

Music, Motorcycles, Family

by Richard Lannon

Listening to great tunes, riding on the open road, and hanging with friends and family is part of living a successful life. I was raised with the belief that if you worked hard and persevered you will be successful. That kind of thinking didn't leave a lot of time for play.

My success focused on my entrepreneurial-career life. I was a live-to-work person. Early in my career, I achieved a high income and did so several times throughout my professional life. First, in the technology industry, I took advantage of the growth of the internet, dot-com, Y2K, and infrastructure upgrades. It was endless days and lots of stress. Then I shifted my focus, branching out into a new kind of profession: the business analyst. I birthed a professional practice creating training and development programs. I won high achievement awards and helped make improvements in the bustling resource industry. My third career shift focused on strategic planning, training and coaching to work with business owners, leaders and professionals to create their desired success. These shifts and changes spanned a thirty-year business-career life I am proud of today.

My family life thrived. I married a wonderful, gorgeous person and we have two great kids who are now adults. Even with the hustle and bustle of my career, I took the time to engage and support my family in their educational and personal interests.

I pursued few, if any, personal interests outside of my professional life. As I mentioned, I was a live-to-work person and found it difficult to understand people who work-to-live.

Because of my focus and the various levels of success I had achieved, you could say I had "arrived" – several times. In hindsight, I think my success came from the fact I was willing to give everything to succeed in my business life. But I was never satisfied; always wanting to do more and always stressed and worried about something.

Monday, Wednesday, Friday

On Monday, June 8, 2015, I got up, went into my home office and worked on a 3-day workshop I was preparing to present for a client in another city later in the week. As I picked up the phone to contact a business associate, I felt a twitch in my left cheek then became light headed. I stopped and put down the phone. Sitting still, I could feel my heartbeat; a pounding in my chest as blood forced its way through my arteries and veins. Something was wrong. I called the medical hotline. The nurse's instructions were clear: take your things, go downstairs, take two aspirins, and she would call emergency response services.

The emergency crew evaluated me and could not find any explanation for my symptoms. I elected to go to the hospital anyway. The next five days were surreal.

I found myself spending two days in emergency lying on the most uncomfortable bed. After two days of monitoring, the doctors told me I needed an angiogram to check my heart. On Wednesday the 10th, I was told I was 90 percent blocked in two arteries and 70 to 80 percent blocked in the other two arteries. I needed quadruple by-pass surgery. Nothing prepares you for that news.

On Thursday the 11th, I had a bed on the cardiac ward and was told I'd have to wait a week before my surgery. That same evening, I had a cardiac event — basically, the same symptoms as before. I felt a twitch, my heart pounded, and my head felt light. There was an entire team of cardiac professionals at my bed in a matter of seconds. My surgery was shifted immediately to the next morning, Friday, at 6 a.m., placing me at the top of the list. That evening, I called my 93-year-old dad just in case it would be the last time we ever spoke.

It's interesting what you remember when you wake up from surgery. It might be a smell, a thought, a feeling. I awoke from surgery with a person standing over me. All I could see was a shadow of a figure surrounded by a halo of light. I asked one question. *Was I alive?*

Like a River

A shift happens when you have been through a traumatic experience and a change happens to your reality. When you have been healthy all your life, this becomes especially true. Suddenly, I had to rethink everything: my business-career, my family, my life. I learned the hard way this takes time.

If you had met me in my previous life, you might have thought I was a successful man. I can say my blessing was having a professional practice, loving family, and what I thought was a healthy lifestyle. I biked, swam, walked, danced and went to the gym. Although I did carry some, what I now call “success weight” around the belly, giving me a slight pear shape, I felt pretty good.

I know now I was not healthy. I *thought* I was because I could do all sorts of physical activities. What I didn't notice with every breathing day was my increasingly shortened breath as the warning signs went unnoticed, misinterpreted, or misdiagnosed. Today, I know the difference and I embrace a functional, healthy living code for living a whole successful life.

I had to spend time thinking about what was important to me. Examining my life was not always fun but it was necessary. I realized that time, place and events are all part of the flow of life. Like a river, they converge. Events happen, everything can change, and a new course emerges. We need to flow and move; to be able to change and learn to enjoy what is available to us in the here and now and embrace what we can do today, tomorrow, and in our future.

In the end, it is not *what* you do but *how* you choose to live a life which counts. For me, that meant shifting a one-sided life from focusing solely on my career to putting energy toward things that would make a difference in how I lived and provide some personal enjoyment. Don't get me wrong; I would still work and continue to run a professional practice. I just needed to

make some life adjustments and pursue some additional interests. To do so would mean music, motorcycles, and family.

The Beat Goes On

When I was young, music was a big part of my life. I collected vinyl albums, played the guitar, and was in a band. After my brush with death, I decided to look at my old vinyl record collection and get some of the ones I had since misplaced. At the same time, I picked up my guitar and started to play again. People with similar interests started flowing into my life. Suddenly I was sharing and swapping albums, playing the guitar with some great musicians, attending a songwriters group, and performing at the occasional open-mic night. I also did a tribute music video and hosted an annual backyard jam, having fun with music at family events. It has been fun and a blast.

I find the people who have come into my life as part of my musical interest have been an important part of defining who I am. They supported me and were there for me when I needed it most. Most musicians are willing to share what they have learned. In sharing, relationships grow. One could say with every relationship forged, the beat goes on.

The Vibration of the Open Road

Getting a motorcycle was a lifelong dream of mine. I played around with motorbikes when I was young but never took the time to own a motorcycle. Throughout my thirties and forties, I saved up the money to buy a motorcycle, but there was always another priority: the kids needed tuition, the aging car needed replacing, we needed a vacation, business conditions changed, and the list goes on.

On a warm prairie-summer evening, I jokingly said to a friend, “If you decide to sell your motorcycle, I’ll buy it.” That fall, my friend phoned one evening, asking when I could pick up my bike. I paused for a moment, promptly looked at my wife and said, “I guess I bought a motorcycle.” As fate would have it, we experienced one of the longest extended fall seasons in history that year and I managed to ride my motorcycle daily.

There is nothing like a beautiful sunny day on the open road. The warm summer air, the smell of the outdoors, and the prairie’s horizon melt my troubles away. There is a profound connection felt between the sound and vibration of the bike; the feel of the road and the open landscape. Eventually, the wind, the air and the surroundings peel away the layers of my day until it is just me, my bike and the open road. I feel free.

All in the Family

Allowing yourself to connect with family deepens your life journey.

My wife and kids have always been important to me. Like most parents, there is nothing I wouldn't do for my children to protect them, provide for them, and give them every opportunity I never had. Nowadays, especially since my by-pass, my family has become more important to me than ever and now includes siblings, in-laws, and nieces and nephews.

It was not always that way. When it came to family, I always had my boundaries. Based on my life experience, I learned to stand my ground, take care of myself and be prepared at any moment to do what was necessary to succeed. My need for independence and autonomy was strong and I tended to choose events and activities that supported this natural inclination.

Cardiac disease has changed how I view family. Ironically, I have learned home is where the heart is. For me, this means being the best husband, father, brother-in-law, uncle and cousin I can be. When I married, I joined the folds of my wife's close-knit family, but it has only been in the last few years that I have learned how to be a part of it. It is amazing how freeing it feels to embrace family relationships; dropping my guard and always being able to be myself. It brings me great joy, post near-death experience, to share in the trials, tribulations, and happiness of family life.

Make Your Journey Count

When you experience a life event such as a heart attack, you realize there are a few life lessons to be learned. From my childhood, I recall adults referring to these kinds of experiences as "character building opportunities." I thought I had already lived through enough character-building experiences in my life. Now I understand that the learning never stops; it is just part of the ongoing journey to personal discovery where there are many lessons to learn along the way.

First, evaluate your life. Reevaluating my life was one of the hardest things I had to do after my initial recovery. I discovered that it is a process more like a meandering river than a straight line. Take a candid look at your business-career, relationships and you personally – something that is not easy to do. Start with sitting down and taking stock of everything, intrinsically and extrinsically. Where you start depends on where you are.

Second, invest time and effort into the relationships of your life. In my view, you need to consider your significant other (a spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, life partner), friends and family. Respect, trust and loyalty are the best qualities to form relationships and I look for those qualities in other people. Choose your friends wisely as they have the potential to either make you or break you.

Third, invest in and take care of you. Your life personally is as important as anyone else's. That does not mean you should be self-centered or selfish. It simply means treating yourself as important and taking care of you. For me, this has meant my mind (the intellect), my body (the physical), and my spirit (soul or inner-self). Success in life is about coming to your terms in these key areas; they are the very essence of your existence. Take inventory of where you are personally in all these areas and slowly make the investment required to take care of you.

Final Thoughts

When you are young, life is an open road with endless possibilities. If you're like most people, your business-career is a big part – if not the biggest part – of your life. Focused on the basics of life, you work hard to pay the bills, put food on the table, and put a roof over your head. You're determined to persevere and be successful, no matter the price.

The truth is, if you define yourself by your work, the journey to recovery takes longer. Since my quadruple by-pass, I have met a lot of people with similar health challenges. In my opinion, those who end up right back where they started are the people who jumped back into their former life.

I'm not ready to throw in the towel yet on my working life. It is not time. I still work as a business strategist, trainer, and coach with business owners, leaders and professionals to build business brainpower, make better business decisions, establish a common direction, and create an implementation plan to guide business success. However, I am selective in the work I choose and who I work with. I recognize the need for synchronicity between my client work, my interests, and my family.

Interestingly, because I took the time to review and reevaluate my career, interests, and family life, my business practice has flourished, allowing me to thrive in all areas of my life. I still believe you can achieve anything you want to if you put your mind to it. I just made sure to make more time for music, motorcycles, and family.

When life knocks you down, reality hits hard. Don't wait for your cardiac event. Look at where you are, what you need, and what you can do *today*. Make the adjustments, whatever the circumstances or situation, to create the future that will make your journey count. Explore your interests, spend time with friends and family, play guitar, ride a motorcycle, and have some fun along the way.