

S E C R E T #1

*Use a Compass,
Not a Map*

If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.

—E. B. White

Sometimes maps can be useful. They help us get from point A to point B as directly and as efficiently as possible. But life is not about efficiency. It is about exuberance. You can't map out passion. Maps become restrictive when we rely on them too heavily to guide our every move. Using a map is fine. But just because you possess one does not mean you need to detail every mile of your journey.

This secret is about finding a direction in life that feels right, something big and bold that calls you forward into action. This means finding something that inspires you. Rather than mapping out your travels in detail, you explore, meander, and weave. You try new things, set your themes, and venture into an unknown, uncharted, and unplanned future. You must have the courage to be willing to change directions often, finding new paths along the way. Just as with my trip across the United States, sometimes the best discoveries are made when you have a sense of purpose but

no plans. So instead of a map, I suggest you use a compass. Have a sense of direction in life, and then move forward experientially.

FIND YOUR COMPASS SETTING

To ditch the map and follow your compass, you need to determine what your particular setting should be. So how do you find your aspiration, your own sense of purpose? How do you know if the direction you are going is the right one for you? Finding your compass setting is about balancing passion, skills, and value. Here is a simple litmus test you can use to determine if you have all of these necessary elements to find your compass setting and follow it.

- *Passion*: Do you choose paths that are based on your dreams, hopes, and aspirations? These comprise your compass. What did you enjoy doing as a child? What have you often thought about doing but have said, “I don’t have enough time or money?” What have you believed in your heart was your passion, but others told you was a crazy idea? What is a hobby or interest you have that could be transformed into a career? What would you do if money were not an issue? Look deep inside yourself. Go beyond what you think you *should* be doing as a responsible adult, and find what you really *want* to do with your life.
- *Skills*: You need to have or acquire the necessary skills to make things happen. What are you good at? What are you willing to learn? Who else could you involve to complement your skills?

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- *Value*: You need to offer something that the world needs and values. Value works two ways. One is the value you receive, whether it be monetary compensation, or personal satisfaction. You need to be able to live, so making money is important. It doesn't need to be a great deal, but it needs to be enough to support your lifestyle. Are you willing to change your lifestyle to have a life you love? How can you make money at your chosen endeavor? The other value is the value you give, the contribution you make to others. Most people have been conditioned to check for what's in it for them in any situation. The key is to remember that once you focus on becoming something, receiving happens automatically. If you want to receive a higher compensation, you have to become a person delivering higher value.

The ideal life is one where you have all three: passion, skills, and value. Think about your life. Look at your chosen profession. Are you doing something that addresses all three dimensions? If so, congratulations. Keep experiencing, evolving, and adapting. Or maybe you don't know the answer to these questions. That's okay. Either way there are things you can do to set, test, and improve your compass.

T r y N e w T h i n g s

Many people try to intellectualize what they want to do with their lives. They create spreadsheets with lists of pros and cons, likes and dislikes. They take classes and workshops where they sit and

think about their life. But sometimes it is difficult to intellectualize passion. Passion is something you have to experience. Many people I meet say, “I would change careers if only I knew what to do.” Without this sense of direction they are stuck. How do you get unstuck? Get out and explore, try new things, meet new people—live your life through each experience. When you do this, you will discover (and experience) activities that you like and ones that you do not like. Then use your passion as a barometer to help determine which direction to turn. Do more of the things that you like and less of the things that you don’t.

Through experiential living, you will encounter in real time, the course you should take, just as Mark Grossman has done throughout his life. As a 13-year-old boy, Mark watched a PBS special on how kids his age were making cartoons with 8-mm film. He was inspired. He ran to his father and said, “Daddy, this looks interesting. Can I do it?” Being supportive, his father pulled an old 8-mm camera off the top shelf of the closet. He dusted it off and handed it to Mark. “Here, son, have fun.” Mark held the camera in his hands, knowing that he was going to be a great filmmaker some day. Knowing that, he went on to fulfill his dreams.

Thirty-five years later, this young boy is a husband, a father—and is selling giant menorahs as lawn ornaments. How did this aspiring filmmaker stray so far from his childhood dream? Actually, he didn’t. He followed his dream—to be who he really is and to do what he loves to do, regardless of the direction it takes him.

Mark Grossman thought he wanted to be a filmmaker. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film Making from the School of Visual Arts in New York and a Masters degree in Communication Arts from the New York Institute of Technology (NYIT). His career progressed through his early twenties but he soon realized

that if he wanted to continue he would have to relocate to the West Coast, a move he did not want to make. Instead, he taught at NYIT for a few years until he had his fill of academia.

Next he accepted a position in advertising and marketing at Norelco, while at the same time selling himself to the manager of a new local cable television station as the right guy to start up their community programming studio. He got the job a year later and won awards for his work. Always wanting to try new things, he simultaneously pursued an interest in politics. “I always seem to have many balls in the air,” he notes.

The political vocation took shape when a number of Democrats won key positions on Long Island and new opportunities opened up for him. He was offered the regional representative position for New York Governor Mario Cuomo. “I wasn’t sure I had the right skills,” he says, “but I always joked that politics and show business are one and the same.” His training in filmmaking proved perfect for government because his role with the governor was largely about communications. He served six years, until Cuomo lost re-election in 1994. That marked the end of his life in government.

After feeling sorry for himself—for one day—Grossman started his own public relations business, focusing on the government sector. After two months he had enough commitments from clients to equal his former income. In 10 years the business grew to seven employees.

Now he is ready to move on again. His next venture? Most likely it will be selling giant menorahs for display on people’s lawns—much like Christmas trees. He explains the latest twist in his colorful career: “My wife is Catholic and I am Jewish. We have a 60-foot blue spruce that we would light up every year in conjunc-

tion with our local civic association. The tree is the centerpiece of the community during the holidays each year. But I felt I needed some equal time, so about five years ago I built an 8-foot-wide, 6-foot-tall menorah so it could stand prominently next to the tree. I made it out of PVC pipes, electric wires, and flicker-flame bulbs.”

The menorah was featured in local newspapers, and individuals expressed an interest in buying one. He now owns the domain name Giantmenorah.com, and has found a distributor. “Ten years is the longest I have done anything,” he says with pride. “In some respects this menorah project is a logical extension of what I have done in the past. It will take advantage of my PR background. I will be the marketer, not the manufacturer. Will it be successful? Who knows? But I am having fun moving forward with the idea.”

What is Mark Grossman getting out of his unpredictable life? “Simple,” he says. “I want to be as healthy as I can be. I want my kids to be smart and healthy. I want a good relationship with my wife. I want to continue to make a decent living. Are these goals? I don’t think so. They are not detailed. I don’t have any predefined notion of what the future looks like.”

One of his criteria has been to choose endeavors that give him great personal satisfaction. “My best moments have been when I felt part of something bigger than myself,” he says. “Regardless of what I have done, my freedom has always taken me to places I enjoyed, at least for the time that I was there. I want my kids to have that same opportunity to try and experience many things.”

Throughout the years, a common thread in Mark’s life has been his love of PR and the visual arts. This has served him well. What is your aspiration? Ask yourself what is something you could try right now that might be in the context of your aspiration—and even if it isn’t, try something new anyway. If you’ve never really

cooked before, make a meal. Take a walk outside, change your surroundings. Maybe there's a new project at work coming up; volunteer to be on the team. What is something you've always wanted to do but have never tried? Try it today.

Set Themes, Not Resolutions

One way of living more experientially is to avoid making “resolutions.” You know, the thing we all do on New Year's Eve. Think about it. What have been your resolutions in the past? Lose 15 pounds? Quit smoking? Run a marathon? Save more money? Get a new job?

Most resolutions have specific, measurable results to achieve. They are also time-based; you have only until the end of the year to achieve your objectives. New Year's resolutions are often nothing more than SMART goals. And we know how successful most people are in sticking to their resolutions. In fact, according to my survey, only 8 percent of Americans say they successfully achieve their resolutions.

Rather than resolutions, choose one word to describe the next year. It serves as a theme for the year rather than a specific goal. For a colleague of mine, this year is about “service,” serving others in whatever way she can to make a contribution. For another person, this year is about “flow,” making the year effortless. For a friend who is going through a divorce and change of career, his theme is “new beginnings.”

C. Leslie Charles, a fellow professional speaker, and Rob, her partner of 30 years, have had an annual ritual since 1995 around setting their theme. She says, “My book, *Why Is Everyone So*

Cranky? may not have happened without our practice of annual themes. It was during our Year of Exploration that I decided to ‘explore my potential as a writer’ and embark on this daunting project. In the following year, our Year of Adventure, the book was published. The Year of Lightness that followed helped me maintain my perspective in the heat of an extended media blitz.”

Their ritual starts on the winter solstice of each year (December 21), when Leslie and Rob reflect on the previous year. They look at what they accomplished; the ups and the downs. It is a chance to appreciate the past and each other. They begin discussing the next year, formulating some general thoughts on potential themes. Then on New Year’s Eve they jointly choose their word for the next year. For them it is an integrating experience since they will have a shared theme. They choose words that motivate and empower them. And this has created surprising results. Things they could not have imagined via traditional goal-setting. Leslie has written books, launched a book editing business, and created an inspirational jewelry business. All were unpredictable, unplanned, and spectacularly successful.

My overarching aspiration at the moment is to “make a massive and visible impact in the world.” To support this, my theme last year was “flexibility,” creating a life style that allowed me to take many different paths. This year is about “platform” (defined as “a place, means, or opportunity for public expression of opinion”). It is about creating a foundation that enables me to make an impact with as many people as possible and creates a reputation that enables greater growth in the future. So when I am presented with several options, I think about my theme and choose the one that leads me in that direction. No planning required, and certainly no specificity in its design.

What is the one word you want to use to describe your next year? A good place to start is with your traditional resolutions. Then ask yourself why. Want to lose weight? Look at the reasons why. Do you want to be healthier? Do you want to have more confidence? If so, instead of dieting, “health” or “confidence” may be good themes. Choose a theme that is expansive, gets your juices flowing, has you excited, and moves you into action.

Still can’t think of a theme? Refer back to your aspiration. What theme would support it? Passion, peace, love, friendship, travel, or self-expression? Or maybe new horizons, adventure, or mind expansion might be a good start. Don’t worry if you haven’t named your aspiration yet—it may come out of your theme. Rather than sitting around trying to figure out your passion, choose a direction that will enable you to experience it. If all else fails and you still can’t figure out what your passion is, then make “finding your passion” your theme.

This is a simple compass setting. It does not dictate a specific outcome and does not imply a particular path or plan. Write your theme on a Post-It note and stick it on your computer screen. Write it on your bathroom mirror. Put it anywhere as a quick reminder of what you are about at this moment in time. Resolutions are things to do. Themes are a way to be.

C R E A T E M A N Y P A T H S

Another way of living more experientially is to create many paths. Just like a tree that scatters many seeds not knowing or caring which ones will grow, we want to scatter many seeds of possibility without worrying about which ones will germinate and flourish.

We just know that some will. “Could do” lists are this chance to create possibility and find new paths.

One person I met during my travels uses this approach to living his own life. He does not try to plan and predict everything. He doesn’t use to-do lists the way most people think of to-do lists. Rather, he puts everything that seems to matter into a “could do” list. Anything that gets him excited is put on this list. If he thinks it is something he might be interested in doing some time in the future, it goes on the list. If a concept fails to continue to inspire him, he crosses it off his list, even if he never achieves it. By playing with possibility, he gets himself excited today without concern for which seeds will sprout. He keeps the juiciest concepts right in front of him.

He is always recopying and rearranging his list. He says, “When I get tired, my core practice is to write out the list. This helps me from a coherence standpoint, giving me the ability to get in touch with what matters. If I get stuck and can’t make progress, I will wait and rewrite the list another time. It is like playing solitaire. Throughout the game, you are constantly moving cards around. Then at some point, after going through the deck, you may not see any more moves. But you still go through each pile one last time just to see if there is a move that has eluded you. If there are no moves, it is time to shuffle the cards and play again. Sometimes, I put things on the list. Other times I let them fall off. I try and find connections between different items on the list, combining them into one item. Through this process I create many paths of possibility.” The most important aspect of this process is that the list is called a “could do” list. Not a “to do,” “must do,” “should do,” or “will do” list. It’s not the number of things that we *could do* that creates stress in our lives. The

source of stress is the things that we say we *will do* or feel we *should do*—and these are the things on most people’s “to do” lists.

Think about possibility. Keep what matters right in front of you. Keep your “could do” list large and your “to do” list small. Then take action on the ideas that inspire you now and move them to your “to do” list. Your “could do” list is an expression and acknowledgement of your power. Your “to do” list is the willingness and commitment to use that power.

Sense Your Direction
and Believe in It

To live experientially requires patience and courage. It also takes a strong belief that things will work out and a belief in yourself, regardless of the adversities and doubts you may encounter. Take the case of Preethi Nair, who came to England from India as a small child. Now in her 30s, she is a successful author and a laureate of the Asian Woman of Achievement Award in Britain. She has achieved this without any real plan. All she had was her aspiration—“a strong desire to be a writer.” Her path toward success was certainly not linear. And it certainly wasn’t easy as she stumbled along the way.

Preethi comes from a traditional Indian family that believes in success through good academic training, a professional qualification, and a big salary. So she started by earning two degrees and becoming a management consultant. She was miserable.

Her aspiration drove her to start writing her first book, working in the evenings and on weekends. Three years later the manuscript was finished and she sent copies to the major publishing houses.

Full of confidence, she walked into her boss's office and handed in her resignation.

As fate would have it, soon after her resignation the rejection slips from publishers flooded in. It seemed as though her dream would end quickly. Then she heard about self-publishing. Instead of getting royalties and advances for a book, the writer pays someone to print and publish it. "I took my life savings—£12,000 pounds (\$20,000)—and put the whole amount down into self-publishing," she says. With the printer's help, her first novel, *Gypsy Masala*, was designed and produced.

She had 3,000 copies of her book printed and sent out 500 review copies to the press, leaving her with 2,500 copies. Not knowing what to do next, she wrangled a stall at the London Book Fair, one of the premier events for the book industry, and handed out hundreds more copies.

In the following weeks, reviews started to appear in the British media. Unfortunately none of her books were in shops. She had overlooked distribution. "I did not realize what it took to get a book into a bookstore," she says. So she personally went to more than 250 bookshops throughout London, dropping off books on consignment. Finally, one of the major book chains picked it up and made it their staff choice. In one shop alone it sold 3,000 copies. The chain wanted to stock the book in 40 of their branches, so Preethi ordered a second printing even though this meant going deeper into debt.

"Demand was soaring. Everything I was waiting for was handed to me at that moment. And then disaster. There was a major petrol [gasoline] crisis in England, where for four days all truckers were on strike. Nothing moved within the country. So when I was most heavily in demand, my books could not get delivered to the bookstores."

Her momentum hit a brick wall; opportunity had swiftly passed her by. Books were not selling and publishers were not calling. Exhausted, disheartened, jobless, and heavily in debt, she just wanted to give up. Instead she decided to give it one last try.

She called a woman she had met at the Book Fair, Lynda Logan (one of the original Calendar Girls) and explained the situation. Lynda agreed to give Preethi the use of her country house to write a second book, and said she would provide access to her literary agent. “I was so overwhelmed and inspired. I decided I would give it at least another six weeks. No matter what happened, I could at least say that I had done my very best.” Preethi wrote her second book, *100 Shades of White*, in just four weeks. The agent loved it and took it to the publishers who had rejected her the first time around—and this time she was successful. HarperCollins gave her a three-book contract. Just a week after she signed with them, the BBC bought the rights to turn the new book into a 90-minute television adaptation.

“I could never, in hindsight, have planned any of this,” Preethi recalls. “Bumbling in the dark may have been the only way I could have achieved the success I have. I am clear it was not a goal in the traditional sense. It was truly an intention. I only had a sense of direction and then operated from intuition and gut instinct rather than logic and plans.”

Preethi is a perfect example of following her purpose, even in the face of uncertainty. Her strong belief in her aspiration is what allowed her to use creative thinking to move from opportunity to trauma to opportunity. With a clear sense of direction in mind, she moved forward without plans, without specific goals, and

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without an understanding of the process. And yet she was successful in achieving her dream.

M a k i n g I t H a p p e n

Maps are useful in trying to get to your destination as quickly and efficiently as possible. But life is not about efficiency. It is about exuberance. And you can't map out passion. Instead of relying on detailed maps, develop a sense of direction—a compass setting—and allow life to unfold naturally.

To help you apply the concepts of *Use a Compass, Not a Map* to your own life, take the time to review these practices and questions. Answer the questions for yourself. Revisit them from time to time. Use them to help you live experientially and avoid planning out a specific path. There are no right or wrong answers. Enjoy the journey. Have fun.

FIND YOUR COMPASS SETTING

Balance passion, skills and value.

- Discover your passion. Review the questions on pages 25–26. Then, look back on your life. What do you wish you would have done? If you could, what would you still like to do? If you could do one thing, what would that be? What dreams do you feel you have had to leave behind? What do you want to do before you die? What is something you would like to do that you don't think will ever happen? What are you interested in that never feels

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like work? What activities do you do where hours fly by yet it only feels like minutes? Make decisions based on your interests, not your checkbook or busy schedule.

- Get the skills. What are you known for being good at? How can you gain other necessary skills? What additional skills may be useful that are not traditionally considered? How can you differentiate yourself from others to help you stand out from the crowd? Who can you collaborate with to fill your skill gaps?
- Create value for yourself and others. How can you make a living at this? How can you help the world value your contribution? How can you creatively stay true to your passion while having the success you desire? How can you make a difference?

Once you choose the direction you will follow, check to see how you feel. Do you get a rush of excitement? Does it make you want to wake up early in the morning to get started? What does your gut tell you? Choose a direction where you feel part of something bigger than yourself.

TRY NEW THINGS

Avoid over-intellectualizing the direction in which you want to take your life; experience it. Go for it. Get out there and play. Tomorrow, try one new thing. Do things you have never done before, no matter how minor they are. Drive a different way to work. Try a new hobby. Read a different section of the newspaper. Then, do more of the things you like to do and less of the things that you don't. For more on "Trying New Things," see Secret #5, Seek Out Adventure.

SET THEMES, NOT RESOLUTIONS

Rather than set a resolution (i.e., a goal), choose one word to describe your next year. Choose something that is bold and broad. Ask yourself why you chose that theme. Is there any larger, more expansive theme you could choose? If you are stuck, try passion, peace, love, friendship, travel, or self-expression as a theme. Or, make “finding your passion” your theme for the year. Write your theme in a place where you will be constantly reminded. Remain open to new possibilities and to changes in direction at any point in the future

CREATE MANY PATHS

Rather than one path, create many paths on which to travel. Use “could do” lists rather than “to do” lists. Keep possibility in front of you. Keep your list of “could do” items large and your list of “to do” items small. Add and subtract from your “could do” list on a regular basis, based on what inspires you. I have my “could do” list on a flip chart in my living room. Put yours somewhere where you will view it often.

SENSE YOUR DIRECTION AND BELIEVE IN IT

Even if you are encountering obstacles, stick with your direction. You will hit roadblocks. Rather than get discouraged, learn from these experiences. Problem solving can be an invigorating process. Be creative. There is more than one way to solve a challenge. Sometimes “bumbling in the dark”—operating from intuition and gut instinct rather than logic and plans—is the best way to gain new experiences. And be sure to constantly reconnect with your passion along the way.

