

The “Big Picture”

This weekend I was reminded of a hike that a former boss took her team on as a “team-building event” near the Delaware Water Gap several years ago. Although I lived my entire life in NJ, I had never visited this picturesque area along the Delaware River that separates Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

My boss was a woman of very few words, but that day a lot was communicated. As the team hiked up the path we joked with each other while complaining about how “out of shape” we all were.

At the top, we ate our lunches on a large rocky cliff that overlooked the Gap. It was a breathtaking view! We couldn’t believe that most of us had lived within a few hours of this area but hadn’t visited until that day. As we ate our lunches, our boss explained that our jobs were changing from focusing on the day-to-day details (e.g. the hike up the path) to the “big picture” (e.g. the scenic view).

About two months later, a layoff was announced. My boss had the unfortunate responsibility to lay off 50% of her team. I was so wrapped up in the fear of losing my job that I completely ignored what my boss must have been going through, yet never showed. Fortunately I wasn’t laid off but several of my other colleagues were. A few years later, after I had changed jobs, I heard that my former boss, Margaret, had taken an early retirement and enrolled in school to learn landscape architecture (a completely different field from IT marketing). Within a year I learned that she had died of ovarian cancer.

I didn’t know it then, but my boss and that beautiful hike made a lasting impression on me. What was my boss really trying to tell us that day? Was she aware of the impending layoff? Did she really want to change careers herself? Did she know that her life would be shortened?

- This week, spend a few moments in the shower or on your way to/from work thinking about the “big picture” of your life including your current work, family, personal, social, health, etc. From this perspective ask yourself... What is breathtaking in my life? What am I truly grateful for?
- Next, ask yourself... Is my career moving in the direction I want? Is my personal life in alignment with my desires? What activities am I doing on a day-to-day basis that are leading me where I want to go?

I’ll never forget Margaret or the amazing impact she continues to have on my life... hopefully, on yours as well.

“This is your life, NOT a dress rehearsal!” (a cliché, but still true)

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Doreen holds an MBA and has spent over 18 years working at major corporations and small businesses in finance and marketing. As a certified professional development coach at Way to Goal! www.waytogoal.com Doreen specializes in helping committed professionals find careers that are both personally and financially rewarding.

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