is inspiring. They instill within us an image of what we might become. Their physical presence isn't required, just the recollection of how they acted. We are spurred to greater heights by how they chose to overcome the obstacles, and seize the opportunities, placed before them.

How do these leaders, who stand tall in our mind, differ from those who stand wanting before us? Even more importantly, how does the image in the mirror, differ from our image of a leader?

Leadership isn't just something innate, it's also built on conscious choice. When stepping from prison, after more than two decades, Mandela could have chosen revenge over reconciliation. The choice was his. Either was within his power. Imagine for a moment, the future of the choice he didn't make.

Who we chose as leaders, reflects the core within us. Who we chose to follow is who we'd choose to be.

Is leadership based on nothing but how we act? What role does 'charisma' play? Is action, without attraction, enough?

Leaders who have created a vision, need no longer be present for us to see it.

#112

*There is no such thing
as absolute value in this world.*

*You can only estimate
what a thing is worth to 'you'.*

Charles Dudley Warner.

What would we trade for it? There's no other measure of value. If we're unwilling to trade anything; then it is valueless, worth neither production nor consumption.

'Trade' is a form of the golden rule. 'Give unto others, the value they give unto you,' with transactions and prosperity as the consequence. Violate it, and we're literally 'out of business.'

What has value? Everything we choose to spend time on, has value. It takes about a minute to read a Truth Pick, that time cost, and hopefully was worth, at least a dime to you or your company. Was the exchange a fair one?

We trade in a multitude of coins from 'cash' to respect, appreciation, self image and esteem, love, honour, ideas, entertainment and enjoyment to name only a few.

Regardless of our objectives as an honest trader, we must recognize there is a currency exchange to consider. What I value, isn't necessarily valued by you to the same degree, for the same reason, at the same time.

The rain that falls is free, and never of value, until there's a drought.

*You lose it
if you talk about it.
Ernest Hemingway*

How do we whistle? Most of us can carry a tune, but couldn't read sheet music if our lives depended on it. How do we do it? The realization is that we don't know how we do it, we just do it.

How do we catch a ball? Given pen and paper, could we plot the point of intersection of a moving body and stretched out hand, with the parabolic trajectory of streaking ball? Again, we're forced to admit we haven't a clue, we just reach out and catch it.

In search of the path to writing, we ask a writer how they write and they just look at us and mumble... 'I don't know how I write, I just write.'

There's a peculiar lesson here. Strangely it seems that understanding this lesson isn't important, providing we act as if we understand it.

It's not always necessary to know exactly what we're doing, what's necessary is that we do it anyway.

We don't know how to 'do', much of what we do. Yet not knowing how to 'do', stops us from doing much of what we'd like to do.

#114

*If a man empties his purse
into his head,
no one can take it from him.
Benjamin Franklin*

Every word read, each book devoured, joins our thoughts to others. Each surprising viewpoint, or controversial perspective, extends our horizons further than we might ever hope to travel on our own. All new ideas, raise us onto the shoulders of others. And we remain elevated, even after the originators of the thoughts have passed on.

Self improvement, in the form of new ideas and skills, not only results in an immediate increase in productivity, but places us within reach of higher ideas and more sophisticated skills. Ideas lead us to ideas as surely as a stream leads us to the ocean.

Bankers sing the praises of the 'exponential growth of interest,' while they keep our money from us for years on end. Teachers should sing the praises of the exponential growth of knowledge, which is at our disposal from the moment we seek it.

What we invest in ourselves, is not only immediately accessible, it's also immediately transferable. Knowledge, like the very worst virus, is contagious, and seldom kills the carrier.

We are wealthy beyond measure, when we can, and do, invest in knowledge without thought of the cost.

*The boughs of the oak
are roaring,
inside the acorn shell.
Charles Tomlinson*

The ground is littered with the shells of acorns planted with impatience. The leafy limbs that might have been, vanished in the fury of 'We must have it now!'

Some things can't be hurried with success. Others defy the very act of scheduling. Deep reflection requires time. Flashes of brilliance obey no timetable. Some things happen at their own pace, regardless of the growing weight of the ticking of a countdown clock.

Thoughts, like acorns, are pregnant with potential. Impatience is the surest way of grinding them to premature dust. We know these things to be true, yet the pressures of the day impart a form of lunacy. We demand both quality and haste, both the scenery and the speed record. Reason and logic aside, we know what we want, and we want it all now.

Time is a source of quality. It allows planning and consideration of alternatives. It provides the ability to savour the experience of life. It enables us to find the right answers, rather than the first ones.

Seeing the oak trees packed within acorns, we attempt, and fail, to pack a dozen lifetimes within the one we're given.

*If you can make a man laugh,
you can make him think
and make him like
and believe you.
Alfred E. Smith*

Humour is our physical and emotional response to the perverse incongruities of life. Without a sense of humour, we stumble from cosmic incident to comic accident, never seeing the connection. Our belly laughs, are wry detectors.

We laugh at the indignities that befall us, because the alternatives are too depressing. We chuckle at both the small and large misfortunes ensnaring us, because we have no other choice. Despite our best laid plans, life is something that happens to us. The knack of seeing the hidden irony is a precious gift.

Humour doesn't come easy. Especially when the humour is in our follies and foibles. To laugh at ourselves is to acknowledge our shared, and all too common, weakness. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who, with the dual scalpels of tact and gentleness, can expose the humour within.

With every burst of laughter there's the opportunity to reflect on what's been found out. Our sense of humour is a symptom of our intelligence. Once we laugh, we know enough to pay attention.

When the audience is laughing, they're listening.

#117

*When two men communicate
with each other
by word of mouth,
there is a twofold hazard
in that communication.
Sam Ervine*

There is no endeavour more fraught with peril, than to try and make ourselves understood by another. Each word used is tainted by individual past experience, and yet must serve listener and speaker as the single vehicle of meaning.

Choose any word... sit across from a friend and with the sincerest of intent, each scribble a definition of what you think the word means. If The definitions match exactly? Rejoice... and now do the same for the hundreds of words and phrases, that make up the briefest of conversations.

Paradoxically, the responsibility of good communication lies 100% with both listener and speaker. As the one trying to impart information to another, the speaker has a vested interest to choose words carefully and to ensure, as best they can, the message is received loud and clear.

As listener? The responsibility is equally as onerous. When the listener nods their head in agreement, do they really know what was intended? Or are they secure in a false illusion?

The assumption of honest intent is no guarantee of perfect communications, but serves as an insurance policy against casual misunderstandings.

*Somebody's
got to be the guardian
of the long term.
Marina V. N. Whitman*

Nothing just happens, there's always a cause. There's little we can do about the bulk of it. Gravity rules landslides, electricity controls the lightning, and Sun and Wind take care of the weather. Mother Nature aside, most of the rest is under our influence, if not our control.

It doesn't always feel as if we have influence over tomorrow. Our best laid plans routinely get crushed and pushed aside. The flaw lies with how we plan for tomorrow. We create a single plan, and ignore a plan 'b', and 'c', and 'd'... We act as if there is only a single tomorrow, rather than a vista of possibilities.

There's never a single answer to the question 'What might happen?' Nor are there even right or wrong answers. Every reasonable answer contains a dollop of doom, a pinch of possibility, and a huge heaping of hope.

To chart a safe course through the possible tomorrows requires agile plans. Plans which literally are designed to suffer failure gracefully. It's not pessimistic to contemplate failure and avoid it... it's pessimistic to accept it.

The future, by definition, is plural, never singular.

*Even if
you're on the right track,
you'll get run over
if you just sit there.
Will Rogers*

There's no great skill seeing what's wrong with the world. All we need do, is go about our lives, and pay attention to what annoys us. Like pebbles in our sandals, failure is evident at every step.

Nor is great intelligence necessary to know what needs doing. Even a child knows that sandals, sans pebbles, walk softer.

There's a great gap though between seeing what's wrong, knowing what's right, and stepping from one to the other. Insurmountable gaps, if the world around us is evidence of our ability to cross them.

It's not a lack of knowledge about either problems or solutions, that keeps the gaps alive. Nor is there, if our whining is any measure, a lack of desire for a world without pebbles. Yet the pebbles persist.

Removing a pebble, requires someone caring enough to bend down and take action. Not all problems are pebbles, but problems have a disadvantage... the bigger they are, the more people they annoy. Even mountains can be moved, one person, one pebble at a time.

The eyes that see a gap, can see the hands to fix it.

#120

*There is nothing permanent
except change.
Heraclitus*

That's a well worked, worn and weary cliché... nevertheless, it's also the truth. It means that no matter what we're doing today... we'll be doing something different tomorrow. Forget the notion of catching up. Drop the idea that things will slow down. Change is now, and forever more, our constant, chaotic companion.

That's scary. It means that our skills, those abilities that put food on the table... will become useless. It means that how we earn our living today... will not earn us a living tomorrow.

When we lose our ability to earn a living, we lose our competence, our sense of self worth... and our self esteem. Is it any wonder that change hurts?

But our most important skill isn't something we learnt... it's our innate ability to learn. Learning how to do something takes care of today... The ability to learn, takes care of our tomorrow's.

In a world where nothing remains the same... learning to do new things, is our most crucial talent. Reading a magazine, attending a conference, going to night school... these are all investments in our future.

The ability to learn, rides the tides of change.

#121

*Be ever questioning.
Ignorance is not bliss.
It is oblivion.
Admiral Hyman Rickover*

Are you a creative genius? If you're like most people you just answered no. Pity, because you are one!

How many times today will you ask yourself why something is the way it is? Each 'Why' is potentially a door into creativity... What do you do with all your little 'Whys'? Do you ignore them? Or do you seek out answers? How many doors to creativity do you pass by each day?

We are always questioning the world around us, and then ignoring those questions... we don't believe that our little questions are worthy of attention. We think that things are the way they are for good reason, and who are we to question the status quo?

These internal mutterings are very effective at stopping creativity at the source. When we can stop those mutterings our creativity takes over.

Want proof? OK... after striving all day to 'be creative' and failing... we go home each night and sleep. At the very moment we fall asleep... we create the most fantastic, unfettered dreams. Creativity explodes within us, without restraint.

We're already creative geniuses... we should just forget our P's & Q's and learn to count our Whys.

*Business has only two
basic functions,
marketing and innovation.
Peter Drucker*

The other day a waiter asked me what I wanted for dessert. Since I have a sweet tooth, and there are no calories in Apple Pie, I ordered some. "Sorry" the waiter replied, "Everybody orders that, but we don't sell it."

My response to this unusual statement was a burst of laughter. I always laugh when I hear something funny. I asked him if he heard what he had said. He looked puzzled and asked me what I meant.

I asked him why he isn't selling something everyone wants to buy! The strange thing is that this happens all the time. People are always asking for specific things from us and we continually fail to deliver.

Have your customers asked you for something you don't have? Does your spouse ask you for attention you don't give? Do your children ask for your time? Do you ask yourself for the simple pleasures of life?

Sometimes, being of value to someone is nothing more than listening to them, and giving them what they ask for.

Who's asking you for Apple Pie? What are you going to do about it?

Every request is an opportunity to prosper.

#123 2001/09/11

*The angel of death
has been abroad
throughout the land,
you may almost hear
the beating of his wings.
John Bright*

Regardless of where we live, we are touched by the shadow of the angel's flight. The sudden chill of shade, causes us to catch our breath, and fear for every living step.

There is no longer any corner of the land where we can shut out the world. We are part of every act. The world has arrived at our doorstep. No locks can keep it out.

Anger. Despair. Grief. Disbelief. No words can describe, the human emotional response to a building falling from the sky. As the building falls, so falls innocence.

Words fail, when the heart is crippled with grief. To belong to a community, is to taste the salt of every tear.

Love those near you. Sleep well. The Sun will rise tomorrow.

#124 2001/09/12 (Day 2)

*O God! Put back Thy universe
and give me yesterday.
Henry Arthur James*

Like lightning to a copper rod, our minds are drawn to man-made hell on earth, and then recoil. Like water skittering on steel too hot to touch, our thoughts flit and fail to find a place of rest.

'This too shall pass', lacks meaning and gives no lasting comfort. Some changes have eternal consequences, and set us on unknown paths.

The nightmares of our restless night, last beyond our waking. The unreal world persists. The day unfolds in dust. Our nightmares are given life.

Each approach we make, to the heat of what we fear, tempers our ability to cope with what is now the world we live in.

One response is to draw inward, another to reach out. The first makes the world a darker place, the second breathes life on a fading light. A handful of hate can create a world of grief. In turn, a world of support can restore a world to peace.

Where we live is no longer important, borders exist only in our minds, not in our hearts.

#125 2001/09/13 (Day 3)

*A name pronounced
is the recognition
of the individual
to whom it belongs.
Henry David Thoreau*

Numbers, especially large numbers, have vague emotional content. They are senseless sounds separated from reality. Do we shed more tears for one hundred, or for one thousand victims?

Or do we only fall, and shatter, at the mention of a name, or the image of a single child?

As numbers turn to names, denial fades, replaced by a growing sense of dread. The world has changed. The skyline different. Voices stilled.

We look around us, staring into the eyes of strangers. Their grief, mirrors our own, and we recognize we're no longer alone. Everyone shares what we feel. We open doors. Pause in traffic. Wave others ahead of us. Being connected, even in simple courtesies, offers a gentle hand of support. A silent nod returns it.

For a while, there is no 'business as usual', for the simple reason that the world has blurred out of focus. Today is not 'usual' and to pretend it is, ignores our internal weeping. We will rise again, we always do, but first we must learn, and then recite, the names of yesterday.

Speak their names, and from the dust, they rise as living memories.

#126 2001/09/13 (Day 3)

*A hero is no braver than
an ordinary man,
but he is braver
five minutes longer.
Ralph Waldo Emerson*

While we move from danger, there are always those who stride, by choice, towards it. They are not oblivious to the dangers, they understand them better than most. Nor do they ignore the personal risk. They are as fearful as any. They choose to defy it. Armed only with a devoted dedication to strangers, they place themselves amongst the flames.

All reason aside, they ignore common sense, not from ignorance, but from compassion. Hundreds risk, and lose everything, in the hope of finding a single breath of life.

We despair at the lack of heroes and yet we're surrounded by them; they number in the hundreds of thousands. Each would lay down their lives, just on the remote chance they might find and rescue us.

There will always be evil in the world; their wings of darkness could touch any of us. Yet all around us, hidden in the peace of a normal day, are society's protectors... and in ourselves, a hidden strength.

We raise heroes up in memory, only after they've fallen in life.

Dedicated to rescue teams worldwide.

#127 2001/09/14 (Day 4)

*Sob, heavy world,
Sob as you spin.
Mantled in mist,
remote from the happy.
W. H. Auden*

American, British, Canadian, and more, and more, until tears blind the eyes. The list entwines the world. Dozen of nations worked, and now rest, alongside each other, floor on toppled floor.

Religions mingled together, and colours, beliefs, and politics... and now their dust has scattered together in the wind. Boundaries are gone in the truest sense. We are one again.

We were brought to this terrible place, not by a nation, or a religion, or even by a belief. We were brought to this garden of grief, by the acts of individuals.

There is a dark, and dangerous, desire to lash out in blind fury. What's worse, what is terrible, is we have it in our power to do so. We can make it so. We can turn the land to glass. We can become like them. We can scatter people as dust on the wind. As has been done, to thousands of us. Dust for dust.

We were brought to this terrible place by specific individuals. Not by nations. Not by innocents. Not by children. By individuals.

All the reasons under the sun, cannot shield us from our humanity.

#128 2001/09/17 (Day 7)

*The sword of the law
should never fall
but on those,
whose guilt is so apparent
as to be pronounced
by their friends,
as well as foes.
Thomas Jefferson*

Below the wailing and gnashing of teeth, there rises a growing rumble of understanding. Some actions are never justified. The killing of the innocents, regardless on which side they reside, is inhuman.

It's inhuman when it's done to us, or if we do it unto others. It's inhuman when it's done by our enemies, and when it's done by our friends. Some things are constant under heaven. Some things are condemned even in hell.

Our path to the future is uncertain. All links to the past blown asunder. The steps we take towards justice will become history, and known as our darkest or finest hour. Whichever decision is handed down, is the one we will have earned.

These things are true for all of us. For those who took action in the past, and for those contemplating action in the future. The rules are now the same. We rightfully ask for support against past aggression, and submit to being judged against future action.

Those who burn the bridges of humanity, lose support on both sides.

#129 2001/09/21 (Day 11)

*Happiness is the only
sanction of life;
where happiness fails;
existence remains a mad
and lamentable experiment.
George Santayana*

The lilting laughter of children; the carefree flight of birds; the bright glory of the morning sun... each continue their assaults on the gathered gloom.

We strike back against the return of normalcy, with bloody shards of guilt. We protect our precious grief, with rightful respect for the dead. But with each passing moment, laughter struggles from the rubble towards the light of day. We're alive. We go on.

Grief is insidious. Like the events that give it birth, it overwhelms us without warning. An emotional shuddering, that can stifle laughter, wreck a smile, and still the beginning whispers of happy thoughts.

Yet through all of these assaults, life wins through. Grief is insidious, but not supreme. It weakens over time. At varying speeds, according to personal needs, we shake free of the agony of remembrance.

It's not a matter of forgetting. Who can forget the unthinkable? We're merely removing thorns from our memories.

Before they died, they lived loud lives of laughter. There's more to their memory, than their ending.

The dead are honored more by tears of laughter, than by tears of grief.

#130 2001/09/24 (Day 13)

*Let us endeavor to live
that when we come to die,
even the undertaker
will be sorry.
Mark Twain*

Each day is a brick to be thrown or to build upon. Even at the height of anger we have choices -- to defend or to destroy. We choose our roles -- protector or protagonist.

Is today a better place, because of actions taken yesterday? Did we roll the rock higher? Did we grow, or were we ground down?

They're simple questions, but no less important because of their simplicity. They search for the light that guides us. When every wind is against us, when every path is uphill, what keeps us moving? What makes it all worthwhile?

Or is the secret not to think too much? To let it all just happen and cast our lot into the storm? "Making the world a better place," is one of the many answers found. Another is: "Take care of those around you." The probing question remains... how wide do we cast our net? How large the circle of our friends?

It's not all chaos. The search, for the reason behind the fury, is the foundation of future progress.

Let our passage turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones.

*Justice is that virtue
that assigns to every man,
his due.
Saint Augustine*

An animal lagging behind the herd is often prey to a Lion. In Nature there are only the consequences of actions. It took Humans to create the concept of Justice. We each possess a sense of what is right and fair, and while we often differ more than we agree, we share a desire for a commonality of thought.

A child that argues: 'She hit me first', is conjuring up an ancient rule of Law. As did Hammurabi when he inscribed: 'an eye for an eye' in ancient clay.

To bring someone to Justice implies a crime committed. Strange how a word describing fairness of consequence, has a more negative, than positive flavour.

Achieve a great goal and receive an appropriate reward. This too, is Justice. An act of goodness is to bring Justice to those who deserve it.

We strive to bring others to Justice, and to bring Justice to ourselves. Perhaps it would make all the difference, if we applied it to ourselves and brought it to others?

Depending on the listener's self esteem: 'May you get what you deserve', is either blessing or curse.

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Who is Peter de Jager?

He's a speaker, writer and management consultant. A New York Times profile said Peter has "a talent for simple metaphors and pithy pronouncements."

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His presentations are interactive, fun, provocative, irreverent to mistaken ideas and most importantly, like Truth Picks... directly applicable to the challenges facing us both personally and professionally.

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