

The Over-Stuffed Portfolio

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“If I had known what it would be like to have it all, I might have settled for less” Lily Tomlin

Well, Hello there! I’m back! Yes it has been a while and I have been remiss of late in sharing my own adventures (and mis-adventures) in Life-Shifting! I’d like to be able to say that I’ve been on a long retreat or, better yet, a sabbatical, vacation or other equally socially acceptable excuse for a long disappearance. But alas, the truth is much simpler and much less impressive: I’ve been busy! Yes, BUSY...working, studying, writing, learning, playing, and of course, procrastinating.

You see, I’m one of those people I like to call “portfolio people”. There are many of us these days...and more and more are joining the ranks of what is truly a post-modern approach to life: no longer does one career, one job, one hobby, one degree, one homeland (even!) suffice. No, we of the burgeoning portfolio tribe are CONSTANTLY on the move, adding arrows to our quiver of life skills, talents and experiences. Perhaps it is one more phenomenon that can be attributed to the restless nature of aging boomers (though my younger colleagues seem to develop the “portfolio disease” right out of college!. However, given the alternative—a full-time job (yikes!)—I, for the most part, am a major advocate of living the “portfolio life”.

Living a “portolio life” basically means breaking out of the bounded belief structures and cultural norms that have us convinced that we should settle for one job, one career, one set of social groups, one spiritual tribe, etc. Yet, just as the idea of “retirement” is beginning to feel extremely anachronistic to today’s forever young and active “oldsters” (sixty is the new “middle age” right?), so too are the one-trick pony beliefs around professional life, social life/circles, even spirituality. Why should we settle for just one job, or one company, or even one religion during our limited and oh so precious time on the planet? And so, many of my clients—and myself included—have decided to broaden our horizons, heading off to explore the hinterlands of our inner and outer landscapes in order to learn, grow and build a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted “Portfolio” life. We are part-timers, volunteers, consultants, coaches, business owners, artists, and sometimes, all of the above (most portfolio folks wind up working much MORE than one full-time job...hey, but it is a CHOICE!).

To this development, in general, I say, all to the good. Human beings are not drone bees, or annual begonias meant to flower once, to live one glorious season, flowering and dying all in one pot. We are meant to learn, grow, flower, die and be re-born anew many many times during our sojourn across the span of a life. Looking back over the past few months that I have been on hiatus from this blog, the days and weeks have been fuller than ever: I’ve become a certified vinyasa yoga instructor, created new life-shifting workshops, led my first yoga/spiritual retreats to far-flung lands, tended to the needs of my family (aging/ill parent, etc), deepened my relationship with key loved ones,

supported a growing cohort of corporate and private clients, and “almost” finished my book proposal. It has been a rich, rewarding and very full time. Yes, full. Too full in fact, for such a non-entity of a word. I think “over-stuffed” might be more like it. Or perhaps, “packed to the gills”!?

So, as I reflect on my time away from this blog, and feel the blessing of my return (for me it is a gift to share in this way, and I hope for my readers as well!), I am struck by the downside of success: the portfolio is only so big and can only carry so much. It may have multiple pockets and hidden crevasses in which to stuff a few more activities, workshops, or yoga classes, BUT it is finite, fragile, and breakable. As am I. As are you.

At some point, in order to add something new to the portfolio, we have to give something else up. This is a hard pill to swallow in a culture where most of us, if not all, are addicted to more, more, more. I remember reading a rather wonderful book called [“There Must be More Than This”](#) by Judith Wright, in which she very smartly outlines the problem with a culture in which it is considered “the norm” to constantly seek more stuff, more pleasure, more ways to keep busy. Yet, even Judith in all her wisdom didn’t seem to notice that her book ITSELF was representative of the very thing which she was chastising. Her book pointed out that there are “bad” things to want more of—shopping, TV, Internet, chocolate, etc—and “good” things to want more of—spiritual learning, meaningful relationships, creative arts, volunteering, etc—yet no where does she acknowledge that it is still all about MORE, MORE, MORE.

So where do we get off the treadmill of “more”—be it the good “more” or the bad “more (and the judgment of the difference seems to me at times a bit condescending—given that I LOVE chocolate and get some great spiritual teachings from the internet...)? It is a complicated, if luxurious question: How do we know when the portfolio is over-stuffed?

Well, the good doctor is humbled by this one. Not sure I can give you a good answer but I will share with you how I make the call: by looking for that sweet spot, that balance between the MORE going out and the MORE coming in. Ask yourself these kinds of questions:

1. How much of your time is devoted to giving to others?
2. How much of your time is devoted to giving to you?
3. How much of your time is spent on those and what you love?
4. How much of your time is spent on those who love you?
5. How much of your time is spent just on “taking care of business” (e.g. bills, bills, and bills!)
6. How much of your “business” is aligned with questions 1-4 above?

Where do you come out? Is your portfolio over-stuffed, over-flowing or leaking a bit from the side? (e.g. lost time, lost energy, lost health?). In the past few months I’ve been blessed by the addition of many new arrows in the quiver of my portfolio. For this I am grateful, yet I also know that I have missed the gift of this blog and am acutely aware of the price we pay when we over-stuff the portfolio. It is time for me to empty my bag a

bit. Make some room to move around. Throw out some of the tried and true contents that are hiding, stuffed, crumpled and out-of-date towards the bottom. Spring is coming anyway...so the time is right for taking stock of what's in and what's out. Most of all, it is time to let go of a very insidious belief: that I (or you) can do/have it all. We can't.

So here's to Spring cleaning and perhaps a new idea to ADD to the portfolio (once there is some room in there): **LESS IS MORE**. Is there room in your portfolio for this one?

Cheers!

Dr J