

THE PURPOSE PROJECT

Lighten the Load

By Richard Leider

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It was an ultimate adventure to a realm far away and deep within. I was leading a walking safari in Tanzania along the edge of the great Serengeti Plains. Looking like a walking advertisement for Patagonia, I was delighted when my new friend Thaddeus Ole Koyie, a Maasai village elder, expressed a fascination with seeing the contents of my impressive backpack. Proudly, I commenced to lay out all of my high tech essentials. After several minutes of just gazing at everything, Koyie asked with great intensity, "Does all this make you happy?"

With that simple question, Koyie captured the essence of the question that weighs so heavily on many of us. What will make us happy in the "second half of the journey?"

Retiring the Word "Retirement"

In the 1930's, when Congress set the official retirement age at 65 years, the average life expectancy was 61.7 years. Today, men can expect to live to age 81 and women to age 85. Moreover, millions of us will live far beyond those ages. Many of us can expect to spend more time in what used to be called "retirement" than we did in our formal working lives. Many people will leave the full-time workforce with reasonable financial resources, the resource of vital health, and the possibility of 30 more years of a meaningful life.

What will make us happy in the second half—the years between age 50 and age 100? As a Life Coach, I often witness people entering the second half of life who are wondering why success has to weigh so much, why "growing up" is equated with "growing old." Bringing our lives to a grinding halt to reflect on the journey is rarely practical, but there are ways to lighten our loads: we can retire the word "retirement."

Retirement, once perceived as a time to "hang it up" has become an opportunity to "repack." Given our increased longevity, the word *retirement* needs to change. Currently the word has many negative connotations, as evidenced by the synonyms listed for it in the thesaurus: "go out, depart, exit, leave, absent oneself, turn in, call it a day." All of these describe an exit. We have few words to describe the potential new journey that can emerge in the second half. One way to describe this new potential is to see retirement not as an exit but as a new phase of reinventing ourselves.

Repacking means reinventing. It means asking the right questions, rather than offering the wrong answers. As simple and poignant as, "Where am I going?" "What do I need for the journey?" "Why the #@%! am I carrying all this?" "Who am I traveling with?" can present a new ticket to vital aging—those vital qualities so easily unquestioned in the second half of life.

It takes courage to look at what we're carrying—and even more to consider leaving some behind. It's much easier to just live with what we have, secretly longing, for a new map and a new itinerary. As a seasoned explorer of both wilderness and adult development, I often advise people to have a "crisis on purpose." Like the infamous mid-life version, discovering a new map for the journey at times requires a second half crisis.

Every culture celebrates the *discoverer*, the hero who confronts the unknown and returns with stories to enrich the community. In the second half of our lives, the repacking process—a vision quest of sorts—takes on new significance. It brings us to a fundamental re-questioning of our purpose, and the opportunity to further uncover our calling.

Living the Good Life in the Second Half

The second half is a time to lighten our loads so we can get where we want to go. Repacking is a second half survival skill. When we don't repack, the results can be devastating. It has been reported that people who retire without a plan receive an average of thirteen paychecks from social security before dying. We must unpack our lives; lighten our loads; and repack for “the good life.”

What is *the good life*? *The good life* is a journey of living in the *place* we belong, with the *people* we love, doing the *right work*, on *purpose*.

We can dust off our old assumptions about aging and repack our bags by exploring those times when life seems to get the best of us; we can lighten our loads, and get the best of life.

Here are steps to lighten the load:

Uncovering Our Calling

Calling is "the inner urge to give our gifts away." Have you expressed your “gifts” fully? How can you give them away in the second half of the journey? While calling may not always correspond to our primary means of earning a living, it always refers to a "life project" that is central to our identity and which enables us to fully express our gifts. What are your life projects?

Answering the Big Question

When we're using our gifts in support of something we're passionate about, we feel more energetic, more motivated to get up in the morning. What issues, causes, interests are you passionate about? What's your answer today to the big question: "Why do I get up in the morning?"

Choosing Our Sounding Board

What are the most important relationships that have supported you along the way? Who are your teachers and personal models? What kind of support do you need for the second half transition? Who are the key resources on your "sounding board" as you plan the second half of your journey?

Sharpening Our Growth Edge

One of the keys to vital aging is "Grow or die!" What new learning opportunities and new growth edges are you curious about exploring? What do you want to learn? Who do you want to learn from? Where do you want to go to learn?

Repacking Our Relationship Bags

As the saying goes, "I married you for better or for worse, but not for lunch every day!" Are you and your loved ones having "courageous conversations" about the second half? A major cause of relationship stress is suppressed communication. The second half journey demands a grand dialogue fed by courageous conversations around two key questions: "What do you want?" and "How will you know when you get it?"

Claiming Our Time Boundaries

Are you satisfied with where your time is going? What do you want more time to do? Do you have the courage to say “no” to the less important things in your life and “yes” to your true priorities? Have you succumbed to the “hurry sickness” so common in today’s society? An antidote is daily solos—appointments with ourselves. Wisdom comes from reflection. Do you make appointments with yourself for meditation, prayer and reflection?

Reviewing Our Financial Health

Beware of waking up sometime in the future and finding out that you’ve been living someone else’s vision of the good life! Are you living in the place you belong, with the people you love, while doing the right work on purpose? Do your financial resources support your vision of the good life?

Refinding Our Smile

Are you having fun yet? Are you experiencing real joy? One source of our smile comes from creating a Master Dream List and acting on it. A Master Dream List contains the things you want to have, do, be or go to during the second half of your life. What’s on your Master Dream List? What's on your partner's Master Dream List? When will you start acting on your list?

Lifestyles of the Rich in Purpose

In the second half of our lives, we can unpack outmoded visions of the good life and create new ones; we can test our artistic interests by exploring the artist within. We can learn foreign languages, travel to countries that have always fascinated us and have conversations with people we never would have dreamed of knowing earlier in our lives. We can take up new forms of expression like yoga, dance and gardening; we can explore deeper forms of personal relationships; we can act on our natural desires to offer our gifts to serve humanity. We can live lifestyles of the rich in purpose.

The possibility of vital aging has inspired an unprecedented second half search for meaning, a yearning for community, a hunger for purpose, a desire for intimate relationships, and an authentic need to understand it all. Aging makes us think about our souls. For many of us, the purpose questions—“Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “What am I doing with my life?” “What is my legacy?”—are just beginning. *Repacking* means discovering the answers.

For vital aging, we must unpack and repack our bags. We must take a hard look at what we’re carrying and why. Seeing if our possessions, lifestyle and work-style are making us happy or weighing us down.

Repacking is the ongoing activity of weighing our choices, rearranging our priorities, reframing our vision of *the good life*, and redefining a new sense of what it means to be a human "being," not a human "doing."

The road ahead can indeed be the best part of the journey. It can be a chance to unpack and repack what matters most to us—an opportunity to attain a deeper and more authentic sense of ourselves than ever before.

Our task, in the second half of our lives, is to listen to the voice calling for us to unpack and to heed its call. We must learn to repack to ask ourselves the question Koyie asked me: **“Does all this make you happy?”**

REPACKING CHECKLIST ESSENTIALS FOR THE SECOND HALF JOURNEY*

The items on the Repacking Checklist are those necessary for a successful and fulfilling second half journey. Work with a partner and discuss what you currently have, what you need, and what you need to let go of for your personal journey. For each item, ask yourself the question Koyie asked me: "Does this make you happy?"

REPACKING CHECKLIST

Checklist Item	Have It	Need It
<p>Passport</p> <p><i>Sense of Purpose—a reason for the trip.</i></p> <p>Question: Have I uncovered my Purpose?</p> <p>Lesson: The secret of life is to live on purpose! Purpose is our reason for being. We must ask ourselves regularly, "Why do I get up in the morning?"</p>		
<p>Baggage</p> <p><i>Stuff I need to enjoy the journey.</i></p> <p>Question: Is my stuff making me happy or is it weighing me down?</p> <p>Lesson: Having a good life has more to do with being than with having. We must ask ourselves regularly, "Does all this make me happy?"</p>		
<p>Map</p> <p><i>Sense of direction to the journey.</i></p> <p>Question: Am I living in the place I belong, with the people I love, doing the right work, on purpose?</p> <p>Lesson: Freedom to choose is our most powerful possession. We must ask ourselves regularly, "Am I living my life or someone else's?"</p>		

Checklist Item	Have It	Need It
<p>Traveler's Checks</p> <p><i>Enough money to enjoy the journey.</i></p> <p>Question: How much is enough?</p> <p>Lesson: By having less in our lives, we often get more out of life. We must ask ourselves regularly, "Do I have enough to live my version of the good life?"</p>		
<p>Address Book</p> <p><i>Connections with the people I love.</i></p> <p>Question: Am I spending time with the people I love?</p> <p>Lesson: Vital relationships depend on our courage to fully unpack with another person. We must ask ourselves regularly, "Am I willing to have courageous conversations with this person?"</p>		
<p>Travel Journal</p> <p><i>Lessons learned from past journeys.</i></p> <p>Question: Do I have a vision for the second half of my life?</p> <p>Lesson: No one can define the good life for us. We must ask ourselves regularly, "Does all this make me happy?"</p>		
<p>Adventuring Spirit</p> <p>Courage to choose my own destiny.</p> <p>Question: Am I willing to get lost?</p> <p>Lesson: It often takes a exploration—getting lost—to get us thinking about what we're carrying. We must ask ourselves regularly: "What am I carrying and why?"</p>		

*Excerpted from *Repacking Your Bags Lighten Your Load For The Rest of Your Life* by Richard J. Leider and David A. Shapiro (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco 2001). Used with permission.

