

Inspired leadership:

Transforming yourself
and others with passion
and purpose



Two experts explain how paying attention to your own needs and desires can help you make a difference in other people's lives

by Marilyn Larkin, MA

Two years ago in the *Journal on Active Aging*,¹ International Council on Active Aging® founder and CEO Colin Milner made the case that “before wellness models can truly make a difference, those who work with older adults need to embrace change themselves.” Roger Landry, MD, MPH, president of Masterpiece Living and author of *Live Long, Die Short*,² agreed. In the article, Landry discussed his own transformative experience and provided self-change advice for those ready to take that step.

To assist members on their journeys, ICAA invited Gregg Levoy and Maureen Hagan to present at the ICAA Conference 2016, held in November. These

speakers set out to facilitate both personal and professional growth, motivating attendees to embark or advance on the path to passionate, purposeful leadership. Their presentations drew high marks and enthusiastic feedback from participants.

Many ICAA members share the desire to move to the next level as effective, authentic wellness leaders. To bring valuable information from the above presentations to all readers, with additional insights for those who attended, the *Journal on Active Aging* recently interviewed Levoy and Hagan for this feature. They both affirmed that leadership begins within.

Connect with passions and callings

Author and speaker Gregg Levoy is a former adjunct professor of journalism at the University of New Mexico, former

Continued on page 26



Inspired leadership: Transforming yourself and others with passion and purpose

Continued from page 24



behavioral specialist at *USA Today*, and a regular blogger for *Psychology Today*. In his books *Callings: Finding and Following An Authentic Life*³ and *Vital Signs: Discovering and Sustaining Your Passion for Life*,⁴ Levoy shows leaders how to get in touch with their passions and callings, which in turn helps them inspire others to do so.

ML: *Why do those who work with older adults need to work on themselves, as well?*

GL: Because leadership starts here. Leadership is about understanding and activating the deep motivations in other people, their passions, their sense of calling or mission or what they want to accomplish and contribute. Ideally, all that is modeled by leaders themselves.

You need to be willing to ask yourself what your own passions and callings are, not just once and for all, but regularly. For both career and personal development, the question is not, “What should I do with my life?” or “What do I want to be when I grow up?”—which, amazingly, many older people continue to ask

themselves. The big question is, “Who am I?”

Of course, who we are changes over time, and so will the passions that come through us. So we all need to revisit this question of “Who am I?” from time to time to keep up with ourselves.

ML: *Would you say many people are living and working in an “automatic pilot” way—that is, they haven’t been particularly introspective, but simply do what they think they’re supposed to do?*

GL: Everybody is capable of waking up to their passions and possibilities; whether they want to wake up is another story. As leaders, they should be willing to try. And this is one reason why the process is not about immediately asking what changes you need to make.

Rather, it’s about looking at what you need to do to reengage with your work, self and sense of mission. The process starts by asking, “Where am I losing vitality in my day-to-day life? Is part of my job sucking the life out of me? Is a

relationship, personal or professional, making me feel like a ghost of my complete self? Are there life goals that I’m not doing anything about?”

It’s important to realize that if you’re a leader and you lack passion for your work, you’re not the only one who suffers. Everyone you have relationships with—colleagues, the people on whose behalf you claim to work, family, friends—will be denied that energy.

ML: *What’s a good first step to reengagement?*

GL: When I was in my 30s, I made a list of both work and non-work activities that were draining the energy out of me. It was a way to start identifying where I was unplugged, on automatic pilot or simply not engaged. The list included things like socializing out of guilt, driving in rush hour traffic, doing my own taxes, and getting trapped in conversations with talkaholics. These were the things that devitalized me, that lacked any sense of meaning or purpose for me.

Making a list like this is a great strategy. You want to look—gently—at the things you’re involved with that are just not doing it for you [also see the sidebar, “Get in touch with your passion,” on page 28].

ML: *Once you acknowledge the activities that are draining you, what next?*

GL: Frankly, a certain amount of grief work may be in order. You become aware of all the time you’ve wasted or has slipped by you, all the things you could have been doing and weren’t. Instead of immediately jumping into what to do now, you may have to sit on the floor and ask yourself, “What have I done?” “Where did I leave my passion?”

After that, it’s about taking a single step toward anything you feel you would rather be doing, and looking at the feedback life gives you. That step could

be talking with a friend or colleague, reading a magazine article, or making a list of the people you'd love to have on a personal "board of advisors" to help you change. Then see what happens. Ask yourself if you feel better or worse. Then another step. Do you feel more awake or more asleep? Another step. What does your body tell you? By taking small steps, you're giving yourself the experience of momentum, achievement, progress—in a word, success—early on.

ML: *You talk about channels. Where do those fit in?*

GL: Channels are the way we get information about ourselves and our passions and callings. We need to open them up and put on our receivers and listen. Channels tell us what we really want to do with our lives and the kind of legacy we want to leave. Here are some examples of channels:

Intuitions. An intuition is like a little calling—it's calling us to reach out to someone, to turn left instead of right, or to do something like signing up for a class even though we're convinced we don't have the time or money.

Dreams. They tell you what you know or feel about something. When we talk about our dreams coming true, we're usually talking about our ambitions, what we really want to do. It's important to listen.

Song lyrics you can't get out of your head. Years ago when I was about to quit my job in frustration, I kept hearing one lyric in my head for weeks—"If I only had a brain," from the scarecrow's song in *The Wizard of Oz*. I realized that lyric was telling me something about my process. I wasn't thinking the decision through.

Friction. Friction happens in areas of your life where changes are trying to take place. Where does your head constantly argue with your heart? Where does your walk not match your talk? Where do you fight with people? What are you fighting for? Where does your need for passion rub up against your need for security?

Patterns. This is where you've worn a footpath to and from some issue in your life over and over—for example, choosing a job when you'd rather work for yourself, choosing the same kind of partner over and over, any mistakes you keep making. Looking at a pattern can tell you something about what really wants to emerge in your life.

Body symptoms. Dr. Arnold Mindell, founder of process-oriented psychology, told me that symptoms usually are dreams trying to come true, which is a really provocative concept, especially when we consider how many symptoms are going on in the last third of life. It's similar to my belief that talents are passions that become needs, and if those needs aren't met, they become symptoms—emotional symptoms like restlessness, boredom or envy at other people's successes, or just feeling out of whack with yourself, or physical symptoms such as headaches or backaches. [To learn about how to get in touch with your calling, see the sidebar on page 28.]

ML: *Many JAA readers feel they are already realizing their passion or calling by working with older adults. How can they bring this process to their constituents?*

GL: I still say, "You go first." Go through a bit of the process yourself. Look inside and ask what really wants to emerge from the abyss. It might be something creative. It could be a leadership role in the community. It could be simply rediscovering your sense of wonder or your love of learning. Then you can offer the people you work with an opportunity to go through a similar process—getting together in groups and talking about passion and the sense of calling.

People love to talk about themselves and they also love to explore these subjects, at every age. And these discussions just might lead to action. Ask questions like, "If you could do anything and weren't worried about failing, what would you take on?" "If you could make any change in the work that you do in the world, what would it be?" "What do you do that you're not getting paid for, but simply because you love it?"

Seven principles of leadership

1. Passion
2. Purpose
3. Persistence
4. Pathfinder
5. Posture
6. Practice
7. Plan (Plan, Lead with your strengths, Action steps, Nurture with personal development and Network of like-minded leaders)

Adapted from Maureen Hagan's handout for her "Leadership through serving others" presentation at the ICAA Conference 2016.

I've given presentations at successful aging conferences where people in their 80s and 90s are sitting in the front row, licking their chops. They don't identify with the notion of retirement. They want to "live long and die short," as Roger Landry says.

Here's an example. I was presenting at a nursing community in Los Angeles when a man came up to me and said he was a retired accountant, looking for the next thing he could do. I asked him to tell me something he loved doing, and he said, "I love to read historical novels, but if I did that all the time, I'd never get out of the house." I asked if he would consider starting up a book club for people who love historical novels. He'd get out of the house, he'd be doing something socially useful and he'd be engaged in his passion. The look on his face was incredible—the dawning realization that this was a great idea.

So looking inside yourself and connecting with your own passions puts you in a perfect position to come up with creative possibilities that can help others.

Leading through service

For fitness professional Maureen (Mo) Hagan, a leader must be able to relate

Continued on page 28

Inspired leadership: Transforming yourself and others with passion and purpose

Continued from page 27

to and connect with people—whether staff or clients—in order to influence and inspire their lives. Hagan, an industry veteran, has been recognized for her leadership numerous times over the years. More recently, she was named one of Canada’s 20 “Most Influential Women in Sport and Physical Activity” in 2014, honored as the 2016 IHRSA Woman Leader of the Year, and selected for the new *OptiMYz* Top 100 list of Canadian health influencers.

Hagan, who serves as vice president, Program Innovation and Fitness Development for GoodLife Fitness and canfitpro (Canadian Fitness Professionals), has worked in active-aging settings since the 1990s. She discusses below why leaders today need to take a new perspective,

and provides tools to help with a transformative journey.

ML: *What is leadership from your perspective?*

MH: The word *leader* is derived from the two words *lea* (meaning “path”) and *der* (meaning “finder”).⁵ So a leader is a pathfinder—someone who goes ahead and discovers or shows others the way. It’s one of the seven principles of leadership that I teach in my presentations [for all seven principles, refer to the sidebar on page 27.]

ML: *Why is it especially important now that those working in the active-aging industry revisit what it means to be a leader?*

MH: We’re seeing the convergence of two very different generations in the industry and in the workforce overall: Boomers, who created the current corporate-leadership culture and are starting to exit the workforce, and Millennials, who are entering the workforce. These groups have very different values and purposes for the work they do. While this creates some conflicts, it also creates an opportunity for a real make-over in terms of what defines leadership today.

Millennials are motivated not by their title or position in a company, but by the ability to lift people up and inspire them to do good work. When choosing a job, Millennials are concerned with contributing to a better world, and how

Get in touch with your calling

Gregg Levoy has put together 37 questions to help individuals get in touch with their passions and callings. Here are some examples:

- What is the most prominent affirmation (wisdom quote, guiding principle) you have tacked/taped/framed up in your house and/or office?
- What have always been your most natural abilities? The courses you always aced in school, the skills that always came easily to you?
- If you’ve ever thought that someday you might write a book, what would the subject of that book be?
- If you were to go back to school—not for the sake of establishing a new career or making money, necessarily, but just for the love of learning—what subject(s) would you most want to study?
- If you could test-drive an entirely different profession than the one you’re currently in—or a different version of the one you’re in—what would it be?
- If money and logistic were no object, what three activities would you most love to pursue/experience?
- You’re going to a Halloween party next week: What do you really want to come dressed as?
- Name something people have been telling you all your life, about yourself. Something positive and something negative.
- If you had an hour’s worth of prime-time television, and an international audience, what subject would you talk about for that hour?
- What is the most important thing missing from your life right now?
- What is the most consistent message or urging you’ve been hearing in your head in the last year about a change that wants to happen in your relationship to work? And the most consistent urging you’ve heard about a change that wants to happen in a non-work arena: relationship, community life, lifestyle, health or spiritual regimens?

“To tie it all together, skim through your responses to the preceding questions and circle any recurring themes—words or phrases that continually show up,” Levoy says. “You’re looking for patterns.”

Adapted from Vital Signs: Discovering and Sustaining Your Passion for Life and Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life. www.gregglevoy.com/vital-signs/excerpts.html

an organization's vision aligns with that. It's different from the way I was taught. We hired people we thought would be a good fit, and then those people bought into the company's vision and worked towards that goal.

Also, Boomers are known for being hard workers and for committing long hours to work for the company's goal. Millennials value and choose the companies they work for based on not just the company's bottom line or vision, but how the company will serve their own needs and goals—and if it doesn't, they have no problem looking elsewhere to find that alignment. That's a very different mindset. For managers from a different generation, relating can be a real challenge.

ML: *How would you pull the generations together?*

MH: Although a leader must still deliver the vision, he or she also needs to be equally eager to understand what the goal of the employee is in joining the company. That requires two-way conversation—an integration of both goals, and finding a true alignment. It's aligning what these individuals desire to do and love to do with the work they're actually doing.

Also, for leaders to drive their companies forward, they need to be able to bring employees along with them, caring for the employees' goals along the way, caring for their work-life balance, their happiness, and their effectiveness in their work.

ML: *Is this approach relevant not only for managers, but also for leaders who work directly with older adults?*

MH: Absolutely! I say this from experience as a licensed physiotherapist who worked for years with older adults with chronic conditions and illnesses. While I was the leader and knew what clients



needed, I still had to find out what individuals viewed as their purpose for living. If someone's purpose was to sit in a wheelchair all day and be able to socialize and get down the hall to the bingo room, who was I to judge that this person really needed to walk every day? My job then became to strengthen the upper body to help with mobility.

When I attach my plan or purpose in working with a client to what that client's goals are, then I'm really being client-focused. So leaders working with older adults need to change the conversation from "I know what I need to do to help you" to "What do I need to do to serve you, so you can be the happy, healthy, independent person you want to be?"

ML: *How does that fit with motivating people to try new things or come out of their comfort zone so, to use your example, maybe they won't want to sit in the wheelchair all day?*

MH: It comes down to one word: influence. If you can, build trust—relation-

ships where the clients have faith in you, not fear. That comes from serving people's needs first. If someone feels that "Mo's got my back," then when I suggest standing exercises one day, that client or resident will be more open to trying.

I believe in "Let's give them what they want and then give them what they need." You know the client wants to do a certain exercise. Once the person has done it, you say something like, "Well, we've gone this far; let's see if we can add one more level"—and then you sell all the benefits that go with it. But you have to build that trust first.

ML: *You've talked about authenticity. What does that mean specifically with regard to working with others?*

MH: It means being yourself. It's being yourself as the leader you are, living your true purpose and living your true core values.

Continued on page 30

Inspired leadership: Transforming yourself and others with passion and purpose

Continued from page 29

When I get up in the morning, I look in the mirror and say to myself, “I’m showing up as Mo today.” I’m not showing up as the boss, even though some days I’d like to just be the boss. When I’m authentically Mo, I connect more with people and that builds relationships.

ML: *It’s like doing away with a hierarchical way of thinking.*

MH: While we all need to know and understand our position in an organization, the fact is, if you truly are leading, you don’t need a title to let people know that.

ML: *That assumes people know and accept who they are, and can function authentically as leaders.*

MH: It does—and that’s why leaders need to do personal development. They have to check in with themselves and ask, “Am I doing my best work?”

Am I speaking my truth?” With that in mind, I’ve recently written the course “Leadership outside the box.” A key tool in that course is a 15-minute mindful meditation that you do every morning as part of a “SUCCESS” routine [see the sidebar, “Tips for leadership success,” on page 31].

ML: *What is a mindful meditation?*

MH: You decide. It could be sitting in silence, just being aware of your breathing and clearing your mind. It could be sitting with a meditation audio in your ear, listening to someone facilitate breathing, awakening, goal-setting. It could be simply sitting with your goals in front of you and saying them aloud, as an affirmation.

Basically, it could be anything that you spend 15 minutes focusing on that’s going to help you become a better version of yourself. You might set an intention

for the day—for example, “I will smile all day and compliment three people.” You say it out loud. And you might scribe or journal for a minute about what it will feel like at the end of the day, after you’ve literally made somebody else’s.

Your posture is also important. Posture expert Amy Cuddy says to stand up in front of the mirror and put your hands on your hips like Superwoman or Superman and say, “I am,” or “I can,” or “I will,” and then fill in the blank with whatever your goal is for the day.

The main point is to do something consistently every morning, like exercise, but for your mind and spirit.

[**Ed.** Marilynn Larkin discusses the effects of posture in her *Journal on Active Aging* article “A wellness approach to posture: feeling the impact.” See “Resources” on this page for information.]

Resources

Internet

Arnold Mindell

www.aamindell.net

Amy J. C. Cuddy

www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/profile.aspx?facId=491042

Canfitpro

www.canfitpro.com

GoodLife Fitness

www.goodlifefitness.com

Gregg Levoy

www.gregglevoy.com

International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)

www.icaa.cc

Live Long, Die Short

http://livelongdieshort.com

Maureen Hagan

www.mohagan.com

Print

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Larkin, M. (2015). The wellness approach to posture: feeling the impact. *Journal on Active Aging*, 14(4), 34–40; July issue*

* Available to ICAA members in the online content library [“Management articles,” “Motivation”] at www.icaa.cc

ML: *What is the most important advice you can offer readers about achieving and sustaining success as a leader?*

MH: Do ongoing personal and professional development. Work on yourself, and also network, because that's when you reach out and learn from people. That's why I go to ICAA conferences. I go to every conference in the industry where I can learn to be a better leader. I also advise leaders to have a coach or mentor to help them and to serve as a source of inspiration. And again, the most important point is that leadership begins with you; it begins within. 

Marilynn Larkin, MA, is an award-winning medical writer and editor, an ACE-certified personal trainer and group fitness instructor, and originator of PosturAbility®, a program that boosts posture and self-esteem. She is also ICAA's Communications Director and a regular contributor to the Journal on Active Aging®.

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2. Landry, R. (2014). *Live Long, Die Short: A Guide to Authentic Health and Successful Aging*. Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press.
3. Levoy, G. (1998). *Callings: Finding and Following An Authentic Life*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, an imprint of Crown Archetype, a division of Random House.
4. Levoy, G. (2015). *Vital Signs: Discovering and Sustaining Your Passion for Life*. New York, NY: TarcherPerigree, an imprint of Penguin Random House.
5. Hall, K. (2010). *Aspire: Discovering your Purpose through the Power of Words*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Tips for leadership success

Maureen (Mo) Hagen has developed "Leadership Outside the Box," a 28-day challenge to highlight the importance of self-development and self-discovery for leaders who want to make a difference in the world. One aspect of the challenge involves a 15-minute morning SUCCESS routine, with SUCCESS as the acronym for a 7-step method:

Sit in Stillness: Sit in silence and/or meditate (to become mindful of your breathing, your thoughts, feelings, or being in the now) (5 minutes)

Understand and affirm the strength(s) that you will bring to your leadership today. Complete one of these 3 statements to help clarify a strength today (1 minute)

I am _ (determined, influential) _____, today.

I can _ (be a pathfinder) _____, today.

I will _ (connect with 2 like-minded leaders for inspiration) _____, today.

Conjure up a picture in your mind of the future and how things will be, look and feel when you reach your goal (1 minute)

Create one affirmation (positive statement) you will verbalize aloud that confirms your unlimited potential and most important priorities (1 minute)

Example: It is January 17th, and I am happy and proud to be a best-selling author in leadership, today.

I can ... _____, today.

I will ... _____, today.

Energize your mind with personal reading and reflection on new ideas (4–5 minutes)

Scribe in a journal what you are most excited about, proud of having achieved or grateful for on this day (1 minute)

Stretch and move to energize your body (increase your heart rate and respiratory rate), or practice Amy Cuddy's power poses to build confidence (1–2 minutes)