

Where are you, Joe? (The art of being present!)

I have been given many gifts in life and one of the greatest was the relationship I had with a mentor named Joe Charbonneau. I saw him speak at my first CMAA Conference in Nashville. Many of you might have met him. He was fun, funny and made a difference in many lives. He became a close friend. Joe and Dawn would visit us in Vancouver. We would visit them in Texas and had many adventures together. If you ever had the opportunity to see Joe speak you will know why it was such a thrill for me to have him sitting in our living room talking to our kids about their futures and just generally making them feel like stars! When I changed careers, he mentored me and took a special interest in my career and in my life. Although Joe didn't consider himself to be coach, I can tell you that he was! As I write this article I realize that it is almost ten years to the day since his sudden death.

On our last in person visit together, he gave me a book that he said was one that had influenced his life in a powerful way. It was called "The Greatest Salesman in the World", written by Og Mandino.

There was a message in the book that said in essence: "Don't think about your family when you are in the market place and don't think of the market place when you are with your family." The story took place in biblical times, so clearly it was before e-mails and text messaging, but the lesson is still a good one. If being present could make you stand out in those days, just imagine what it could do for you in these days.

We live in an age of distraction! We live in an age of information overload. We live in an age where doing and being what everyone else is doing and being seems important to so many. We live in an age of sound bites. We live in an age of being everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

We often use Forrest Gump in our presentations. He is a fictional character that lived an amazing life. He was always in one place. Whatever he was doing, wherever he was, whoever he was with, he was always totally present. He could truly only focus on one thing at a time and although we may look at that as a shortcoming, or an illustration of being simple, there is a brilliance to it that we could all benefit from.

How are you at being present? If you decide to work toward being wherever you are, here are some of the benefits that you and the important people in your life will receive.

The Gift!

Being present is a gift! That is why it is called the present! I received the gift of Joe. When you are truly present for someone you are giving a gift. You are also receiving one! As a leader, when you give one of your followers your undivided attention it becomes a much bigger gift than you probably know. When a child or spouse is given your true presence, it is a gift. If you enjoy giving gifts, give that one! Being present for you is also a gift. Try giving and receiving that gift sometime!

Focus!

Multi-tasking is a popular concept. I am not sure if I'm not a big fan of it because I am not very good at it, or if I am not very good at it because I am not a big fan of it, but it flies in the face of being present and focused. If in life we focus on one of our gifts with little or no distraction we become pretty competent and move toward mastery. Have you ever had a conversation with someone who is multi-tasking? They must have the illusion that they can do all the things they are doing and still listen well. The other possibility is that they really are not listening or don't find the conversation with you important enough to give their full attention to it. If it is true that in life we get what we focus on, the multi-tasker might think they can focus on five things at once. Maybe they don't really get any of them. They probably didn't get much out of their conversation with you.

Productivity!

Not being present gets in the way of productivity, quality and safety. Perhaps an enemy of being present is the belief that we have to get so many things done. How did we decide that instead of doing the things we are good at really well, we should trade that for doing thousands of things at merely an acceptable level? Are we really being more productive because we do a bigger volume of things? How can we help the people we lead to be more focused on what's truly important?

Peace!

The act of being present can be very peaceful. It is good to be peaceful every once in a while in a hectic, noisy, busy life. I have found that even finding 5 minutes in a day where I can go somewhere and sit quietly without doing anything is peaceful and energizing. There are so many things going around in our minds that just shutting it off for five minutes might be difficult at first, but when you can just learn to be present, you will find that you can be present almost all of the time, if that is a goal.

It is a conscious goal for me to be present with my family, my friends and my clients. Sometimes I am better at it than others. When you lose a friend unexpectedly, it gives you reason to be more present with the ones you still have.

Make the present your gift to you and others!