Making the Most of Life’s Significant Moments

By themselves, significant moments do not alter a person’s behavior. Events certainly can make powerful impressions on us: they stir our emotions, capture our imagination, provoke our conscience, or bring revelation. However, events do not automatically transform us, and the feelings they evoke usually are short-lived.

Leadership breakthroughs happen when we seize the opportunity presented by a significant event to adjust our thinking and to change our patterns of action. For example, having a heart attack could have brought me nothing more than pain. However, I used the experience as a springboard to change my thinking about my physical health. Prior to the heart attack, I considered exercise to be a nuisance and dietary restrictions to be a drag. After suffering the heart attack, I reevaluated the importance of a healthy lifestyle. I contemplated the implications of ignoring my health, and I thought about how poor fitness would shorten my life and would limit my influence. I modified my mental attitude toward nutrition and physical fitness, and I took practical steps to build exercise into my weekly routine.

The tragedy for many leaders is that they let major life experiences slip by without learning from them. Once a pivotal moment alerts you to the possibility for a better future, I suggest embarking on the following four steps to bring about positive change.

1) Embrace Bottom-Line Thinking

When touched by a significant life event, project yourself into the future by asking yourself the following questions: How will my life improve by making a change? What is at stake if everything remains the same?

2) Generate Reminders

I agree with Samuel Johnson: “People need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed.” For instance, physical fitness isn’t rocket science. Indeed, the formula is amazingly simple: eat healthier and exercise more often. Yet, breaking a bad habit involves reminding ourselves of the action we need to take and what’s ultimately at stake. Generating reminders may include creating visual mementos, setting calendar prompts, asking friends to provide accountability and encouragement, or celebrating progress made.

3) Find a Model

I started off as a lousy public speaker, but I was committed to improving. For that reason, I began to study, in detail, the great communicators within my circle of friends and colleagues. I listened intently whenever they spoke, and I observed their strengths. Then, I incorporated the lessons learned into my own style and delivery. Progress came slowly. In fact, I’d estimate that it took me eight years to become a polished public speaker. However, by modeling myself after other skilled communicators, I eventually gained competence myself.

4) Adjust Your Surroundings

To translate the momentary inspiration of an event into life transformation, we must limit our exposure to negative environments. The people closest to us have tremendous influence over our lives. To make the most of pivotal moments in our lives, we often need to reevaluate our relationships and to cut ties with unhealthy acquaintances.

CONCLUSION
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Pivotal moments in life stir our emotions, but they don’t necessarily affect our day-to-day motions. In fact, if you wait until you feel like making a change, then you’ll never experience personal growth as a leader. The next time you’re touched by a significant life event, look for ways to adjust your thinking and behavior so that instead of temporary enlightenment, you experience lasting breakthrough. Remember: leaders develop daily, not in a day.