

1 Finishing Well: How Pathfinders Transform Success to Significance

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12 You are probably going to live a whole adult lifetime that wasn't available to your parents and grandparents.

13 Their life expectancy at birth was 50 years.

14 We have two lifetimes now.

15 Life I is what occurs before halftime, and Life II comes afterwards.

16 Most people have a pretty good plan for Life I, but few can see their way forward into Life II. ¶¶¶

17 Halftime is the in-between season that occurs at about age 45, plus or minus a few years.

18 It's the time I described in my first book, [Halftime](#)—the season of “now what?”

19 In our time, halftime really marks the end of Life I and the beginning of this whole new second adult season that I've identified as Life II.

20 Halftime used to be the beginning of the end.

21 Now it is the beginning of a whole new beginning: a season that for me and many others has turned out to be the richest and most meaning-filled season of all. ¶¶¶

22 [Peter Drucker](#) once told me, “The strongest insight you had in [Halftime](#) was that there is more than one lifetime.” ¶¶¶

23 Life II takes most people by surprise.

24 It's as if they woke up one day in a new world.

25 Suddenly the [landmarks](#) are different.

26 Thanks to cutting-edge technologies and the rapid advance of science, we've explored all the geographic frontiers.

27 From microbiology to outer space, we've seen some amazing things.

28 And now, it turns out, the most challenging frontiers are human and demographic.

29 Here's how Peter Drucker put it in the Foreword to my [third book](#), which sought to explore why so many capable people are having a hard time getting traction on their second halves: ¶¶¶

30 In a few hundred years, when the history of our time will be written from a long-term perspective, I think it is very probable that the most important event these historians will

see is not technology, it is not the Internet, it is not e-commerce.

31 It is an unprecedented change in the human condition.

32 For the first time—and I mean that literally—substantial and rapidly growing numbers of people have choices.

33 For the first time, they will have to manage themselves. ¶¶¶

34 Unfortunately, as Peter also observed, we are totally unprepared for it. ¶¶¶

35 Up until maybe 1900, even in the most highly developed countries, the overwhelming majority followed their father—if they were lucky.

36 If your father was a peasant farmer, you were a peasant farmer.

37 If he was a craftsman, you were a craftsman.

38 There was no such thing as upward mobility. ¶¶¶

39 And now suddenly, a very large number of people choose what they want to be.

40 And what's more, they will have more than one career. ¶¶¶

41 Most people *are* unprepared and they are searching for meaning in mid-life.

42 That it is up to us is the good news.

43 It's the bad news too.

44 For choice brings with it uncertainty and a burden of responsibility ¶¶¶.

45 **The Code Breakers**

46 *Life II takes most people by surprise.*

47 A couple of years ago, I set aside the better part of a year to embark on what I would call an interview odyssey for people seeking to crack the code on Life II.

48 I wanted to find the pioneers, the pathfinders out ahead of the rest of us in the new territory.

49 These code breakers redefine what it means to be 50 and beyond.

50 I wanted to find out what they were thinking and, more important, what they were *doing* to find meaning in Life II.

51 I interviewed more than 120 exceptional people—those making a meaningful difference in the lives of others and, as a by-product, living with passion and contagious enthusiasm. ¶¶¶

52 These weren't a random sample of American life.

53 Some were celebrities—a Heisman trophy winner, a White House chief of staff, a best-selling author, a winner of six Grammy Awards—but most were products of the so-called American Dream: all but two came from modest means, good education, finding and building on a core strength, and a sense of calling to serve others in Life II.

54 They were all multipliers who were making a lot of what they've been given to work with.

55 Far from just wasting away by themselves, they were deeply engaged in contributing to the lives of others.

56 That's where the legacy of their lives will live on.

57 It's what I call *socially productive aging*. ¶¶¶

58 So what did I find these exceptional people doing?

59 Lots of different things!
60 They were as pluralistic as America in their approaches to Life II.
61 All of them were successful in the first half of their lives and each of them did what Peter Drucker described to me as repositioning for full effectiveness and fulfillment in life's second half.
62 The patterns were similar, the outcomes diverse.
63 First, there was an intense engagement with Life I goals.
64 Then there was a period of questioning, "What now?
65 What next?"
66 Usually this was followed by a period of experimentation, a time for trying out new things characterized by what I call "low-cost probes."
67 Often these flowed into parallel careers that ran alongside their first-half lives.
68 The core of the person remained the same, an entrepreneur stayed an entrepreneur ... but the venue began to change. ¶¶¶
69 Here are five examples of people who are finishing well ¶¶¶:

70 ***The Visionary Public Servant***

71 Tom Luce is a super-lawyer who repositioned himself to follow his passion for public education. ¶¶¶
72 As we sat down, I asked Tom to tell me what parts of his life's work had given him the most satisfaction. ¶¶¶
73 "When I started the law firm," he said, "my goal was to build an institution that would outlast me.
74 From the very beginning, my goal was to build something strong enough to survive my departure, and doing that allowed me to be free, because I knew that I could step down when the time came without regrets.
75 I could leave because I'd know I'd accomplished my goals, and others would take it from there. ¶¶¶
76 "Most of us have different seasons in life," I said.
77 "Our passions change.
78 Was there a point at which you felt the law firm was becoming more institutional than entrepreneurial?" ¶¶¶
79 "It was entrepreneurial for a number of years," he said.
80 "We worked very hard at establishing our practice and acquiring clients, but I never wanted to be a managing partner, even though I did that job for many years.
81 I felt that job demanded different skills, and I was more of an entrepreneur, not an institution runner.
82 I wanted to use my entrepreneurial gifts, so turning the job of managing partner over to someone else was an easy step for me." ¶¶¶
83 Tom's halftime came when he ran unsuccessfully for Governor of Texas.
84 When people get to halftime, they have three basic choices: ¶¶¶
85 ▪ Go back: Return to Life I; in Tom's case, that would mean returning to the law firm

that bore his name. ¶¶¶

86 ▪ Go away: Retire. ¶¶¶

87 ▪ Go forward: Fulfill the destiny that Life I had prepared them for. ¶¶¶

88 Tom chose to go forward. ¶¶¶

89 It's often surprising how unexpected changes of direction can lead us back to the things we're supposed to discover.

90 In Tom's case, he realized that the thing that had given him his start in life—education—was really where he wanted to focus his service.

91 He was the son of a single mother who worked as a sales clerk in a small shop in an upscale community.

92 They lived in a modest apartment, but because they were in the Highland Park School District, Tom had the opportunity to go to some of the finest schools in the country. ¶¶¶

93 Good schooling made Tom's upward mobility possible, and he never forgot that.

94 "I first got involved in education reform," he told me, "because Ross Perot asked me to.

95 Ross was our biggest client, and he volunteered me for a couple of projects, so that's why I did it.

96 Once I got involved, I was overwhelmed by a sense of gratitude for the education I'd received.

97 But in the background was this sense of righteous anger because I'd had such a good education, and here were kids who were being crippled for life by the very schools that should be helping them to succeed." ¶¶¶

98 Tom formed two nonprofit ventures that led public schools across the United States to measure performance based on standardized tests.

99 These ventures provided ideas that were central to the Bush Administration's "No Child Left Behind Program."

100 As I write this, Tom serves as Deputy Secretary of Education for Policy and Accountability in Washington, D. C ¶¶¶.

101 ***The Nonprofit Organization Leader***

102 Frances Hesselbein, well known to readers of this quarterly, was a devoted wife and mother who repositioned herself as a nonprofit leader. ¶¶¶

103 Frances is an American icon, a genuine hero to me and countless others.

104 A winner of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian award, Frances resigned 17 years ago (she most emphatically will not use the word "retired") as head of the Girl Scouts of America.

105 After leaving GSA, she worked with Dick Schubert and me to start the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management (now the Leader to Leader Institute). ¶¶¶

106 I asked Frances, "What do you think of when I say the word *retirement*?" ¶¶¶

107 "I don't understand it," she told me, "because I come from a family that thought that was an obscene word.

108 My grandfather at 96 had not yet retired.

109 At 94 he ran for his last term of office, a four-year term.

110 At 96 he played a pipe organ recital for his friends and family." ¶¶¶
111 *Say no to the good thing to say yes to the great thing.* ¶¶¶
112 Frances says she is called to the work she is doing and "when we are called we are given
the energy to do the work."
113 Now she is a leading champion of the nonprofit cause.
114 She made 50 speeches last year and she edits this quarterly journal ¶¶¶.

115 ***The Repositioned Consultant***

116 Tom Tierney stepped down several years ago as chief executive of Bain & Company.
117 Tierney is credited with building Bain into a major consultancy.
118 An advocate of "constellation leadership," he is now devoted to building his brainchild,
the Bridgespan Group, an independent nonprofit consulting practice designed to bridge
the gap between the seemingly disparate worlds of corporate management consulting
and nonprofit organizations worldwide.
119 He recently launched Bridgestar, an Internet-based charity designed to strengthen the
leadership of nonprofit organizations. ¶¶¶
120 When we talked, I wanted to get a little background on the mental and spiritual
transformation that led to his change of direction.
121 I said, "Tom, ever since you graduated from Harvard, you've been on a fast track.
122 You've had a pretty fantastic ride, but as you've told me before, you came to the point
where you wanted to give something back.
123 How did that happen?" ¶¶¶
124 "While it was terrific to have a prominent position in a big organization like Bain," he told
me, "and while it was terrific to have that kind of money, I knew for some time that I was
going to make a transition.
125 I asked myself, *is this my life's calling?*
126 *Is this really my life's work?*
127 And when I analyzed it, I knew the answer to those questions was no. ¶¶¶
128 "I really wanted to make the world a better place," he continued.
129 "And as much as I respected and appreciated the work Bain was doing, it just wasn't
obvious to me that a \$2 billion Bain versus a \$1 billion Bain was going to satisfy that
need.
130 So I started pursuing a *parallel career*.
131 It felt exciting.
132 It felt impactful, if that's a word, using skills I already had.
133 I knew how to grow personal service businesses." ¶¶¶
134 "And best of all," I said, "it was building on your passion to make a difference in the
world." ¶¶¶
135 *Change the scene before the well runs dry.* ¶¶¶
136 "Absolutely, But I had to let go to hold on to that passion," he said.
137 "I had to let go of Bain.

138 I had to let go of the CEO thing.

139 I had to let go of the corner office.

140 But once I released my grip on those things, I was no longer encumbered by all the attributes of that, I was free to say, Now what do I really want to do?

141 What excites me?

142 Not what should excite me, but what really excites me.”

143 Tom learned that he had to say no to the good thing in order to say yes to the great thing.

144 ***The Thought Leader***

145 Jim Collins is a best-selling author of books about business management who repositioned himself to write about nonprofit management.

146 His stunning monograph, “Good to Great and the Social Sector,” only 35 pages long and only available on the Internet, is probably the only self-published work ever on the best-seller lists.

147 It’s terrific.

148 Not a wasted word.

149 Probably the most relentlessly curious person I know, Collins has morphed from teaching at Stanford to consulting at McKinsey to opening a rock climbing school.

150 He now describes himself as a “self-tenured self-endowed researcher.”

151 Along the way, he discovered his life theme and repositioned his work around it.

152 “At a fairly early age,” I said, “you found your theme.”

153 “Actually, it was three themes,” he responded.

154 “The first was teaching, the second was learning, and the third was trying to find out how social systems—meaning companies and large organizations—really work at the deepest and best levels.

155 But in all those themes, it was clear that I was interested in research and intellectual inquiry.

156 When I made that discovery, I decided to go back to teach at Stanford.

157 And an interesting thing happened.

158 All my life, until that moment, I had a nasty habit of chewing my fingernails.

159 But from the first day I taught in a Stanford Business School classroom, I never chewed them again.”

160 “Because?”

161 I asked.

162 “It was as if all my life up to that point I’d had some underlying anxiety,” he said.

163 “I was off track and hadn’t found my niche.

164 But when I got into teaching and research, everything sort of clicked into place.

165 I thought, *I’m a professor figuring out how great things work, and that’s the essence of what I am.*

166 From that point on, I locked in on the field I’m interested in.”

167 Collins at a young age has accomplished everything others might covet, so I asked,
"When I say the word retirement, what comes to mind?" ¶¶¶
168 "I understand that change is refreshing," he said, "but I don't understand retirement as a
concept.
169 In terms of economics, I could retire right now.
170 I've achieved enough that I could go off and become a full-time rock climber.
171 But the biggest reward for me is not to cash out; it's to have the opportunity to continue
my work." ¶¶¶

172 ***The Social Entrepreneur***

173 Randy Best is a serial business entrepreneur who has repositioned himself as a serious
social entrepreneur.
174 Randy has been starting businesses of one kind or another since he was a teenager.
175 He has a passion for testing himself against the limits, especially when it means
challenging the status quo.
176 "Almost every venture I've been in," he told me, "involved going against the status quo.
177 I was always trying to fundamentally change the way industry operates.
178 From the very first venture I ever attempted, there was always some significant paradigm
shift in the approach I would take." ¶¶¶
179 Over more than 20 years, Randy started dozens of companies.
180 At one point he was involved in the management of 21 businesses at the same time.
181 But one day he woke up and said, "*Why am I doing this?*
182 *Why do I have this need to start so many companies and take such risks?*
183 I suppose a psychiatrist would say that I was constantly testing myself, to compensate in
some way," he said.
184 "But I began to think how selfish I was, always putting my family at risk, always pushing
myself to see what my limits were." ¶¶¶
185 Sometimes becoming a social entrepreneur begins with one's own issues.
186 Randy is dyslexic.
187 To this day, he told me, he has never read an entire book for himself.
188 He realized that his own struggles in that area could be the foundation for a new venture
in the field of education.
189 From this emerged the Voyager program: an innovative learning initiative that has
involved him in public education in a big way. ¶¶¶
190 After mountains of research, Voyager chose to focus on the much-needed area of literacy.
191 "First, I thought, *Somebody ought to do something about this.*
192 And then I thought, *That person is me.*" ¶¶¶
193 Ready for a new challenge, Randy knew that the goal wasn't making millions of dollars for
himself but making a difference in the lives of millions of children.
194 "Fortunately," he said, "this was something I knew I could do.
195 I had a habit of sticking with things even when we were taking on water, and I could see

that reforming public education wasn't going to be easy.

196 But I knew that if I got started in this, I would never give up, and that maybe—with that kind of determination and coming at it from a slightly different angle—I could make a difference where others had failed.” ¶¶¶

197 The Voyager program, which is designed to prepare public school teachers for their classroom duties and to refocus the curriculum to make sure that kids learn how to read, has been controversial from the start.

198 But it has also been effective, and it is now being adopted by some of the largest and most troubled school districts in the country, including New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and others. ¶¶¶

199 **Conclusion**

200 In the course of these interviews, I found people who are all in charge of their own biographies.

201 There is a certain non-conformed majesty in the way they conduct their lives.

202 They are resistant to stereotypes.

203 Their identities are secure.

204 They walk to the beat of their own drummer.

205 They are characterized by freshness—by joie de vivre in the midst of changing and sometimes uncertain circumstances.

206 They don't let things grow stale.

207 They are neither bored nor boring.

208 I found that themes endure.

209 Relationships endure.

210 Skills endure.

211 Basic personalities remain stable.

212 The scene begins to change before the well runs dry.

213 It's the opposite of the famous Yeats poem.

214 The center holds!

215 They are consistent. ¶¶¶

216 When a natural season is coming to an end they go on. ¶¶¶

217 Go back?

218 Go forward?

219 Go away?

220 They always seem to find a way to go forward.