



### **IF I WERE A RICH MAN...**

Sorry for starting this column off making you silently hum that familiar tune from *Fiddler on the Roof!*

Last week while I was waiting for the dealership to complete the oil change on my car, I struck up a conversation with the woman who was sitting next to me as we watched a clip promoting a television show called "Secret Millionaire". The premise of the show is that someone with money goes incognito into an impoverished community and agrees to give away hundreds of thousands of dollars to improve the lives of those in the community. She told me that she loved that show and it inspired her to see someone giving back like that and hoped to do something like that herself one day.

In the course of our chat, I also learned that she is going through a divorce, recently filed for bankruptcy and had been struggling with her teenage son who has a drug addiction. When the service rep entered the waiting area and began recounting the necessary repairs to her car, I pretended to be engrossed in the magazine on my lap but I could feel the tension building long before he told her that the repairs would exceed \$3700, money I was sure she didn't have. She authorized the service department to handle the one safety issue that otherwise left the car unsafe to drive.

As we continued to pass the time waiting for our respective vehicles to be ready, she told me that she had been a homemaker for the past 23 years and that she was struggling with a new sales job she had just taken since she has to support herself. She had been a top sales rep for Xerox before her children were born and she had taken the sales job since it was the only job she knew how to do.

Just like I've asked so many of you, I asked her what she longed to do, if money wasn't a concern. I find that whenever I ask people this question, they always have an answer on the tip of their tongues. Everyone knows what they **wish** they were spending their time on. Sometimes it's a sport or a hobby or a charitable mission or a dream they long ago put up on a shelf because someone labeled it as "unrealistic".

Her answer was that she'd like to work with women whose husbands had cheated on them, to help them recover their self-esteem, like she had had to do and to help mothers whose children have a drug addiction. I asked her what she was doing to make that dream a reality.

That's when she looked at me as if I had three heads. It seems to be the response I get most frequently when I ask someone why they aren't doing what they really wish they were. Her subsequent statement also echoed a version of what I hear most from people who aren't following their dreams, "What would I do for money? Everyone knows I wouldn't be able to support myself and my kids doing that."

I wondered if it was really true that she would be unable to support herself and her children doing something she was passionate about. Why do people assume that their passions are incompatible with economic sustenance? So, I figured I had nothing to lose. I asked her what it would take for her to be willing to do what she was passionate about. Her answer, like many I've heard before, was that when she had enough money saved she would think about doing it. "How much money?" I asked. She said, "I don't know. I guess 'enough'." I pressed a little further, how was she supporting herself and her children now and learned that she was living with her mother since her husband refused to pay his child support.

I asked whether her mother would throw her and her children out of the house if she didn't bring home "enough" money. Would her children be forced to become shoeless beggars? Of course not. I asked whether she had thought about just staying with her husband while he was having an affair and doing the work she loved. She said no because she didn't want her kids to see her living a lie and selling herself out. Can you guess my next question? Why was it better for her children to see her selling herself out to a job she hated, while she waited to garner "enough" money to do what made her happy?

My conversation partner became a little aggravated at that point and said that if she had enough money then she would do exactly that, but until then it was better to teach her kids responsibility and the value of hard work. I'll admit it, I was pushing the edge of a conversation with a relative stranger when I asked her what exactly the value was of the hard work she was modeling. And why the lesson for her children about responsibility couldn't be modeled in doing what brought her happiness instead of modeling responsibility as a miserable duty that must be endured to earn money so one could then be "happy".

I reminded her of how much she admired the Secret Millionaires, how each of them made a point of finding out what really made others' lives better and made their contribution doing exactly that. Did she really need to wait until she was a millionaire to be able to make her contribution? Couldn't she do that in addition to (or instead of) holding a sales job? I wasn't encouraging her to be a loafer and live in her mother's house forever or to leave her children without shoes or with hungry bellies. What I was doing was questioning the falsity that is only the dollar value or enormity of our contribution that makes it worth doing and that, until we each have amassed our personal fortune, we can't do what makes us happy or that contributes to the well being and happiness of others who are less fortunate? I think that's a myth that too many people have bought into – the eternal deferral of what fills you with passion until after you've made "enough" money – whatever that is.

Over the past year of my sabbatical, in addition to working on the book I have been writing on work-life balance issues, I have been guiding individuals who are looking for a solution to exactly that dilemma – how to reconcile their desires to do what fills them with passion and still provide for their families while making a difference in their community. It is this work that fills me most with my own sense of purpose and I have formed a new venture to continue this work inspiring others to find ways big and small to live their purpose NOW, not later, in an authentic and meaningful way. [www.conjunctiodora.com](http://www.conjunctiodora.com) Next month, I will announce in this space a series of workshops and gatherings that I will be hosting jointly with my colleagues at Pinnacle Group and I hope to be able to spend time with many of you who have asked me these very same questions over the years.

Until then, I leave you with two very important questions:

*What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? - Mary Oliver*

*and*

### **WHAT'S STOPPING YOU FROM DOING IT NOW?**

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