

Introduction. Today is Your WakeUp Call!

...The next morning, my wife saw that I was dressed and ready to go. She gave me a surprised look and said, "I thought you were taking the later train today?" She asked me whether we were still having breakfast together or if she should drive me to the station so I could make my normal train. Little did I know, at that moment, I was standing at the crossroads of my life and my answer to that innocent question would determine my fate.

There is a lot of drama built into that excerpt above. I'm not someone who gets entangled in too much drama but I included it there for a reason. That statement above is part of the story I share with you below. My story. And it was a very dramatic episode in my life. That small decision I made that day really did determine whether I lived or died. I didn't know it at the time, but sometimes it is the small decisions that make the biggest differences in our lives.

Before I share that story more fully, I want to return to our focus for today which is about designing and living an extraordinary life. For many of us, including me, the realization of this starts with a wakeup call. But what does that really mean – a wakeup call?

Wakeup calls occur when you experience an event or have a powerful insight that is significant enough to shake you up and scream "LIFE'S TOO SHORT! WAKE UP!" They remind us that we don't have endless tomorrows. The official definition of a wakeup call is a 'portentous event that brings an issue to immediate attention' or 'a sign to take action concerning something that was overlooked or neglected.' I don't want you to have to wait for a 'portentous event' or a sign to realize you've been overlooking or neglecting any part of your life. You bought this book and you're receiving this message today – there's your event and your sign.

Why is this important, you ask? I sum it up simply by proclaiming that if

**"Do it! I say.
Whatever you
want to do, do it
now! There are
only so many to-
morrrows...Life
has been good to
me. It's not like I
missed an awful
lot. I had a pretty
good lick here.
Every moment
gets a little more
important...
Live every
minute, guys.**

**~MICHAEL
LANDON**

***So many of us
are hung over
these days, but
not from too
much tequila!***

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there are changes you want to make in your life and you haven't started on them yet (for whatever 'reason'), you are wasting precious time! Don't wait until more time has unnecessarily passed, or it becomes too late. Stop empowering the reasons and excuses you are using, no matter how real and valid they feel.

Is what I'm saying resonating with you or is it just a bunch of words on a page? Can you step outside of your day to day life for a moment and really see that? How does that feel? For some of you, it is utterly terrifying. For some, it's motivational. For others, no matter how hard you try, it just isn't real. But it is very real, and the time is now to take an honest look at your life to decide where you want to make powerful and positive changes for yourself, and strengthen your relationships with those you love, creating entirely new relationships with those things that have been stopping you all this time.

We're All Hungover

I have a theory about how life feels for so many of us these days. I see people who have grown all kinds of electronic appendages to their bodies – Blackberries, Cell phones, PDAs, iPods, etc. They can't bear to be away from their gadgets. (I thought technology was supposed to make our lives easier?) 'What if I miss something important?' Guess what? You are missing something important. It's called 'your life!'

As a result of all of this 24/7 access, media and information overload, and constant stimulation (even the anchors on the evening news can't sit still for a moment) so many of us feel 'hung over' these days. I don't mean that we drank too much tequila last night (at least I don't *remember* drinking that much tequila...). What I mean by 'hungover' is that we're OVERworked, OVERstructured, OVERloaded, OVERinformed, OVERstimulated and

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OVERwhelmed! Too many of us feel this way. By continuing this, we get to keep lots of data and information in our brains and be up-to-the-minute on all news and events. But there is a tremendous cost to living this way and burning out isn't going to serve you, your family, your clients or anyone. Are you included in that group in some way? I believe that it doesn't have to be that way!

How easily we can forget how precious life is! So long as we can remember, we've just been here, being alive. Unlike other things for which we have a comparison – black to white, day to night, good to bad – we are so immersed in life that we can see it only in the context of itself. We don't see life as compared to anything, to not-being, for example, to never having been born. Life just is. But life itself is a gift. It's a compliment just being born: to feel, breathe, think, play, dance, sing, work, make love, for this particular lifetime. Today, let's give thanks for life. For life itself! For simply being born!

~DAPHNE ROSE KINGMA

Where do you start? My story.

I was in a rut myself for many years. Prior to becoming a coach, I was unsatisfied and unhappy for most of my career. Days weren't all horrible – I had plenty of good days too. But they just didn't provide the meaning that I was craving.

My biggest problem was that I had no vision for my life. I didn't know where I wanted to go or even how to begin. So I did what most of us do...nothing. And time started melting away – days became months which soon added up to years. Back then, I worked in New York City and lived in Connecticut. I was commuting more than two hours *each way* to work (4 ½ hours in total each day) and I hated that I didn't have any time to spend with my one year-

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old daughter and my wife. This was not the dad or the husband I wanted to be. But as the sole breadwinner of the family at the time, I couldn't simply stop working. Although I didn't know what to do, I realized that I had to stop "*losing days*."

Then one beautiful afternoon, I was having lunch outside and a vision popped into my head. It was a picture of me at my kitchen table, having a relaxed and enjoyable breakfast with my wife and daughter. We were all smiling and I was very happy. THAT was the kind of husband and dad I wanted to be. Not the one who was tired and cranky each morning and evening, kissing my daughter who was sound asleep on the forehead, wondering if she even remembered who I was.

I was immediately determined to create that vision as my reality (was that my sign?) and I decided right then that the very next morning, instead of rushing to the early train as I always did, I would take the later train so that I could have breakfast at home with the two of them. Instead of being at my desk by 8:45 a.m. as I usually was, I would get there a little bit after 9 o'clock. This was not going to be a monumental life change. In fact, it was only a 20 minute difference in my schedule. But even so, it would be a nice little start in the right direction.

What happened next was so interesting. As soon as I made that simple little decision, something inside me shifted. It's hard to pinpoint but it literally felt as if I had just taken control of my life back – even from just that one small decision I made. That little break from routine changed everything. One of the most important lessons I realized from making that decision was that nothing would change until I changed it. It was clear that I would never FIND the time to spend with them in the morning. I had to CREATE it!

I immediately called my wife and shared my intentions with her and for the rest of that afternoon, I felt 'bulletproof.' Nothing bothered me – in fact, I

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felt the best I had for a long time. I even enjoyed the rest of the day at work. My job duties were exactly the same, but because I took back the responsibility and accountability for my life, my relationship to what I was doing changed. (Creating a simple intention can be very powerful, regardless of whether it actually occurs or not!) The resentment I felt for my job eased as I realized that I didn't have to *make myself* miserable! That was exactly what I was doing – making sure I was miserable in this job each day; punishing myself for being there and not doing anything to change it.

That evening, I went to bed with a renewed sense of hope, possibility and empowerment. I still didn't have direction, but I had made a start. Life was good!

The next morning my wife, surprised to see that I was already dressed and ready to go, asked quizzically, "I thought you were taking the later train today?" She asked me whether we were still having breakfast together or if she should drive me to the station so I could make my normal train.

The chatter in my head started: 'Do I just take the early train and have breakfast together another day? It's just breakfast. We can do it anytime. Will my daughter even be aware that we're having breakfast? Do I risk going in late? Will I get in trouble at work? I've only been there a few months, can I even do this?' Little did I know, at that moment, I was standing at the crossroads of my life. My answer to that innocent question would literally determine my fate.

Something inside my whole body stirred (another sign?) and stopped my internal racket dead in its tracks. I looked at her and knew that nothing was more important than keeping my breakfast plans. "No," I said. "The whole point of the morning was to have breakfast together, so let's have breakfast together. I'll catch the next train as planned."

*Life is a gift
and every single
day counts!*

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For the next twenty minutes, we had a wonderful time together having breakfast in our small dining room. It was a beautiful morning and I could not stop looking over at my family and just smiling. I was completely filled with love. My wife and I met on a 9th grade trip to Quebec, and I knew that she was ‘the one’ the first moment I saw her. Here we were 18 years later and I was living the reality of my dreams.

After breakfast, she dropped me off at the station and I took the train into New York City, smiling the whole way. I’m sure I looked out of place among the cranky faces of the other commuters who were beaten down by the many hours they had spent getting in and out of the city. But nothing could bother me that day – I had regained control of my life and I felt nothing but love inside. I felt great!

I made it into New York City, got on the subway, and instead of being in my office, I was still underground when the first plane slammed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center, into my floor, *hitting my desk!* The morning I had chosen to have breakfast with my family was Tuesday, September 11, 2001.

Yes – that is how fast it can happen. That is how unexpectedly it can come. We don’t have endless tomorrows.

When I exited the subway moments after the second plane hit, I stood across the street from the building watching, as if it were a movie, not truly believing that on any other day it would have been me up there. I couldn’t imagine what it must have been like on the inside, that view I had known so well, up on the 96th floor.

Since that view will never be known again, I’m going to share a little bit of what it was like working from such a majestic viewpoint. On windy days you could feel the building sway slightly and could often look outside of the window and see small planes and helicopters flying well below you. But

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there was never any fear. The sunsets from up there were some of the most magnificent I'd ever seen – the whole left half of the floor would turn orange and red as the sun beamed through uninterrupted – so much so that most times people would have to lower the shades in order to see their computer screens, many times annoyed and complaining about having to do so. Thinking back now, that seems absurd – shutting out nature's miracle in order to salvage 15 more minutes of staring into a lifeless screen. But at the time it seemed all too normal. But now it's gone forever.

So there I stood, from a less familiar outside-in perspective, looking up at my world that had a gaping hole where I should have been, not being able to comprehend what had happened and who it happened to.

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Yet...I cannot spend any more time looking back and saying “Why?”, “Why did that happen?”, “Why me?”, “Why them?” No. I am here. I am alive. I have a beautiful family, great friends and a meaningful mission. I have to look forward and say “What now?” “What will I do with this opportunity - with this *gift* that I've been given?”

You have been given that same chance! Today is your gift!

9/11 was my wake-up call! *TODAY IS YOURS!*

You don't need a tragedy in your life to wake up to the possibility that exists for your life.

Did I see my wake-up call coming? Absolutely not!

Was I living my life like I had *endless tomorrows*, Yes I was!

I got lucky. But I also got in action and I made that small decision to have breakfast with my family which ultimately saved my life.

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Rewrite Your Future

Are you going to spend more time *wishing* your life was different in some way or hoping to make changes *one day* – after the kids get older, or once things at work settle down, or next month, or next year, or *some day*...? As my friend Tom Bruein says, “**There is no such place as ‘Someday Isle’!**” (Someday I’ll...)

You have great intentions, *safe* intentions. However, I have bad news for most of you. That day, *some day*, is never going to come. Stop kidding yourself. That’s just your excuse machine working on overdrive. If you keep doing that, you’re going to wake up 5 years from now and look back and wish you started 5 years earlier (are you already doing that?). Look past those excuses. You have a chance to *rewrite your future*...now!

It takes getting out of your comfort zone - having an insight or breakthrough that makes a huge difference in your perspective. That is what changes the way you view the world. That is what creates new relationships with the things and the people in your lives.

Life is a gift and every single day counts! We think and we act like we have endless tomorrows, but we do not! You can’t afford to waste your time or energy looking back and asking “Why?” You need to look forward and say “What now? Where do I want to go! What shall I do with this gift I’ve been given!”

What is it time for you to put out to the world? What are you being a little hesitant about declaring because it would make it *too real* or it might actually put yourself on the hook for it? Look around. Really look. What are the signs you have been missing? What is it time for you to see?

Today is your wake-up call! What are you going to do with it?

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world.”

~ Nelson Mandela