

What Movie Are You Watching?

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The challenge is always the same. How do we survive and thrive under circumstances we do not control? Gas prices, debt, job insecurity and personal challenges such as illness, divorce or loneliness all can trigger prolonged, intense stress. And yes, stress makes us stupid. Stupider than an eight-year-old with a butane lighter. Brain research reveals that stress shuts down access to our creative problem solving and critical thinking centers of our brains. The result is that we can exaggerate feelings of helplessness, despair and rage. Stress triggers strong emotions that focus our attention on the regrets of the past, fear of the future or blame on others. But it's all we see on TV or hear on the radio. All these emotions are self-destructive. Stress slays us in the face and gets our attention so what's the solution?

Well, it begins with suspending our fears and frustrations. There are two movie theaters in our minds. One is showing the latest horror film of our lives and the other is a film festival of heroic tales (like *Lord of the Rings*) and romantic comedies (like *Sleepless in Seattle*). In our inner movies we are either the victim, getting slashed, squashed or shot, or we're the hero whereby staying with our values and vision we transcend our challenges and pursue a life we both value and enjoy. We choose which movie to watch every waking minute. Our horror flick makes us stress crazy. Our epic journey inspires personal wisdom. But all of us must choose. But just willing ourselves to be positive and heroic is exhausting. A positive internal reaction to threatening external reality can seem insane. So how do we get the right movie of our life playing?

It requires more than will power. It happens when we change how we think, how we feel, and what we do. It requires one huge commitment. Are you ready? You must commit to really enjoy life as you are living it. Minute to minute enjoyment happens when you show up for every moment. You know your life has become an endless breathless sprint when your mind is constantly preoccupied and obsessed with personal fears or anger at things you do not control. When you're sitting at dinner pretending to listen to your spouse but you're actually having a second conversation in your mind, you are in attention deficit. When you're home checking emails and your young child is telling you a story and you're saying, "Uh, huh...I'm listening...Go on," you're only pretending. There is no such thing as true multi-tasking. Instead it's called ping-pong focus. It is exhausting to play and never satisfying to any of the players. When your life is in your rhythm, you will be emotionally present for those whom you love. You will see your own feelings. You will savor beauty, taste your food, and laugh easily. You will even be alert in meetings. You will have new options and have more energy. And that will only happen when you pursue your authentic dream, using your most natural talents to contribute to a better future. Yours and others. Most of all it will only happen when you're driven by love instead of fear.

None of this is unrealistic. In fact, it's the most realistic way to live. When virtually all of your efforts are being invested in your real dreams, when you are using the gifts that create the most value, and when your prime motive is love, your anxiety for success, your mad panic for relief from stress begin to fade in an integrated life that offers long stretches of active contentment and deep emotional refuge to deal with the inevitable

storms of disappointment and setback. It all happens when what really matters in life matters most to you. As soon as we focus our highest energy on creating a long-term life with both value and enjoy the challenges of making whatever changes we must will gradually melt in the light of our sustained vision.

I have seen many people make seemingly unbelievable changes to successfully live their dream life. I've seen a single mother, high school drop-out get a Master's degree and become a high school principal. I've seen a multi-billion dollar company CEO leave his stock options and start a local community-based firm so he could spend more time with his family. I've seen an executive needing a heart bypass cut his weekly job time by 40% and be more successful. I've seen a young family go bankrupt and then have their own business living exactly where they want to within five years. They all did the same things. First they quit being mad or scared. Second, they got clear on what they did want. Third, they pursued a long-term plan (multi-year) to get there. This isn't self-help drivel from the *Love Guru*. These are the finding of multi-decade studies of behavioral economists. Life success and personal happiness come to those who resist overreacting to immediate circumstances and consistently invest in themselves for the long run. Believe in your future. Write your screenplay. Be the hero of your own life. It's a great movie.