¿CÓMO VAS A MEDIR TU VIDA?

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We would like to reproduce in its entirety an article that was published by Clayton M. Christensen in Harvard Business Review in 2010. The article deals with the thesis of his book ‘How Will You Measure Your Life?’, which we believe can bring great value to non-profit organizations driven by a mission or purpose.

The full article, published on the HBR website, can be read [here] (https://hbr.org/2010/07/how-will-you-measure-your-life).

Before I published The innovator's dilemma, I received a call from Andrew Grove, then president of Intel. I had read one of my first articles on disruptive technology and asked me if I could talk to his direct subordinates and explain my research and what it implied for Intel. Excited, I flew to Silicon Valley and introduced myself at the agreed time, just so Grove would say: "Look, things have happened. We only have 10 minutes for you. Tell us what your model of disruption means to Intel." I said I couldn't, I needed 30 full minutes to explain the model, because only with it as a context would make sense of any comments about Intel. Ten minutes after my explanation, Grove interrupted: "Look, I have your model. Just tell us what it means to Intel."

I insisted that I needed 10 more minutes to describe how the disruption process had developed in a very different industry, steel, so that he and his team could understand how disruption worked. I told the story of how Nucor and other mini-oils had started attacking the lowest end of the market (steel reinforcement bars or reinforcement bars) and then climbed to the top end, undermining traditional steelworks.

When I finished the minimill story, Grove said, "Okay, I get it. What it means for Intel is...", and then articulated what would become the company's strategy to get to the bottom of the market and launch the Celeron processor.

If I had been tricked into telling Andy Grove what I should think about the microprocessor business, they would have killed me, but instead of telling him what to think, I taught him how to think, and then he took what I felt was the right decision on his own.

That experience had a profound influence on me. When people ask me what I think they should do, I rarely answer directly. Instead, I ask the question aloud through one of my models. I will describe how the process in the model opened its way through an industry quite different from yours. And then, most of the time, they will say, “Okay, I understand.” And they will answer their own question more insightfully than I could have done.

My HBS class is structured to help my students understand what a good management theory is and how it is built. To that backbone I attach different models or theories that help students think about the different dimensions of a general manager’s work to stimulate innovation and growth. In each session, we observe a company through the lenses of those theories, using them to explain how the company came to its situation and to examine what management actions will produce the necessary results.

On the last day of class, I ask my students to turn to themselves with those theoretical lenses, to find convincing answers to three questions: First, how can I be sure that I will be happy in my career? Second, how can I be sure that my relationships with my spouse and family will become a lasting source of happiness? Third, how can I be sure that I will not go to jail? Although the last question sounds cheerful, it is not. Two of the 32 people in my Rhodes scholarship class spent time in jail. Jeff Skilling of Enron’s fame was a classmate at HBS. These were good boys, but something in their lives sent them in the wrong direction.

Making deals does not produce the deep rewards obtained by strengthening people.

As students discuss the answers to these questions, I open my own life to them as a kind of case study, to illustrate how they can use the theories of our course to guide their life decisions.

One of the theories that provides a great perspective on the first question, how to be sure to find happiness in our careers, is Frederick Herzberg, who claims that the powerful motivator of our lives is not money; it is the opportunity to learn, grow in responsibilities, contribute to others and be recognized for achievements. I tell students about a kind of vision that I had while running the company that I founded before becoming an academic. In my mind I saw one of my managers go to work one morning with a relatively high level of self-esteem. Then I envisioned her driving home with her family 10 hours later, feeling despised, frustrated, underused and degraded. I envisioned how deeply her low self-esteem affected the way she interacted with her children. The vision in my mind quickly went on to another day, when she drove home with greater self-esteem, feeling that she had learned a lot, that she had been recognized for accomplishing valuable things and that she had played an important role in the success of some important initiatives. . Then I envisioned how positively that affected her as a wife and mother. My conclusion: management is the noblest of professions if practiced well. No other occupation offers so many ways to help others learn and grow, take responsibility and be recognized for their achievements, and contribute to the success of a team. Increasingly more MBA students come to school thinking that a career in business means buying, selling and investing in businesses. That's unfortunate. I want students to leave my classroom knowing that.

Create a strategy for your life

A theory that is useful to answer the second question (How can I make sure that my relationship with my family turns out to be a lasting source of happiness?) refers to how the strategy is defined and implemented. Its main idea is that a company's strategy is determined by the types of initiatives in which it invests management. If a company's resource allocation process is not masterfully managed, what emerges from it may be very different from what management intended. Because company decision-making systems are designed to direct investments towards initiatives that offer the most tangible and immediate returns, companies reduce investments in initiatives that are crucial to their long-term strategies.

Over the years, I've seen the fate of my HBS classmates develop since 1979; I've seen more and more of them coming to unhappy, divorced, and away from their children. I can guarantee that none of them graduated with the deliberate strategy of divorce and raising children who would walk away from them. And yet, a shocking number of them implemented that strategy. The reason? They didn't keep the purpose of their lives in front and center when they decided how to spend their time, talents and energy.

It is quite surprising that a significant fraction of the 900 students that HBS attracts each year from the world's best have thought little about the purpose of their lives. I tell students that HBS could be one of their last opportunities to reflect deeply on that question. If they think they will have more time and energy to reflect later, they are crazy, because life becomes more demanding: you take a mortgage; you are working 70 hours a week; you have a spouse and children.

For me, having a clear purpose in my life has been fundamental. But it was something I had to think about long and hard before I understood it. When I was a Rhodes fellow, I was on a very demanding academic program, trying to include an additional year of work in my time at Oxford. I decided to spend an hour each night reading, thinking and praying about why God put me on this earth. That was a very difficult commitment to maintain, because every hour I spent doing that, I wasn't studying applied econometry. I was in conflict about whether I could really allow myself to take that time out of my studies, but I stood firm and finally discovered the purpose of my life.

If instead I had spent that hour every day learning the latest techniques to master the problems of self-correlation in regression analysis, I would have wasted my life. I apply the tools of econometrics sometimes a year, but I apply my knowledge of the purpose of my life every day. It is the most useful thing I have learned. I promise my students that if they take the time to discover the purpose of their life, they will remember it as the most important thing they discovered in HBS. If they do not discover it, they will simply sail without rudder and will be whipped in the very steep seas of life. Clarity over their purpose will prevail over knowledge of activity-based costs, integral command cadres, basic competencies, disruptive innovation, the four Ps and the five forces.

My purpose arose from my religious faith, but faith is not the only thing that gives direction to people. For example, one of my former students decided that his purpose was to bring honesty and economic prosperity to his country and raise children who were as committed to this cause and to each other as he did. His purpose is to focus on family and others, as well as mine. Choosing and successful pursuit of a profession is only a tool to accomplish its purpose. But without a purpose, life can become hollow.

Assign your resources

Your decisions about the allocation of your personal time, energy and talent finally shape your life strategy.

I have a lot of 'business' competing for these resources: I'm trying to have a rewarding relationship with my wife, raise wonderful children, contribute to my community, succeed in my career, contribute to my church, etc. And I have exactly the same problem as a corporation. I have a limited amount of time, energy and talent. How much do I dedicate to each of these activities?

Assignment options can make your life turn out to be very different from what I intended. Sometimes that's good: opportunities arise that you never planned. But if you misinvest your resources, the result can be bad. When I think of my former classmates who, without realizing it, invested to live a life of hollow unhappiness, I can't help but believe that their problems are directly related to a short-term perspective.

When people who have a great need for achievement, and that includes all graduates of Harvard Business School, they have an extra half hour of time or an extra ounce of energy, they will unconsciously assign it to activities that produce the most tangible achievements. And our careers provide the most concrete evidence that we are moving forward. You send a product, you finish a design, you complete a presentation, you close a sale, you give a class, you publish an article, they pay you, they promote you. On the contrary, investing time and energy in your relationship with your spouse and children usually doesn't offer the same immediate sense of accomplishment. Children behave badly every day. It's really not for 20 years that you can put your hands on your hips and say, "I raised a good son or a good daughter." You can neglect the relationship with your spouse and, in the day to day, it does not seem that things are deteriorating. People who are motivated to excel have this unconscious tendency to invest little in their families and invest too much in their careers, even though intimate and loving relationships with their families are the most powerful and lasting source of happiness.

If you study the root causes of commercial disasters, you will again and again find this predisposition towards efforts that offer immediate gratification. If you look at personal life through that lens, you will see the same surprising and instructive pattern: people who increasingly allocate less and less resources to things they would have ever said mattered most.

Create a culture

There is an important model in our class called Cooperation Tools, which basically says that being a visionary manager is not as good as it seems. It is one thing to see the future mischievous with sharpness and chart the direction corrections that the company must make. But another very different is to persuade employees that they may not see the changes that are coming to be lined up and work cooperatively to bring the company in that new direction. Knowing what tools to handle to get the necessary cooperation is a critical managerial skill.

The theory organizes these tools over two dimensions: the extent to which the members of the organization agree on what they want from their participation in the company and the extent to which they agree on what actions will produce the desired results. When there is little agreement on both axes, they must use “powerful tools” (coercion, threats, punishments, etc.) to ensure cooperation. Many companies begin in this quadrant, so the founding executive team must play such an assertive role in defining what should be done and how. If the ways of working together with employees to address these tasks are successful over and over again, consensus begins to form. Edgar Schein of MIT has described this process as the mechanism by which a culture is built. Ultimately, people do not even think about whether their way of doing things produces success. They accept priorities and follow procedures by instinct and assumption rather than by explicit decision, which means that they have created a culture. Culture, convincingly but tacitly, dictates the proven and acceptable methods by which group members address recurring problems. And culture defines the priority given to different types of problems. It can be a powerful management tool.

By using this model to address the question, how can I be sure that my family becomes a lasting source of happiness?, my students quickly see that the simplest tools that parents can use to get children to cooperate are powerful tools. But there comes a time during adolescence when power tools no longer work. At that time, parents begin to wish to have started working with their children at a very early age to build a home culture where children instinctively behave with respect among themselves, obey their parents and choose to do the right thing. Families have cultures, as do businesses. Those cultures can be consciously built or evolve without realizing.

If you want your children to have a strong self-esteem and confidence that they can solve difficult problems, those qualities will not materialize magically in high school. You must design them in your family culture, and you should think about this from the beginning. Like employees, children develop their self-esteem by doing difficult things and learning what works.

Avoid the error of “marginal costs”

We are taught in finance and economics that when evaluating alternative investments, we must ignore the sunken and fixed costs and instead base decisions on the marginal costs and marginal revenues that each alternative implies. We learn in our course that this doctrine predisposes companies to take advantage of what they have implemented to succeed in the past, instead of guiding them to create the capabilities they will need in the future. If we knew that the future would be exactly the same as the past, that approach would be fine. But if the future is different, and almost always it is, then it is not the right thing.

This theory addresses the third question I discuss with my students: how to live a life of integrity (staying out of jail). Unconsciously, we often use the marginal cost doctrine in our personal lives when we choose between good and evil. A voice in our head says: “Look, I know that, as a general rule, most people should not do this. But in this mitigating circumstance in particular, just this time, it’s okay.” The marginal cost of doing something wrong “only this time” always seems temptingly low. It catches you, and you never look where that road is ultimately headed and the total costs involved in choosing. Justification of infidelity and dishonesty in all its manifestations lies in the marginal cost economy of “only this time.”

I'd like to share a story about how I came to understand the potential damage of "only this time" in my own life. I played on the University of Oxford basketball team. We worked hard and ended the undefeated season. The guys on the team were the best friends I've ever had in my life. We got to the British equivalent of the NCAA tournament and we got to the four finalists. It turned out that the championship game was scheduled for a Sunday. I had personally committed to God at 16 years of never playing the ball on Sundays. So I went to the coach and explained my problem. I was unbelieving. My colleagues too, because I was the starting center. All the guys on the team came to me and said, "You have to play. Can't you just break the rule this time?"

I am a deeply religious man, so I walked away and prayed about what I should do. I had a very clear feeling that I should not break my engagement, so I did not play in the championship game.

In many ways, that was a small decision that involved one of several thousand Sundays in my life. In theory, I could surely have crossed the line only that time and then not to do it again. But looking back, resisting the temptation whose logic was «In this mitigating circumstance, only this time, it's okay» has proved to be one of the most important decisions of my life. Why? My life has been an endless stream of mitigating circumstances. If I had crossed the line that time, I would have done it again and again in the following years.

The lesson I learned from this is that it is easier to keep your principles 100% of the time than to keep them 98% of the time. If you give in to "only this time," based on a marginal cost analysis, as some of my former classmates have done, you will regret where you ended up. You have to define for yourself what you represent and draw the line in a safe place.

Remember the importance of humility

I got this idea when they asked me to teach a class on humility at Harvard University. I asked all students to describe the humblest person they knew. I highlighted a characteristic of these humble people: They had a high level of self-esteem. They knew who they were and they felt good about who they were. We also decided that humility is not defined by behavior or self-despreciation attitudes, but by the esteem with which one looks at others. Good behavior flows naturally from that kind of humility. For example, you would never steal from someone, because you respect that person too much. You would not lie to anyone either.

It's crucial to bring a sense of humility to the world. By the time you get to one of the best graduate schools, almost all of your learning comes from smarter, more experienced people than you — parents, teachers, bosses. But once you're done at Harvard Business School or any other top-level academic institution, the vast majority of people you'll interact with in the day to day may not be smarter than you. And if your attitude is that only the smartest people have something to teach you, your learning opportunities will be very limited. But if you have a humble desire to learn something from everyone, your learning opportunities will be unlimited. Usually, you can only be humble if you feel really good about yourself and want to help those around you feel really good about yourself as well. When you see people acting abusively, arrogantly, or degradingly toward others, their behavior is almost always a symptom of their lack of self-esteem. They need to look down on someone else to feel good about themselves.

Choose the right criterion

Last year I was diagnosed with cancer and faced the possibility that my life would end earlier than planned. Fortunately, now it seems that I will be saved. But the experience has given me an important vision of my life.

I have a pretty clear idea of how my ideas have generated huge revenue for the companies that have used my research; I know that I have had a substantial impact. But as I faced this disease, it has been interesting to see how unimportant that impact is to me now. I came to the conclusion that the metric by which God will evaluate my life is not the dollars, but the individual people whose lives I have touched.

I think that's the way it will work for all of us. Don't worry about the level of individual prominence you've reached; worry about the people you've helped become better people. Here's my final recommendation: think about the metric by which your life will be judged and take the resolve to live every day so that, in the end, your life will be judged as a success.

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