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## Life isn't about finding yourself; it's about creating yourself.

### *A personal tale of self-exploration and invention*

By Eli Amdur

*“Out of mortal imagination comes a dream of something new, something better, something yet to happen in the future...”* – Thomas Cahill, historian.

When I was little, and adults asked me what I wanted to be when I grow up, career coach and newspaper columnist were definitely not my answers. What little boy ever says that? Besides playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers, it was the predictable doctor or president. Or Superman.

Yet here I am: career coach and newspaper columnist (and adjunct professor and corporate consultant) and very happy with it. I do a little of this and little of that, and I make a living. Not so bad, y'know?

The question today, though, is not what I do; it's how I got here and, parenthetically, why I'm telling you. First, here's why. I was relating my story to a client at a time of life change for her, and she implored me to tell it to more people. I wrestled with that for a long while – and then acceded. Now, here's the story.

By the time I was 50 I had been a public school teacher, held various odd jobs, gotten into business, and changed industries five times. I succeeded everywhere I went, albeit on a crooked path. It was not the best built career plan, with one exception: a commitment to personal advancement through efforts to grow businesses.

Then I became unemployed – again. At 50, that's a pretty good time and reason to do some serious soul searching. What would be my next job? Where would I work? What would I do (or continue doing)? As the weeks flew by, this became a more difficult question and more arduous process because I had so many ideas crashing into each other, not to mention three decades of perspective. Would I return to any of those industries? Or seek yet another? Would I make a second attempt at entrepreneurship? (I started a business in 1984 and ran it for six years.)

I struggled. I sought advice and found a mentor. I thought, re-thought, and brainstormed. I engaged in self-debate. I lost a lot of sleep. I was, no doubt, having my “wilderness experience.” I was eager for resolution but, wisely, not rushing to it.

The struggle continued, but then one night ... the epiphany! Unable to sleep, I abandoned that attempt at 4:30 on a chilly, rainy Thursday morning in late May. My wife and I had just bought 10 flats of annuals for our garden, and they needed to be planted. What a perfect time to do it!

Jumping out of bed, I threw on an old pair of ratty jeans, an older Grateful Dead T-shirt, and my oldest sneakers. Five minutes later I was in the back yard on hands and knees on the wet ground, getting soaked by a soft spring rain, putting in hundreds of multicolored impatiens along the edge of the bed that formed the border of three sides of the yard, which was soon being bathed by dawn's early light.

Activity like this is an excellent way to “vacate the mind,” and get into a creative mode of thought. It is rhythmic, hypnotic. One gets lost in the present, gives up the past and the future, and engages in only the “here-now” experience; creates a fusion of the person and the world, of the subject and the object, and of reality and possibility; narrows and inhibits the force of consciousness, experiences a loss of ego, sheds fears, and lessens defenses; and becomes spontaneous and expressive.

As I put in plant after plant, I stopped asking myself if I would go back to one industry or another and – slicing it another way – began to take stock of the fact that in every industry and company in which I worked, I was the primary guy who did the recruiting, hiring, training, managing, mentoring, and ... coaching.

**COACHING!!!** That was it! I was a coach – not a sales executive, a general manager, or a business development director. I was a coach. No, “I **am** a coach.”

Soaking wet, extremely dirty, achy, stiff, and sleepless for over 30 hours at that point but full of a newfound energy, I peeled off my wet clothes, showered, made coffee, donned a clean pair of jeans, a clean Grateful Dead T-shirt, clean sneakers – and got in the car. Gleefully singing along with “Truckin” blaring from my speakers, I headed to the county clerk’s office, filed the name of my new company, and began my future as I saw it.

It’s over a decade later and, although a struggle at first, I never doubted I’d be successful. I came through my wilderness because I was willing to wander into it. History is rich with stories of those who did that – Abraham, Moses, Columbus, Magellan, Lewis and Clark – knowing there was something out there, unsure exactly what, but willing to find it – and claim it.

That’s my story. Yours might be different, but remember, I stated the reason for today’s article is not to discuss what I do, but how I got here. And no matter what you do, sooner or later, you’ll find yourself at the edge of your wilderness.

And if, in your mortal imagination, you’ll see that as an invitation, not an obstacle, you too will realize what I did: that life is not about **finding** yourself. It’s about **creating** yourself.