

1



Welcome to School

We can't make moments. But we can make the most of them.



Never in the history of the planet have individuals with so much power felt so powerless. Never before have so many of us been told we are valued yet felt like vassals. Inside this personal-power-schizophrenia, that we matter often slips our minds because others appear to matter more. To that end here is a quiz I'd like you to take. I don't know if it will help you find your way, but it might remind and rearrange your thinking about how important you are along the way.

For the sake of conversation let's call this an Impact Quiz.

2 — *Inspire, Enlighten, & Motivate*

Here is the first of two parts:

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Heisman Trophy winners.
3. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.
4. Name five people who have won a Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
5. Name the last five Academy Award winners for best actor or actress.

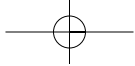
How did you do? The point is, few, if any, of us remember the headliners of yesterday, and these are no second-rate achievers. These are the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners. Every stage eventually goes dark.

Here's the second half of the quiz. See how you do on this one:

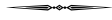
1. List two teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

Easier? The lesson?

The people who make a difference in our lives are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most



awards. They are the ones who care. If you care, you make a difference.



What makes our little corner of the world less isn't its size but our regard for it.

What diminishes us isn't only how others size us up but how we size ourselves up.

We begin to make ourselves more important by first refusing to diminish our importance.

Little adds more to our importance than knowing how important we are to each other.

We can't love others until we feel we can love ourselves, and love is a ladder that allows us to climb out of ourselves. Follow the path with a heart. At the heart of teaching is loving.

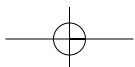


The only equity we have in life is how we invest ourselves in the moment.

At any moment the question is where are we in that moment.



We make the common profound by pausing and tying knots around a moment. In this way we transform our moments into a string of pearls.



OVER EVERY FINISH LINE IN LIFE
ARE THE WORDS,
“BEGIN HERE”

All right. Here we are folks. Step up. Step up. Labor Day is done. Summer is over. School is in. The wheel that never stops turning has turned. Again. It's time to hunker down and get to work. Runners take your mark. There's a race to be run. What's never begun is never won.

On my internal calendar, September is January. And not just for me. Perhaps because so many of us spent so many years in school, or perhaps because so many of us spent so many years sending our kids off to school, September just feels like the starting gate. September is so pregnant with beginnings that in many ways it is more of a doorway to the year ahead than New Year's, the holiday that celebrates the Roman god of doors. And regardless of our ideas about where or when things ought to begin, very little begins at our beginning. Most begins where it begins.

Any of us who are planning to move forward can cut the cost on life's learning curve by taking the time to look backward.

Those who avoid the past never do.

Whether we're hoping, in the year ahead, to improve our chances of getting to heaven or simply to get better grades, all beginnings benefit from a backward glance.

The promises we make to ourselves about the future require us to look at promises we have broken in the past. Few of us who promise we'll study this year will honor that promise unless we study what or why we didn't do what we said we would do last year.

Getting better grades in any aspect of life requires us to take a hard look at what we didn't pass or passed on in the past.

Sooooo, sometimes the best way to approach new beginnings is by sitting down and quieting down before we go charging off.

While every beginning requires caution, we can also err on the side of caution. Beginnings require us, if you'll excuse the expression, to begin.

A buddy of mine in college would stay up for nights before finals creating elaborate study schedules. And never study. Plans can sometimes be a form of procrastination. It was the late John Lennon who reminded us: "Life is what happens while we're making plans."

Beginnings require preparation and reflection. But preparation and reflection are everything and nothing if nothing is done with them. Good deeds are prayer's wings.

If we want to begin to change the world, we have to begin with ourselves. "We don't see things as they are," wrote Anaïs Nin, "we see them as we are."

Most of us will do anything to begin anywhere but with ourselves. We will talk about changing our hair, our car, our neighborhood, or our job. But the real work begins here. At home. With us. Hello! Hello! Anyone home?

Beginning to work on one's self is just that. A beginning. Forget about finishing, even as we are reminded of the Talmudic teaching, "We are not expected to finish the work, but neither are we excused from it." Anyone who thinks they've finished their "work" is daydreaming and needs to get back to work. Unlike the movies, life is never a wrap. It is always a process. Outside of the individual ego, the camera in life never stops

6 — *Inspire, Enlighten, & Motivate*

running. If or when the Great Director shouts “Cut,” we’ll all know it.

People used to live in one house most of their lives. And often worked for one company most of their lives. These were the standards of consistency that once reflected stability. Stability, however, has been redefined. Stability, we now realize, is a dynamic state. And, therein, its strength.

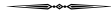
In early twentieth-century psychology it used to be that if your patient was drowning, you threw him a psychic rope and pulled the troubled soul to shore. By the 1950s it was generally observed that the shore of normalcy that a therapist stood on was illusionary and retreating. The shore it turns out is also dynamic.

Neither the patient nor the therapist was any longer sure where the shore was. What was once stability is now an aberration, at least statistically. It is only the variant family that now lives in the same house their whole life, and lots of movement in a business career often means you’re a guy or gal on the move. Up. For many of us beginning new jobs or beginning life in a new home is what we’re beginning to get used to. New beginnings are beginning to be old hat. And, like Dr. Seuss’s character Bartholomew, some of us are wearing 500 of them.

Neurologists have long told us that anatomically the human brain resists change. Our mind likes to sort information and experiences down the same canals the information was sorted in the past. So, beginnings do challenge us. Beginnings challenge us to bend when we feel we just got something straight. But what beginnings beg us to see is that little is ending that isn’t beginning. What does not bend, breaks.

Change is the only constant. Serial beginnings reflect the general state of change we live in.

Though this has always been true, these days it's not only visible, it's blinding. As change has accelerated, we are forced to adapt. Faster. Beginning to change is not something we can begin tomorrow. Beginning today, tomorrow will be yesterday.



A friend of mine named Lawrence Grobel has written a wonderful book titled *Talking With Michener*. This rich and fascinating insight into the life of James Michener reminded me of a story that Michener wrote of his childhood. About beginnings. And beginning again.

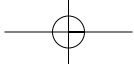
It seems that one fall day, when the famous author was a boy growing up in Pennsylvania, he found himself walking down a country road and happened on a fabulous apple tree laden with fruit. Coming closer he saw a farmer standing next to the tree. Seeing the boy admiring the tree, the farmer said, "Let me tell you about this tree. This is a very old tree and several years ago it stopped bearing fruit."

"What did you do?" asked Michener.

"Well," said the farmer, "I took a nail about a foot long and drove it into the tree's trunk. Next year it started bearing all over again. In fact, better than ever."

Every now and then, whether we want it, or like it, or seek it, something comes along that penetrates us so profoundly that we come alive all over again. Sometimes what shocks us revives us. Sometimes others or life nails us. Sometimes we have to nail ourselves.

It is true that all beginnings don't bear fruit, but every first step is a seed, planted. And in seeds there are orchards.



8 — *Inspire, Enlighten, & Motivate*

Time is also an orchard. Every moment is ripe with opportunity.

My grandfather, Jacob, used to say, “A man learns and learns and dies a fool.” We all have a lot of learning to do. Fortunately, school is open.

