

## Highlights:

[Looking at coworkers a bit further along the path that they may be traveling]

- Don't get me wrong, they aren't bad people, but their careers have changed them, altered them physically and emotionally: they explode with anger over insignificant inconveniences; they are overweight and out of shape; they scowl with furrowed brows and complain constantly as if the world is conspiring against them, or they feign sham optimism which fools no one; they are on their second or third or fourth(1) marriages; and they almost all seem lonely. Utterly alone is a sea of yes-men and women. Don't even get me started on their health issues.
- I'm talking serious health issues: obesity, gout, cancer, heart attacks, high blood pressure, you name it. These guys are plagued with every ailment associated with stress and anxiety. Some even wear it as a morbid badge of honor, as if it's noble or courageous or something. A coworker, a good friend of mine on a similar trajectory, recently had his first heart attack-at age thirty.

[Relationships and sex]

- I look at him with half-scorn and half-envy. Although he was married at eighteen, Ryan has been divorced for five years, the same amount of time I've been married. I have it in my head that he is living the ideal life: having fun, doing interesting things, dating attractive women. I, on the other hand, am hardly having sex at all. My primary sexual relationship is with my left hand.
- Don't let Facebook fool you. There is one, and only one, accurate relationship status: It's Complicated.
- [In reference to JFM's failed marriage] I just sort of drifted through the relationship, my priorities far off course.
- For many years, we and most of the world have associated with people based on propinquity. The people who are geographically closest to me are, well closest to me. For most of my life, I've spent most of my time with people whose largest commonality is proximity: schoolmates, coworkers, acquaintances, networking buddies, and the like. Most of these haven't been bad people, but other than location, we've had very little in common. We typically don't share similar values or beliefs, and let's face it, values and beliefs are the bedrocks of any meaningful relationship. And in many cases we didn't even share any common interests.
- Think of meeting women in bars. If you don't even like bars, then your commonalities aren't even things you enjoy, which is how relationships begin, with little in common, and then we wonder why they don't work out.
- We're no longer forced to find a soulmate or friend at the corner bar.
- Because most of the time we develop relationships out of convenience, many relationships are bound to fail. I mean *fail* as in most relationships are *alright*: they're good, but they're not outstanding. That's because most relationships - the one's predicated on convenience - lack

the traits necessary to build a successful bond with another individual, important traits like supportiveness and trust and encouragement.

- Imagine making love with the man or woman you love, unencumbered by the trappings of the noisy world around you, fully in the moment, two bodies, flesh, and hearts as one.

#### [Consumerism]

- In the midst of all the seventy-hour work weeks, all the time spend on so-called achieving, I didn't *forget* what's important, I simply *don't know* what's important anymore. And so here I am, Sunday afternoon, counting the cracks in my wounds, sulking in my new bachelor pad, more confused than ever.
- But even while Rome is burning, there's somehow time for shopping at IKEA.
- Much like the rest of my life, this apartment looks good, but it feels empty.
- I have to wonder, is this what my eighteen-year-old self would have wanted a decade after his emancipation? Sadly, yes, this is exactly what he yearned for: material possessions, a well-paying job, an expensive car, this lifestyle, ostensible success-comforted by conformity, not worried about the emotional price tag, nor the waves of hurt left in his wake. Look around. On the surface there's nothing wrong, but I'm not convinced.
- Consumerism represented all of the things I wanted but was too poor to afford as a kid.
- There is blood on the flag, our blood, and in today's world of achieving and earning and endlessly striving for more, the American Dream really just seems to imply that we are fat and in debt, discontented and empty, every man an island, leaving a void we attempt to fill with more stuff.
- The act of ownership is what stressed me out, kept me from feeling free.
- Our possessions possess us. All the things I owned kept the back of my mind activated. I used to sit around and feel weighed down by all the stuff in my life. I'd worry about everything I had, thinking 'I've got this much, so now I need more-I need to level it out: I have the TV, so I need the DVD player; I have the garage, so I need a nice car to fill it; I have this, so I need that.' It's a never-ending cycle, a cold war with yourself.
- As Americans, our consumption has transformed from necessary to compulsory.
- I was never happy with the things I was spending my money on, never happy with where my money was going.
- All my energy was going towards the *stuff* I owned, rather than toward the people in my life.
- Discussing how to get rid of our stuff answers only the *what* side of the equation, but not the *why*; the *action*, but not the *purpose*, the *how-to*, but not the significantly more important *why-to*. In other words, the *what* is relatively easy.
- I don't own many things, but everything I own adds real value.
- Once it's all stowed away in carefully labeled cardboard containers, Ryan is going to upack items only as he needs them for the next twenty-one days. At the end of three weeks he plans to do one of three things with everything remaining in boxes: sell, donate, trash.
- What I've found is that when I remove the just-in-case items from my life, I free up the space they consume - the physical and mental spaces they occupy. More importantly, I haven't missed any of the hundreds of items I've gotten rid of - the stacks of magazines, the extra

kitchenware, the clothes I hadn't worn in months, the extra coats, the extra shoes, and all the extra junk that cluttered my world *just in case* I needed it.

- There's myriad TV shows and websites and clubs all dedicated to collecting things - not creating things, but collecting them.
- Now, before I spend money, I ask myself one question, is this worth my freedom?

#### [Travel]

- He says that travel is his passion, but not just any kind of travel: full submersion into a culture, learning everything from scratch. Thereby, he moves to a new country every four months; once he gets comfortable, it's time to go, time to find somewhere new. The kicker, though, is that he doesn't get to pick the country. Instead, his readers vote on his next home country at his website, *Exile Lifestyle*, wherein every four months he tallies the votes, packs his carry-on bag, and hops a plane, knowing almost nothing about his new homeland - a sexy, made-for-the-movies lifestyle.
- I figured you had to make a bunch of money *before* you could travel. In fact, until last year, my passport was empty.
- Maybe Colin's lifestyle is best suited for, well, guys like Colin, guys younger than me, cool Gen-Yers who want to travel the world unencumbered by their things, not people like me who've climbed the corporate ladder, who've proven they can function in a status-quo world, who enjoy owning a desk and a couch and a kitchen table and enough kitchenware to have a handful of friends over to share a homecooked meal.

#### [Careers]

- [Very successful entrepreneurs] They all shared one thing in common: they never leave. Once you make a million dollars, a million is no longer enough. So then you have to make five million. And then fifty. And eventually you've spent more than half your life simply trying to earn money. But for what?
- What I've learned from a decade in the corporate world is that individual betterment has little to do with inbred talent. Progress requires practice and dedication and, to a certain extent, a healthy obsession. Hence, passion is a mixture of love and obsession.
- [The wrong questions we ask] *How do you earn a paycheck? How much money do you make? What is your socioeconomic status? And based on that status, where do I fall on the socioeconomic ladder compared to you? Am I a rung above you? Below you? How should I judge you? Are you even worth my time?*
- Being good at something doesn't mean it aligns with my values.
- Whatever you do for a living, I think your level of passion can be measured by the label you give your work. People tend to designate one of three labels to their work: job, career, mission. Which do you use?
- Careers are dangerous because people invest so much of themselves into their careers that they establish an identity and a social status based upon where they work and what they do for a living.
- We give our occupations far greater societal worth than they deserve.

- [In pursuing the “American Dream”] Then we get stuck on the corporate ladder, and before we know it we’re too high up to climb down, so high that even looking down is a terrifying proposition.
- People who do what they love for a living tend to refer to their work as their mission.
- Instead of going viral, I focus on adding value. Habitually, before every tweet, every status update, every essay I write, I ask myself, *Am I Adding Value?*

#### [Lifestyle]

- I want something different, a deliberate life.
- Minimalism has allowed me to eliminate the other distraction from my life, things that, when you step back and look at the big picture, just don’t matter as much as we think they do.
- Because I’ve been able to get rid of so many material things, I don’t get as attached to my possessions anymore, which means I can take more risks because I’m not spending money on a bunch of junk I don’t need.
- The first jump - that’s the most difficult part. Because you’ll always have some people who say things like, ‘Why would you do that?’ or ‘How *can* you do that?’ or ‘If you could do that thing you want to do - write that novel or become an entrepreneur or travel the world or whatever - then everyone would be doing it.’
- Now what I’ve found is that everyone who embraces the simple-living lifestyle has their own flavor of minimalism.
- Like me, Leo, who’s also divorced (now remarried), used to be overweight, stressed out, unhealthy, uninspired, dispassionate, a cog in the corporate wheel.
- True passion arises after you’ve put in the long hours necessary to become a skilled craftsman, a skillset you can then leverage to have an impact, to gain autonomy and respect, to shape and control your destiny.
- For any dimension of life, for any skillset - be it exercise, ballroom dancing, or writing - a person must be willing to drudge through the drudgery to find the joy on the other side.
- TV and Internet and Facebook and everything else passive are fine in small doses.
- My priorities are what I do each day, the small tasks that move forward the second and minute hands on the clock. These circadian endeavors are my *musts*. Everything else is simply a *should*.
- I can now spend my day focusing on that which is truly important - health, relationships, writing - instead of re-organizing my basement. Once the excess stuff is out of the way, staying organized is much easier anyway; it’s like getting organized without the stress of actual organizing.
- I no longer own piles of books, but I read more than before.
- [Questions to ask yourself] *What is truly important in life? Why am I discontented? Who is the person I want to become? How will I define my own success?*
- With my life less weighty, I feel exhilarated - electric, like the digital billboards that besiege the cityscape surrounding me now.
- [Referring to anchors] For me it was all kinds of things: Material possessions were the most obvious anchors, a sort of physical manifestation of what was holding me back. But also things like my mortgage, my car payment, most of my bills, and all my debt. Massive, terrible debt.

Which I've been chipping away at for a couple years now. And then there were - and still are - other things that are keeping me from freedom, like relationships and my career.

- If you are not happy with your situation, no matter how comfortable it is, you won't ever feel secure.
- Once we extinguish our outside requirements for the things that won't ever make us truly secure - a fat paycheck, an ephemeral sexual relationship, a shiny new widget - we can shepherd our focus toward what's going on inside us, no longer worshipping the things around us.
- Take it from me and my first-hand authoritative experience - my empirical evidence, as it were. At age thirty, I earn less money than I did when I was nineteen, and yet I've never been happier. My happiness is derived from my experiences, from my relationships, from my health - not from my income.
- The point, however, is not to limit myself. My journey toward a simpler life has never been about deprivation. Rather, I limit myself in the short term so I can learn more about me, learn about my psyche, and ultimately identify what is meaningful in my life.
- First experiment: getting rid of his television.
- Human beings used to have precious interstitial zones in which we could find momentary solace: airports, checkout lines, waiting rooms, and other places were transient sanctuaries in which we could bask in reverie. This is no longer the case.
- [Smartphones] My usage will be more intentional than it was before; my phone will be a tool, not an appendage.
- ...he said there were three things that significantly changed his life: establishing habits he enjoyed, simplifying his life, and living with no goals.
- After removing the stress from my life, I partook in exciting new endeavors that I likely wouldn't have attempted under goal's regime.
- Sometimes we have to contribute to help other people, but sometimes we need to contribute to help ourselves.
- Ultimately what we're doing is attempting to establish the place in which we live as our home, an extension of ourselves. And so the logic goes: the more I buy, the more this place is my home. A home is a home for one reason: we call it home. The stuff doesn't make it your home - you do. Sometime it helps to keep one object prominently displayed as a reminder that you are home.

#### [Quotes]

- There is more joy and fulfillment in pursuing less than can be found in pursuing more.
- For many years, I've confused *passion* with *excitement*.
- Why the hell are you so happy lately?
- The things you own end up owning you.
- It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything.
- Once something becomes a part of your identity - once it becomes a part of you - it's hard to shed.
- I think the *act of collecting* is dangerous.

- I think meeting people should be more deliberate. I've met most of my closest friends through the Internet.
- A *career* is one of the most dangerous thing you can have if you want to find fulfillment.
- *Must one unplug from reality to properly observe reality?*
- The truth is, you can skip the pursuit of happiness and just be happy.
- Five most important areas of life: health, relationships, passion, growth, and contribution.
- We stopped talking about living and started living.
- Happiness + Growth + Contribution = Success

#### [Society]

- Our culture, myself included, seems to be way too focused on "What do you do?" with very little, if any, emphasis on "What are you passionate about?"
- {Regarding the holidays} The problem is that we've been conditioned to associate this joyous time of year - the mittens and decorations and the family activities - with purchasing material items.

#### [Reflections]

- Identity
  - **Be careful about what you allow to become a part of your identity, because once something becomes a part of your identity, it becomes a part of you and becomes very hard to shed**
  - In my life, I need to work on removing the physical objects from my identity and minimizing the physical and mental space of the objects that I do make a part of my identity
    - for me, these large objects seem to be my **biking gear** , everything else like laptop and clothes are fairly compact
  - focus on capturing memories and maintaining your identity in a digital form
    - music
    - photos
    - reflections
- Treat the act of collecting as dangerous
- focus on creating, not collecting