

Nothing Much Happens Without *a* Dream

By Ann McGee-Cooper, Ed.D and Duane Trammell, M. Ed

"Nothing much happens without a dream. For something really great to happen, it takes a great dream."

—Robert Greenleaf

This quote has always been a compelling one. It stops you in your tracks as you begin to ponder your own life. Do I dare to dream bold dreams for my own life? Have my dreams gotten lost in the demands of working over-time, paying bills, caring for aging parents, driving kids in carpool, or fixing leaky gutters?

Time loses its energy, meaning, and power unless it moves us toward our dreams. Taking the time to listen to our wishes, dreams, and fantasies opens up our unique genius, talents, and reasons for being. It's very easy to get "too busy" for dreams, and when we do, a very special part of us dies.

What Are You Passionate About?

Have you ever thought about the link between passion and dreams? Where does the passion for life come from that fuels our dreams? People find passion for their lives in different arenas. For



some people, it's a person—a new friend, mate, grandchild, or acquaintance that instills in their lives fresh vitality and meaning. For others, it's the blossoming of a new talent or interest such as moving to a new city at twenty-seven, buying and restoring an old house at thirty-seven, learning to tap-dance at forty-seven, or going on a road trip at seventy-seven.

Passion also comes from a general enthusiasm for life-for learning, for music, for government reform, and for whatever else might capture our interest and imagination. People who dream big dreams seem to live outside the bounds of conventional life. When they tell friends they want to take up skydiving lessons, they are undaunted by their friend's warnings that "you're crazy you will kill yourself." They have a relentless zeal for changing a law or traveling half-way around the world to hear a favorite aria sung in its original language. Plugging into this passion for life is essential to discovering dreams for our future.



What is your dream or vision for your life? Is it a practical, fairly easy dream to obtain, or is it a very challenging vision that falls under the "in your wildest imagination" category?

Without an inspiring dream, life loses its zest, its purpose, its energy. Sometimes people become so busy helping others around them achieve their dreams that they forget to generate any dreams of their own. In addition, many men and women experience a midlife crisis as they reach or fail to reach certain goals, then suddenly realize that old age is fast approaching. They may either foolishly try to recreate their youth or reestablish new and meaningful dreams for the second half of their life.

Dreams and Purpose for Living

Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist, discovered during his four-year imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp that of the prisoners who escaped the gas chambers, those who had a life

purpose (or dream) were far more likely to survive. Those who didn't die. Bernie Siegel, a surgeon and teacher at Yale Medical School and oncologist Carl Simonton also report that having a meaningful purpose is a primary factor for patients who successfully recover from cancer. In a field called psychoneuroimmunology, we are learning that just thinking vividly about an exciting dream or goal and imaging it as complete with all its benefits can cause our body to create hormones (such as endorphins) that balance our immune system, counter stress, and seem to create new energy. Test this idea by recalling which people, in your own experience, have the most dynamic energy and health. Do they have a dream and does it seem to energize them? Is their dream contagious to others around them? Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech is a wonderful example of this quality.

In addition, dreaming is a safe way to test options for the future. "If you can dream it, you can do it," said Walt Disney. In a film clip from her early childhood, Sarah Hughes declared that she would one day be standing on the top podium at the Olympics. A childish fantasy? She didn't think so. She worked and played hard for years to get to the Olympics. Then, she completed seven triple jumps on her way to a nearly flawless performance, dazzling the world and winning the gold!

Going to Work versus Getting to Make a Difference

Something profound shifted in me when I realized that I could do work to earn a living or I could use the same time and energy to invest my gifts into making the world a better place. The main difference was how I thought about what I was doing and how much deep thinking I had done around what I want to do with my life. By setting aside time regularly to imagine the future and ask where I want to be in five to ten years, and what I want my life to contribute to others, I have

significantly changed the way I think about each day, each task, each challenge. I have discovered that even the most menial event can be done as a chore or as a way to give back to others. Learning to do everything as though those I love and respect were watching has changed the way I work and live. Before I learned to set aside the time to journal, plan and dream, I did a lot of going through the motions and/or rationalizing and procrastinating especially about work I didn't enjoy. I spent a great deal of energy dreading certain parts of my work and getting by with the least amount of discomfort, when I could have been fully alive. For me, having a calling is less about what I do than how I do it. It's about learning to fully engage both my head and my heart as I choose to bring my best to each day. And as a result, I have learned to change my attitude and look forward to most workdays. Sure the world is not rosy and there are plenty of tough challenges in any job or day. Yet now I realize that my opportunity to serve is about finding respectful, creative ways to confront those challenges so that all benefit or are well served. Learning to keep big dreams alive and working in my life continues to make a big difference for me.

The Magic "Ten" List

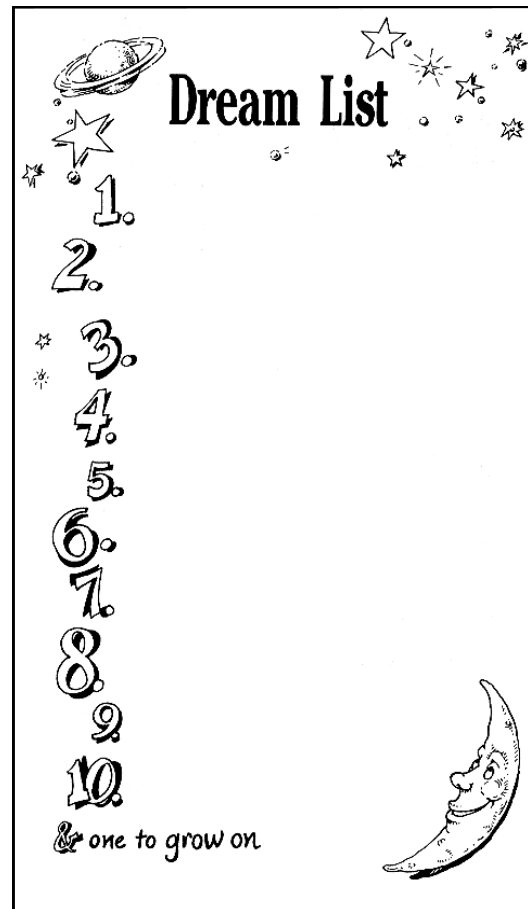
Several years ago, we began making personal lists and business lists of ten outrageous dreams. Then to our amazement, most of them came true. We learned that writing them down and keeping them before us energized and focused us. Some never happen but become like stepping-stones to move us toward other horizons.

There is something very powerful about writing down your dreams. For one thing, they become more real. The journey starts with acknowledgement. We make ourselves take a position, claim what we truly want. We are so influenced by a victim culture, it is just much safer never to define what we want. That way, we can

whine and complain when we never really get to live the life we want.

The other, almost magical thing about writing down dreams is that possibilities begin to appear that we never saw before. There is phenomenon called "scotoma" that can help us understand this. If we decide that we want to find a vacant building to rent for a new small business venture, we begin to notice signs on our morning drive route that we never noticed before. Were they always there? Probably. Why did we not see them? We learn to subconsciously filter out any data that we don't really need. So when we actually tell our brain to start looking for a way for our dreams to start happening, we begin to see data to help us.

As an experiment, try your hand at capturing your own special dream list. Make a list of ten things you would really like to have happen in the next



few years in your life. Be bold. Don't let money, circumstance, current job position, geography or other potential barriers hold you back. Next, put the list somewhere you can see it each day. Begin thinking about small steps you can take to make the dreams a reality. If you dream of owning a sailboat, begin by buying sailing books and magazines and enjoying them for a few minutes each day. Go to a lake or bay and watch sailboats sail for the afternoon. Do some networking and find an acquaintance who might invite you sailing. Learn all you can about what you might like to buy. Start a savings account for "the dream boat."

Whether your dream is taking an unforgettable journey on the Orient Express or moving to Hawaii, entertain yourself each day with vivid images as though they have come true in the best possible ways. Hold your dreams in your mind and heart and enjoy the new energy and fun they will bring to you.

For additional information about Creating Your Dreams

- *Awaken Your Sleeping Genius, A Journaling Approach and Guide to Servant Leadership* by Dr. Ann McGee-Cooper & Duane Trammell.
- *You Don't Have to Go Home From Work Exhausted!* by Dr. Ann McGee-Cooper and Duane Trammell, a Bantam Doubleday paperback (pp. 10-15).