

Investing in Your Future

Kluwer Mediation Blog

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About twelve months ago, I reluctantly attended a seminar in a classy hotel in London. A friend had encouraged me to go. I turned up rather late, missing the networking breakfast. I got my iPad out and got on with my emails as the speaker launched into his presentation. I was fairly sure I would not learn much. After a few minutes, I found myself taking a few notes. Then, many more. After half an hour, I felt that he might just have been addressing me alone, although there were probably 150 others present in the room. After 90 minutes, I had committed to a year-long series of seminars, one per quarter, at a cost of several thousands of pounds. (I also received a free mini iPad for signing up that day...). When I arrived at a mediators' retreat the following day with a box load of reading and other kit, it is fair to say that my colleagues were sceptical about my investment.

A year on, I have just commenced year two with another investment of several thousands of pounds. I wasn't going to but the value to me of these single days in the company of 25-30 other entrepreneurs and professionals, facilitated by a light-touch, skilled host, in a congenial environment, has been enormous. We spend most time working on exercises for ourselves using the excellent materials they provide and also working in pairs or small groups to reflect on our tasks. There is a website, books, videos and 1:1 coaching between sessions. But I tend not to use these. The days reflecting and planning are enough in themselves - and really valuable. It is a great example of viewing expenditure as investment rather than cost.

I have learned how to make better and more effective use of my time. We are urged to plan Buffer Days, Focus Days and Free Days. There is an emphasis on health and relationships just as much as on business, acknowledging that these are all related. We have been encouraged to carry out an Activity Inventory recording all that we do and to measure that against our Unique Abilities, that which only we can do. Cut out the inefficient, incompetent and even excellent if you can. Focus on where you alone really can make a difference.

And what if you had an additional 15 years of life ahead of you (over and above your anticipated date of death)? What would you do with it? Identify what you would really like to do - and do it now. Have a plan. Over the next 25 years, what are your ambitions? Set these broadly and then focus on each quarter. Don't worry about one year or three years from now. Take the next three months and set yourself some realistic tasks. Keep a record.

What can you delegate? What do you need to let go? What is working well? - celebrate. What could be better? - act. What have you (personally and in business) achieved in the past three months? Why? What can you build on? How? Set a 30 day action plan. How can you maximise your relationship with your best clients? What sort of business are you? A brand? Self-managing? Expanding? Reliant on you being at the coalface? Or enabling others to thrive?

And so on. You can find out more at Strategic Coach (<https://www.strategiccoach.com/>). Thoroughly recommended. But the real point is this: what are we doing to improve ourselves? To understand better who we are, what we want to achieve and what is important? What about our clients and our understanding of them? This kind of reflection really gets you thinking about what they may need, rather than what we might offer.

Personally, my real gains have been in becoming much more conscious of family time, trying to avoid "work" as the default setting, being much more focussed on what is important, accepting that aspiration and achievement are two different things, delegating more, and paradoxically really enjoying and doing much more in a business sense. More bangs for less bucks? It is all worth considering, seriously.