



Kingsport Times News Article – by Jeff Bingham

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Set Goals So You'll Know Where You're Headed in Life

A recent speaker told a story that I think most of us can relate to. Here's my version of it.

Whenever I get in the car, I have a driving companion named Tom. Tom has an Irish accent. He charmingly calls highways "motorways" and traffic circles "roundabouts". Whenever I need to turn, Tom warns me in advance and reminds me just before the turn comes. Even when I make a wrong turn, Tom patiently tells me to turn around. He never calls me stupid or criticizes me in any way. Even when I get it wrong, Tom tells me he's "recalculating". And, when I finally successfully get to where I'm going, Tom triumphantly exclaims: "You have reached your destination." This always makes me feel like a million bucks.

It's too bad that living isn't as easy as GPS has made driving. But, Tom is just a machine, and he only tells me how to go where I want to go. Tom doesn't decide the destination.

Even when you know your destination, you can get all mixed up because of the pressures that influence us in life. Here's a real life example.

Florence Chadwick set many international swimming records, including the record for swimming the English Channel between England and France. On July 4, 1952, she attempted to become the first woman to swim 21 miles across the Catalina Channel, from Catalina Island to the California coast.

The ocean that day was ice cold, and the fog was so thick that Chadwick could hardly see the support boats following her. Sharks prowled around her; the support crew fired rifle shots to drive them away several times. Her mother and her trainer, who were in one of the support boats, encouraged her to keep going.

However, after 15 hours and 55 minutes, with only a half-mile to go, she felt she couldn't go on, and asked to be taken out of the water. She told a reporter, "I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen land, I know I could have made it." The fog obscured her goal, and she felt like she was getting nowhere.

Sound familiar? When we don't have a goal, or when the goal is obscured, we lose our sense of purpose.

So, we come to this basic question: What's your life goal? What's the destination programmed into your GPS? In life, we're in the Catalina Channel. It's cold and the sharks are circling. What's on the other side?



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Today, sit back and think about your life, not the problems of the world, but your own life and how you feel about things. Ask yourself, what's my goal? The answer for most of us, very simply, is happiness. We want to feel happy, which means that at any given moment we want to feel good about things. We talk about having the right to the pursuit of happiness, but you must pursue happiness because it sure isn't going to pursue you.

And, how do you find happiness?

An eye-opening study has been conducted and analyzed for 42 years by a psychiatrist named George Vaillant. Vaillant found that money or fulfilled ambition were not what made them happy. Instead, the ability to adapt brought them happiness.

Think about it: How well do you adapt to the things that happen in life? The question is not how much trouble you have in life. You can have very few troubles and not be able to cope with them. How do you respond to pain, to conflict, to uncertainty?

Nothing stays the same. For good or for ill, everything changes. If things are good, we want them to stay that way, but life just isn't like that. They might get better or worse, but they will change. So, if our goal is happiness, we must be able to adapt to life's changes in order to stay happy.

You may not be able to do everything you always did. If you're not working, what do you do after you wake up each day? What's your goal today? Most of us slow down some as we get older, but slowing down means getting to your goal at a slower pace, not giving up on it.

I'm not saying that's easy. The challenge, the new adventure, is to adapt and go on. But, being older should mean you have developed the ability to adapt, and thus to find happiness.

We always talk about "someday": Someday we'll do this, and someday we'll be happy. My hope is that today will be someday and that you will soon hear a voice say loud and clear, "You have reached your destination."

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