

Knitting a life, or stepping into the future

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How do you decide, among all the pressures from home, work, or personal needs, which tasks or areas will get your attention when you wake up in the morning? Taking a broader perspective, how do you decide what to do in your life? Shall you paint portraits or get an MBA, live on a beach or in a quandary?

You could say that school or work or family demands dictate what you do on a particular day, but most of us actually have some ability to choose our activities, even if it's just our attitude toward those activities. People seem to structure their days and lives in one of two ways. They either knit them or step into the future and look back.

People who knit their lives construct them moment by moment, as if knitting, stitch by stitch. They make decisions as they go, doing what feels right in the moment. The advantage is that they're living life as it occurs; they're following their instincts, neither shunning nor putting off the unpleasant. The disadvantages are that they change direction and task as life demands, and that, unless their original goal was to make a big old blanket, who knows what kind of garment will result and how happy they'll be with it in the end?

Others create their life's decision list by stepping into the future, and they look back to the now, mentally constructing the actions that brought them to this tomorrow place. For example, today they have a job they don't like. They step into the future where they're living in a happier state because they had changed careers after putting it off so long. To reach this possible future, they had to get training they had avoided, they had to drop one of their community activities and rearrange some family responsibilities. But they made it! They got a new job. All the sacrifices were worth it.

Using this technique not only helps define a visionary goal, it also lays out the steps of the plan necessary to attain it. People who achieve great things have this ability and an unswerving refusal to take their eyes off the goal. Those who can ignore life's pressures and focus only on what they want are rare. This technique also has a disadvantage. If you concentrate only on the future, the present moment contains little sweetness, and you will live a life chasing happiness instead of tasting it now.

I think it's a good idea to use both approaches. Find a goal that's important to you, get a vision of the garment you want to knit, visualize its completion, describe the steps needed to get there, and make them your action plan, the backdrop for the life you live today. As you do, follow your instincts, do what feels right, and don't let a moment pass by that holds the potential for joy or sweetness.

Imagine what a remarkable life you can construct if you have both vision and flying fingers that knit a well-woven now.