

Subject: Closing and Opening Life's Chapters

Greetings friends, family, and colleagues!

This installment of semiannual inspiration is about the closing and opening life's chapters. Sometimes, they close and open because we graduate from university or take a new job, and sometimes they open and close because a loved one's life changes. However, we are the ones that actually turn the page from one chapter to another. Therefore, **I thought I would share some learning moments and observations from a recent chapter I closed and one that I am opening as I write this message.**

Before I share the learning moments and observations, I should offer a personal update. For those of you who do not already know, I am moving to Seoul, Korea to teach English to adults with my partner Jon. As many of you know, he spent the last year there teaching children in the city of Cheonan, and we have decided to return to Korea, together, in late August. In addition, I have moved from Philadelphia to Southeastern CT to be with my family for the summer – I had a great, 10-year run in the Philadelphia area and will miss the city, and all of my friends there, greatly.

Also, thank you SO MUCH for the kind, deep, and thoughtful feedback many of you shared regarding my last message, and the teleseminar based on it (audio and slides are available at <http://philadelphia.iabc.com/2009/03/brian-fishbone-presentation-to-iabc-philly-032509>), about lessons learned in a faraway land. As you have come to expect, this message will offer some stories and questions for you to consider.

LEARNING MOMENTS FROM CLOSING AND OPENING LIFE'S CHAPTERS

First, I want to share **four learning moments that I had in closing the most recent chapter of my life and opening the next one.**

Overcome the obstacles, no matter how difficult they may seem. Sometimes life changes bruise and batter us – closing one chapter and opening a new one can leave a scar. Perhaps we learn that a cherished partner, friend, or family member is moving far away or that a loved one has become terminally ill. Or, more personally, we decide to finally share with others who we really are. Coming out of the closet was a gut-wrenching, decade-long struggle littered with obstacles, but it strengthened my character. I am better person today because of it. In fact, I am even writing a book about the experience!

Question(s) for You: What are your scars and bruises? What have they taught you, and how have they made you stronger? Are you stronger than the obstacles you face?

Take critical pauses. There are many chapters in our lives, but too often we do not take the critical pauses that we need when we near the end of one and the beginning of another. Luckily, I have some friends who have taught me about the power of the critical pause – my friend Paula, who, when she found out her dad was dying, wrote a letter and bound it as a book for him, and my friend Theresa, who recently took leave to take care of her sick mother. Having lost her dad only a few years back, Theresa knew how important it was to hit the pause button on her career. I am guessing a question that lingered in her mind, and in Paula's, was, "How much more time will I have with my parent?" I have also experienced the power of the pause – you all may remember that I was unhappy with my work and life in the US and fled to Korea for a sabbatical. The pause refreshed and reinvigorated me, and as a result, I am forever changed.

Question(s) for You: What would make you take a critical pause, and reflect?

You can think long and hard about change, but in the end you must take action. Though I spent much time deliberating, both with Jon and on my own, I decided it was time for bold action, to move to Korea to teach English for a year or more. At some point, you have to just get on with it and step out of the analysis paralysis. As I mentioned in a teleseminar earlier this year, it's like being back on the diving board at the local pool as a child. You get to the edge of the diving board, and maybe you get a little scared. You note it's a long way down to the water below. You feel the chill of a cool breeze. You worry you might belly flop when you hit the water. Eventually though, you take the dive, right? In the end, all you can do is take a breath, hold your nose, and jump.

Question(s) for You: What have you been thinking about diving into, and is it time for you to just jump?

Sustaining change is not easy. Then, you land in the water (or the next chapter of your life), and you feel the refreshment and exhilaration of the beautiful dive you just completed. Yet, so often in life, you quickly swim back to the edge of the pool where you feel safe (or perhaps to the previous chapter of your life?), and perhaps you don't climb the diving board again for a while. My friend Andy, who is an engineer by trade, summarized it this way in his response to one of my previous messages, "My great question (not necessarily) directly to you, is how do we make these changes last. Very often, I have returned from a change of life experience, and as the distance grows from that experience, I find that I have returned (in part) to my previous form. While we have the ability to be elastic in our lives, how do we prevent the compression?"

Question(s) for You: How can you sustain change in your life?

OBSERVATIONS - GETTING THE CLOSURE WE NEED

I have also been thinking about how we can move onto the next chapter, especially when it requires momentous change. More specifically, how do we bridge the gap from one chapter to the next? Below are some **observations about getting the closure we need while closing life's chapters.**

Storytelling offers powerful closure. Yes, we can inspire action and win people's hearts and minds through telling stories, but perhaps more importantly, storytelling allows us to evolve, to continue our transformation into the people we are capable of becoming. I was lucky to be part of such a storytelling experience recently. My friend Lou recently ended his service as president of our college's alumni association by telling a series of stories at the closing meeting – about his original connection to our college (a family legacy), about his activities on campus, and about the pride he felt in serving the college alongside his dad, a fellow alumnus and volunteer leader. He cried during his storytelling, and I was captivated. In that meeting, I learned about the emotional potency and meaningful closure that rich storytelling among friends, family, and colleagues can provide.

Question(s) for You: When and how do you tell stories? What value do they offer to you and others?

Servant leadership offers powerful closure. Lou ended the same meeting discussed above by specifically recognizing and appreciating each board member for his or her accomplishments. There were easily 20 of us in the room, and he made personal eye contact with and offered meaningful, specific praise to each volunteer. On a day that we should have been honoring him, he was busy honoring everyone else. I was humbled by his display of servant leadership, and I thought to myself, "What a powerful way to close one chapter and open the next."

Question(s) for You: When you close this chapter of your life, whom will you thank for their support?

CONCLUSION

Though I am closing this chapter of my life, I promise to keep you all with me, in my mind and in my heart, as I move into the next chapter. These messages will continue from Korea – you can expect the next one once Jon and I get settled in Seoul this fall. In the meantime, please keep me connected to your story, and let me know if I can help you in any way.

As many of you know, I like to end these messages with a quote. I have seen this one in many formats over the years, and it has helped me through countless transitions.

“Often times, we focus so much on the door that has closed behind us that we miss the window opening in front of us.”

Here’s to the windows that are open all around you!

Regards from Southeastern CT,

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PPS – If you respond after June 29, I will be in Canada until late July and will have limited access to e-mail. Thanks in advance for your patience!