

**The Monday Memo
from the desk of
Dr. John Stanko
Issue 61**

Because I am away from home from time to time, I usually come home to a pile of mail and with a full briefcase. I often spend my first hours at home trying to sort everything out to put it back in a place where I can access it later. Or better yet, I employ one of my favorite organizing principles: "When in doubt, throw it out!" If I am unsure whether or not I will ever need a report or article again, I throw it away; I seldom have any regrets about doing that. My wife is currently listing our paper and audio books on a used book website so we can get rid of those that have accumulated. I just went through many of my files and cleaned out old papers that I did keep but haven't used. If I haven't used or worn something in the last twelve months, then I give it away or throw it out. I even went through my computer files this past week and deleted many old files and folders.

You may be wondering what this has to do with anything. My answer is that your "stuff" may be a major hindrance in your progress to find and fulfill your purpose. You may be spending time rearranging and caring for things that don't really matter, and that is time better spent pursuing more important endeavors. You also may also be investing limited financial resources on things that mattered at one time but aren't as important as they once were.

Perhaps this week represents an opportunity to evaluate and clean out. Set some time every day (or one full day if possible) to go through your closets, computers, files and other places that accumulate stuff. Get rid of things that you don't need. Determine that you will stop going through work to get to work. Evaluate the magazines and e-zines (regular email offerings) to see whether or not they are relevant at this point in time. I recently made a decision to stop reading five or six publications that once were among my favorites. With the success of selling our used books, we are looking for other means by which we can sell off (or give away) some of our excess stuff.

Jesus made a clear statement in Luke's gospel: "Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions'" (Luke 12:15). I am trying to be greedy for one thing and that is for opportunities to fulfill my purpose in life. I am trying to focus my time and energy on that and to eliminate any and all competition. That is a lofty goal and I fall short on most occasions. But that is what I am striving for and I don't want my "stuff" to become more of a distraction than it already is.

Your stuff has a voice. You can't audibly hear it, but it calls regularly, saying things like, "Read me. Wear me. Clean me. Drive me. Watch me." Your purpose may be crying out to you, but it can't be heard over the noise from the other voices. That is why you may need to stifle the competition so your purpose can come through, loud and clear.

If you are up to the clean out challenge, get started as soon as possible, even today! As you simplify your world, you may be surprised how much of a hold stuff had on you. Don't be. Just get rid of as much of it as possible and seek your purpose. When you do, you may hear a voice that has been there all along, but couldn't be heard above the noise of the competition. Have a great week!

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This has been an exciting and busy week for my family and me. I just returned from our daughter's graduation from West Virginia University. She was among 3,000 graduates as she received a bachelor of science degree in business administration. Naturally we had our family

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members in town for the festivities and now I am getting ready to depart this coming Tuesday for Zimbabwe. Since I won't have direct computer access there, I am going to send you another Monday Memo (issue 63) in the next day or two and then send the next issue (64) on Tuesday, June 4, when I return to the United States. I trust you won't mind that I am going to follow this irregular schedule for the next two weeks.

As I sat at commencement today watching all the graduates in law, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, liberal arts and business, I was impressed with how much work and vision it took for many of those students to get to the day of graduation. The guest speaker had graduated 34 years earlier from the same school and he challenged the graduates to ponder where they would be in the coming years. In other words, he was asking each one if they had a vision for their own life and future. I thought that was a good question to ask you this week: Do you have a vision for your life? Where will you be five years from now? What do you see yourself doing then?

The answers to those questions leads to another question: What are you doing about it today? What steps are you taking now to help you fulfill your personal vision? Are you taking courses of your own? Reading books on a certain topic? Considering a job change to enhance your professional development? What are you doing that can help you fulfill the personal vision that you have?

This may sound selfish to you. Your goal may be to serve and work today to the best of your abilities and opportunities and I commend you for that. But there are times when self interest is the best interest. No, I'm not talking about some selfish pursuit that steps on others or serves self at all costs. What I am talking about is something you do that is in the best interest of the vision you have for yourself, the vision God gave you. If you are or want to be a doctor, then what's in your self interest -- working at the best clinic or under some superior mentors -- may be the best thing you can do now to help you fulfill your future vision.

This week, I finally finished the book ***Forgetting Ourselves on Purpose***. The author reminded me of the words of F. Buechner: "There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

I want to be the best consultant, writer and speaker I can be. That is who I am, who God made me to be. By furthering those ends in my life, I am serving God and the world around me. I have a vision for what I want to do in five years and I am taking steps to be able to fulfill that, by God's grace. What about you?

Is there anything you can do this week that will bring you closer to your self vision? Maybe you will enroll in college and receive your diploma in the coming years. Why not apply this week? Perhaps you will open your business. Call someone who can help you open your business one day; get together with them or take them to lunch! Or maybe this week will be the week when you ask yourself, "Where do I want to be in five years?" and allow yourself to develop an answer. Whatever you do, may you take a step this week that will bring you closer to your God-given destination. Have a great week!

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Issue 63

I know. You just received Issue 62 and already I'm coming back to you with Issue 63. I depart tomorrow morning and won't be able to send anything from my computer until June 4. I thought I would send this issue early and the next issue late. Maybe you can tuck this one away until next Monday so you can stay on schedule.

About four years ago, someone recommended that I read *The Power of Servant Leadership* by Robert Greenleaf. When I was finished, I was a different man. Greenleaf was an executive with AT&T for 41 years and then became a consultant for the remainder of his life. He began writing essays based on his observations of servant leadership and the need for such leaders. Today, some twelve years after Greenleaf's death, his writings are more popular than ever. His foundation is based in Indiana and can be accessed by going to <http://www.greenleaf.org>.

I am writing to you about servant leadership because when you know your purpose, often you become a leader. I don't always understand how or why, but I guess since you know where you're going, others want to follow. Greenleaf wrote:

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant--first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test [of servant leadership] is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will he or she benefit, or, at least, will he or she not be further deprived?

I have tried to use Greenleaf's words and concepts to evaluate my own leadership style. Many times I have been found lacking as a servant.

Jesus was a servant and his service was the basis for his leadership. Jesus was also a man of purpose. By his own words, he came "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Being a servant with purpose, people followed him and still do. You may already know what your purpose is, but now I must ask you: are you ready to serve? Finding your purpose is one thing; learning to serve is something totally different.

Service to others is what keeps a person of purpose humble and relevant. It keeps you grounded in reality, the reality of where people live and what their real needs are. While purpose can focus on self, service focuses on others. A servant leader has a healthy balance of self interest and selflessness. Recently someone asked me if our purpose always focused on someone else and I had to pause before I answered. But then I responded, "Yes!" If we were born to draw, build, sing or teach, we do it for other people. We get something from fulfilling our purpose, but we receive because we are giving.

Serving someone is an art, but only if you turn your back on your needs and serve the needs of others. Jesus said that no man can serve two masters; that is true where service is concerned. You can't do things for others the way you want them done; you must perform according to their needs and wishes.

If you are a person of purpose, are you a purpose servant? Do others receive the best of your purpose efforts? Why not make an effort to be a better servant this week? Better yet, get Greenleaf's book and make service a priority beyond this week. Think of what the world would be like if people of purpose made service their priority. Think of what your world would be like if you were a better servant. Make service your aim this week and make your purpose all that it is supposed to be as you meet the needs of others. Have a great week!

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I'm on a plane heading home to Pittsburgh and in this last hour before I land, I thought I would write this week's **Monday Memo**. Did you miss me since I haven't written in two weeks? I had a great time in Zimbabwe, where I was busy day and night. I did leadership, goal setting and life purpose seminars, conducted a local radio interview, spoke at the University of Zimbabwe to medical professionals, and consulted with a number of leaders. I learned a lot and look forward to my next visit there later this year. I added hundreds of names to **The Monday Memo** list, so if this is your first edition, welcome to **The Monday Memo** family!

Life is challenging right now in Zimbabwe. Many of the medical workers and students I spoke with are working on HIV and AIDS related issues. Unfortunately, Zimbabwe is among the world's leaders of HIV infections and AIDS deaths. This coupled with serious economic downturns, currency devaluation and other social problems makes life in Zimbabwe challenging now to say the least.

Yet during one seminar I asked all the participants to close their eyes and tell me what they saw themselves doing. In other words, I asked them what their dream was for themselves. Every man and woman had an answer, and they got excited just telling me what they saw. One man saw himself performing; another saw himself speaking before 50,000 employees, from his own company! One woman saw herself running a totally different business than she was currently in; another saw herself driving a sports utility vehicle while she ran her successful consulting firm. Several saw themselves taking their families on vacations to places in Europe and the United States.

I was reminded in that seminar that everyone has a dream. No matter how bad conditions may get, that dream stays alive. In fact, that dream can actually sustain and nurture you during tough times. That is why it is so important that the dream stays alive and that you regularly take some steps to see the dream fulfilled, no matter how simple those steps may be.

So let's do what those seminar participants did last week. Close your eyes for 10 seconds and visualize your dream. What do you see? What are you doing? Now write it down. It doesn't have to be long. Just a few sentences. Now read it over several times. Close your eyes again if you need more details or clarity. But write down what you see yourself doing in your wildest imaginations.

Now ask yourself: What can I do this week that will help me make that dream a reality? When I close my eyes, I see myself speaking before large audiences of 20,000 or more. What can I do this week to help further that dream? I am contacting two speakers bureaus who are always looking to match speakers with events that need them. It won't take me much time, but it is something I can do. I will also watch and study the techniques of one speaker on television who is addressing a large crowd. I will watch his or her mannerisms and study their style. Even if I never speak to those large crowds I "see," my working toward that will make me a better communicator to the crowds I do address. So nothing will be lost this week as I work to make it happen.

There must be something you can do this week to take a step closer to your dream. But it all starts with seeing it. I trust that as you close your eyes, you will then open them to the things you can do to make it all happen. Have a great week and I will write you again at our regular scheduled time next Monday.

The Monday Memo

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Issue 65

I just met with someone who has been offered a job. It is a good job that she has done before and could undoubtedly do again with a high level of excellence and efficiency. There is only one problem. She doesn't want to do it! There are others who hope that she will want to do it. She values their input and has searched her heart to find a way to fulfill their expectations. But she is going to say "no" to their offer and is going to launch out on her own to find something better suited to her life purpose.

Defining yourself and setting a course that you feel good about are hard things to do. It is often easier to follow the career path of least resistance, a path that often can provide some job security. For many years, I felt I was supposed to be a pastor. I tried to live up to those expectations that, to be honest, I put on myself. I thought that's what God wanted me to do. I pastored to please others but I wasn't happy. Finally, I faced how unhappy I was and resigned my pastorate. I have since resisted attempts by friends and counselors to fashion me according to what they felt I should do. Instead I set out on a path to define and fulfill my purpose.

Now I can hear you asking, "Well, what about the will of God? Where does that come into play?" And those are good questions. My sense, however, is that God will give you the will and the heart to do His work. There may be a season where you do something that crosses your will and separates you from your joy. But I don't think that can happen for very long.

There is a Bible verse from The Living Bible that reads: "For God is at work within you, helping you want to obey him, and then helping you do what he wants" (Philippians 2:13). God is working in you to give you a will and desire to fulfill His will and then helping you do what that will represents. Part of that help is His joy. A man named Nehemiah once said, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). If you have no joy in what you do, then you have no strength.

Why are you doing what you do? Why are you studying what you are studying? Why are you running the business that you are. Is it to fulfill someone else's dreams and expectations? If so, is that a good enough reason to continue doing it? The answer may be "yes," but it also may be "no." That is something only you can answer. If you answer "no," then what are you prepared to do about it?

This may be the week when you are honest with yourself and face the fact that you cannot live up to others' expectations. You must live your own life and fulfill your own purpose. If you do nothing else this week but face this reality, you will have taken a giant step to finding and fulfilling your purpose. May this be a breakthrough week for you as you find the courage to define yourself. There is no one better suited for the job.