

LeaderPerfect Newsletter

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Getting Back To The Well-Spring

by Dr. Mike Armour

Early in my intelligence career I specialized in SERE — survival, evasion, resistance, and escape. As the name implies, SERE is about finding yourself behind enemy lines and getting back alive.

Of necessity much SERE training is in the field. And it's rough, tough, and rugged.

But there is also a classroom component to help students "think survival." Classes present students with a variety of survival scenarios. For each scenario the student must determine a proper course of action.

Which Trail To Take?

One question we used to put to students was this one. "You're in a semi-arid area and your water supply is running low. You are making your way along a narrow trail which is little more than a slightly worn footpath. Suddenly the trail splits in front of you. Which direction should you go?"

Over the years, few students found the "textbook answer" to that question. They struggled endlessly with possible rationales for following the trail either to the right or to the left.

But going to the right or the left was the wrong response. The far better course would be to reverse direction. In arid regions, you see, animal paths (and human trails, too, for that matter) converge as they near water. Or viewed the other way, they diverge as they move away from water. So if the trail forks in front of you, water is behind you.

Diverging Trails

Recently I've been thinking about life in terms of diverging trails. Year by year we make life decisions that take us long one trail, then another. But one day we begin to sense that life is becoming arid. Diverging trails have taken us further and further from the well-spring that once gave us meaning and fulfillment. Suddenly we find ourselves at a fork in the road, facing still another life-choice, but uncertain which path to take.

Often the correct choice is to reverse course. To get back to the well-spring of life. To renew long-neglected intimacies. To reinvigorate fading dreams. To rekindle our passion for what really counts. To rebuild. To renew. To recharge.

One reason I love executive coaching is that I'm constantly helping people do that very thing. And drawing them back to the well-springs of life regularly reminds me to do the same.

The Best Move Is Not Always Forward

The world keeps telling us to press on. To press forward. To press ahead. But even the hardiest desert creatures must return to water occasionally.

Sometimes the way forward is to step back. To regain our bearing and balance. To retap our deepest values.

Otherwise we end up like Ziggy in one of my favorite cartoons. It pictures him in front of a large locator sign that reads, "You are here . . . for no apparent reason."

If that's a familiar feeling of late, then the forks in the road have distanced you too far from your well-spring. Revisit the fount. Drink deep. Refresh your spirit. Then move out once more.

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