

The Twelve Principles of Personal Leadership

Principle #8 – Simple Diversions – Part 2

-One Leader's Perspective

By Greg L. Thomas



It has been estimated that the average person only uses 10% of the capacity of their physical brain. What is the other 90% for? Some scientists believe that the memory storage capacity of the brain may be up to 1,000 terabytes. I believe it was provided for us to develop and grow through a wide variety of lifetime experiences and challenges. Years ago I complimented a friend of mine on something new he had done... *actually* he had performed it very well! His humorous reply to me was, "Are you kidding? I've got talents I haven't even discovered yet." This is true for all of us, but unfortunately most of us only learn enough to survive or to get slightly ahead of others. In [part 1](#), I mentioned how my High

School in the early 1970's categorized students into groups depending where they thought people should fit in society. The truth is that every culture or society on earth attempts to do the same thing to you. Depending on your family's social status, ethnicity, skin color, neighborhood, educational level, income level or influential connections there is a *default* position for you in society. If you just go with the flow you will end up there because it is where you are *expected* by others to fit. Once you determine to break through that limitation you will immediately discover strong *resistance* because you are no longer playing by the unspoken rules. Often times this resistance comes from those we love and trust the most. Sadly, because of defeatism or plain jealousy some will resent our efforts to improve our lives. The *blessing* that the United States has been to the world is that it offers the greatest opportunity for any individual to reach their highest potential if they have the will and desire to transcend their birth status. The American republic was founded on the concept of encouraging the "pursuit of happiness". However, it is our responsibility to *pursue* it.

Yet, why don't more people make an effort to change their lives and reach their greatest potential? For many people the default position that society has established for them is comfortable and seems... natural. If everyone, including yourself is content right where you are there is little possibility of change or growth. What does all this have to do with simple diversions? More than you may think...

Again, if we *believe* we are where we are supposed to fit in, and are content with that role, we will usually stop learning and growing. Thus the human mind with *all* of its extra capacity will go undeveloped and void of new experiences or opportunities. By bringing into our lives a few

simple diversions we expand our knowledge and expertise about hobbies or studies that interest us. Obviously these simple diversions should be positive, and in concert with our values and morals.

A number of years ago I joined the American Rose Society (ARS). I have a deep love and interest in roses I inherited from my mother. I am not interested in exhibiting roses in shows or at local conventions but I am interested in the cultivation and propagation of roses. This is one of *my* simple diversions and I enjoy it immensely. After I joined the ARS and I began to read its publications I attended their annual Rose Show in Cleveland in 2001. The exhibition was beautiful but I personally found the various seminars to be of the most interest to me. I also learned something that caught my attention. Many physicians and other professionals were avid members of the ARS. Why? Growing roses offered them a challenging and fulfilling way to release the stress of their careers when they went home. After a long nerve-racking day of practicing medicine, or law, they enjoyed coming out to the yard and cultivating their roses by spraying, fertilizing, trimming, or hybridizing these beautiful plants. Their reward is observing the slight changes that occur every day and having an assortment of beautiful roses in their yard, in their homes or at the exhibition hall. Since the great majority of ARS members are not doctors or lawyers, it is obvious that people from virtually every walk of life enjoy this simple diversion.

So what is *your* simple diversion? Perhaps it is fishing, scrapbooking, hiking, rubberstamping, stamp-collecting, wood working, or one of hundreds of positive activities. When we participate in these diversions they refresh our minds and bring pleasure because we *enjoy* spending time with them. But, there is another benefit! Often times these so-called simple diversions can grow into a *passion* that leads us to another career, or becoming an expert in a unique field or it may even lead us to our true calling... where we should have been all along!

You never know what your hobby or interest may lead to! Every year the *All-America Rose Selections* (AARS) are announced to the public. The AARS is an association of leading American wholesale growers and rose breeders. It supports a two-year rose trial in 20 gardens located in about every climate condition in the United States. Its goal is to draw attention to exceptional new roses that perform well. One of the 2008 award winners is named *Dream Come True*. This excellent rose was bred by an amateur rose breeder, a retired doctor who lives in Ohio. Remember an amateur is defined as someone who does something for *pleasure* rather than for pay. However, once we discover our *passion*, and do what we really love, it often leads to monetary rewards.

How often are simple diversions necessary? First of all we should take a number during the work day! We call them “breaks” and many people skip them because they want to be more productive. Actually the opposite is true. Being focused on one single activity for too long can become monotonous and stifle creativity. In some careers it can even become a safety hazard. In contrast, a short break refreshes our mind by changing our view and providing new smells or sounds or tastes to stimulate the brain. This gives the mind an opportunity to “reboot” so when we return to work we can have a fresh perspective.

We also need to have a weekly break. History shows that many advanced and productive cultures rested at least one day in a seven day week. The reason for this is simple. Mankind tends to have workaholic tendencies and will often overwork unless it recognizes and observes a day of rest. Life is much more than work, and if we don't take time out to ponder the purpose of life and our role in it, we become *voluntary* slaves to a workaholic culture. As a child it was easier to take time to rest than it is today. In the 1960's many areas of the United

States had laws that virtually *forced* people to rest on Sunday. For many, it was a *family day* for a large number of Americans as they gathered for religious observances, watching sporting events, playing in the yard, and enjoying a large meal. Though I don't think anyone should be *forced* to cease working on a certain day in a democratic society, we lost some important benefits in its decline. In the 21st century, it's all about making money and materialism. People work seven days a week because they can. They make the mistake of thinking that more money will provide them happiness or fulfillment. Many parents falsely believe that working obsessively to buy more... will *show* their children that they love them. Actually, spending time with them in religious observance, or playing, or conversation or sharing a meal together will show them you love them. It is important that we "get off the merry-go-round" of a hectic world one day a week to reflect on things like *why* we work, *why* we have a family, or *why* we were put in this world. If we don't see the need for this, and choose to *reserve* this important time for ourselves, we miss out on the richness of this weekly diversion. For most of us it is the only time *left* in our frenzied modern society that safeguards time for family, self-reflection and mediation.

Make sure that you take at least one day off a week to spend some personal time with your loved ones and you own personal needs. Even the great religions of the world stress the importance of taking off one day a week for personal time and spiritual reflection. A balanced mind needs not only productive work... but recreation, rest, companionship with others, and often a refreshing diversion from routine tasks.

How about your vacations? I have often heard managers or executives say something like "I didn't take a vacation last year" or "I haven't had a vacation in 5 years"! Who are we trying to impress? I can assure you that 10 or 20 years from now your spouse and children will not be bragging what a great success you have become. However, what they will remember is that "we never took vacations together as a family". If you have convinced yourself that you are too busy to take a vacation, you frankly are over-compensating your ego! If you have convinced yourself that skipping your vacation will help you to "get ahead" or be recognized by others, stop deluding yourself. If that is what it takes to "get ahead" in your organization it is time to post the Emancipation Proclamation on the employee bulletin board. Then find another job where one's skills and talents are appreciated more than how many hours they log in. You have earned it...you need it...demand it...take your vacation time!

A few years ago I saw a television biography of John Adams, an early American president on television. I am sure it was *fictionalized* as they showed his family gathered around the old man in his final moments. In this television drama the final words of the ancient patriot rang out loud and clear. He shouted, "WORK!" "WORK!" and then he expired. The intent of this scene was to show the deep Puritan roots that were embedded in Adam's character and how the concept of hard work permeated his entire life. As I watched this I thought, "How sad". There were so many *better* things to say or think at the time. Work is important, and it should be fulfilling, but it shouldn't be the most important thing in life. Work is also not a substitute for meaningful relationships. This leads us to the next chapter and principle.

In conclusion, take the time to examine your life *right now* and make sure you are achieving a work/life balance by choosing to *reserve* time for your simple diversions. This important step will help you to reach your full potential.

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About the author:

Greg has an extensive thirty-five years experience in public speaking and has spoken to hundreds of audiences worldwide. Greg has a Master of Arts degree in Leadership from Bellevue University, where he also has served as an adjunct professor teaching courses in business management and leadership since 2002. His first book, [52 Leadership Tips](#) (That Will Change How You Lead Others) was published in 2006 by WingSpan Press. His second book, [Making Life's Puzzle Pieces Fit](#) was published in March 2009. Both are available at amazon.com. Greg is also the president of [Leadership Excellence, Ltd](#) and a Managing Partner of the Leadership Management Institute. Leadership Excellence, Ltd. effectively builds individuals and organizations to reach their highest potential through enhanced productivity and personal development using a number of proven programs. He is also the president and founder of [weLEAD Incorporated](#).