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An Hour with a Knowledgeable Life Designer

Posted on August 29, 2015 by Daniella Liberati with 0 Comments

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I had the privilege of spending an hour with **Ghislain Demers** last week to talk about what it is like being a **life designer**. I wanted to know what drew him to this job and what it entails. I asked him for the most frequent **suggestions** he

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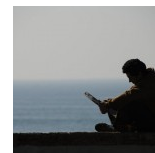
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provides to his clients, how to deal with **stress** and **life-balance**. We had a relaxed conversation over some coffee and light Mexican music in one of **my favourite cafés** in Sherbrooke. It was a very **interesting** conversation I am looking forward to **sharing** with you, so settle in and read on.

Life Design?



Photo credit: Luis Llerena

Before I begin, I would like to provide a bit more **insight** on what a life designer is. A life designer is both a **coach** and a **consultant**. Their goal is to **support** a client by offering them **advice, guidance** and **mentoring** to help them achieve **personal** or **professional goals**. Life designers provide **means** and tools to help their clients **resolve conflicts** and eventually achieve their **autonomy** in their own life design process. Most of Ghislain’s clients are either searching for **advice** on their professional lives or need **support** in achieving their personal dreams (which usually demand **profound changes** in their lives).

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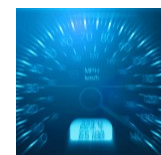
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Ghislain approaches both of these problematics in **three** steps:

1. **Balance:** How do you balance your personnel, professional and family lives? He observes these these three elements with his client to look for ways to improve the delicate balance of each of them.
2. **Time management:** Where are your priorities? How do you deal with “conflict”? Ghislain explains that conflict does not mean quarrel in this case, but rather something that counters your plans. He helps his clients accept conflict as a good thing, and brings them to find means to deal with it more effectively.
3. **Problem resolution:** In a third step, he provides his clients with the tools to deal with their problems in their personal, professional or family lives autonomously.

Ghislain therefore focuses on three different spheres in order to build a life design: work, family, and especially, **personal**.

“I am constantly undoing the myth of the need to reconcile work and family life. This may seem to be an interesting concept at first, it is, however a concept that makes you remain in a vicious circle of working hard and forgetting to tend to yourself.”

This is why he added, and cannot stress enough,

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the importance of a **personal life** with his clients.

Your Personal Life

Apart from work and family, it is of utmost importance not to forget our **personal lives**. Three quarters of his clients say they mostly focus on family and work. Some explain they like to spend time with their kids or cooking for their family, but this is not to be considered as time for yourself – this is not time you use to actually **recharge your own batteries**.

“I like to give my clients the following analogy – when you take the plane, the stewardess always says ‘in case of a drop in cabin pressure, an oxygen mask will drop from the overhead compartment – please place the bag over your mouth and nose before assisting children.’ The same thing applies in your family and work life. Before taking care of your family and job, it is important to put your own oxygen mask on – to do things for yourself. Who will take care of your children if you cannot breathe?”

His advice? For the next two weeks, take 3 to 5 hours off for yourself (per week), to **do what you love**. When his clients come to him, they usually have **0 hours** for themselves. There are 168 hours in a week. *“Do not start off with 12 hours but 3 on 168 to do nothing else but take care of yourself. Stick it in*

*your agenda.” And during that time **do what you sincerely enjoy doing.** May it be walking, bike riding, nature tours, watching movies, not doing anything! Give yourself the time for it.*

“If I do not have 12 hours to myself on my 168 week hours, I become a lousy husband, a lousy father and a lousy worker. But if I spend 12 hours doing what I love, sports, walking and reading for example, then I am a better husband, a better dad and I am more efficient at work.”

Every time he is **astonished** by the extent to which their lives are **radically transformed.**

“With just 3h to themselves, my clients are more happy, they are more lively, less irritable, their appearances changes. But it is a ‘strike of lightning effect’ as they fall back into their everyday lives quickly – the difficulty is integrating this new lifestyle more permanently.”

You also have to **increase** those 3h with time. According to him, for some 7h is ideal, for others it is 12, maybe more. You just have to find your **balance.**



Photo credit: Sébastien Marchand

Yes, But...

What about **entrepreneurs** or **employees** who work in companies where the ethics are very different? How about companies that **valorise** the **9 to 5 work life**, live on extra hours and **frown** upon those who see differently? According to Ghislain, not having time for yourself is an **illusion**. It all depends on you.

He provided the example of a CEO who does not have a task description. They wind up in “reactive mode”, not it planning and just going through the motions. Every leader needs to do the following:

1. **Have a vision:** without a vision or a plan, their team will not know where they are going.
2. **Take care of their team:** make sure they are well trained and have all the tools they need to work correctly. Also, entrepreneurs need to deal with conflict because it affects everyone on their team.
3. **Delegate:** with a short-term vision, entrepreneurs feel this is a waste of time because they will have to go back over the work that was done. However, with long term

vision, delegating makes more sense: coaching your employees and helping them eventually become better than you will allow you to focus on what you need to do. Your employees will learn, and continue to work with you.

You simply need to **have your priorities in the right place** to be able to **provide yourself with your own time**.

How Did You Become a Life Designer?

Ghislain had not decided to become a life designer when he first started University. **Like most entrepreneurs**, he realized it was time to live from his **passion** later on, far **after** finishing his studies and working in completely different fields. However, his *BAC en communication organisationnel* (Bachelor's Degree in Organizational Communication) from Trois Rivieres, Quebec contained a mix of **psychology, management, communication**, and **education** which probably did help create the foundation for his **natural coaching abilities**.

He completed a Master's Degree in Urban Planning in Vancouver but **hated** the political aspects of the job and decided to take a break and work for an outdoor store for a while. He ended-up helping to open the first 25 Atmosphere – Plein air stores in Quebec.

Over the years with **Atmosphère**, he received a large amount of **calls** from the franchise owners

with questions like *how can I increase profitability, how do I deal with inventory and resolve human resources problems?* After research, speaking to various people, finding solutions, and **counselling** each franchise owner, he came to realize that he was becoming a **coach**. He really loved working one on one, and that was how he began redesigning his own life when he opened his own company in 2008.

How Did You Redesign your Own Life ?

I wanted to know more about how he designed his own life. He works **3 days a week** and usually has **long weekends**. Before becoming a life designer, however, he was working the **80h/week** grind and missed out on most of the first 5 years of his daughter's life because of it. In 2008 he made a list of all the things he wanted in his new life after leaving his job which included:

1. Working less to spend more time with his daughter
2. Doing more outdoor activities
3. Working one on one with clients...

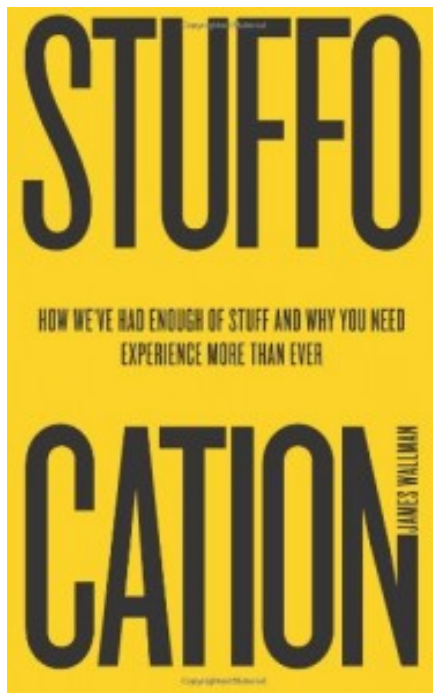
He makes less money annually but is now **time rich**. During his studies, while travelling in Europe, he decided that **every 7 years** (this was a random number) he would **take a year off and travel**. He travelled in Europe after his Bachelor's Degree and realised he did not know much about his own country, Canada. His next trip was a year and a half of hitch-hiking across Canada. After his Master's

degree he visited Scandinavia, Greece, Barcelona, and Scotland. In 1999 he travelled from Vancouver to Quebec by car. In 2009 he sold everything, travelled across North America with his family and moved to **Sherbrooke**, Quebec. 2017 will be a new adventure!

His Reading Suggestions

Since reading is one of his favourite pastimes, I asked Ghislain to suggest his top two books for entrepreneurs. He could not decide between more technical research-oriented papers or best sellers so he provided me four novels of both kinds.

Best Sellers



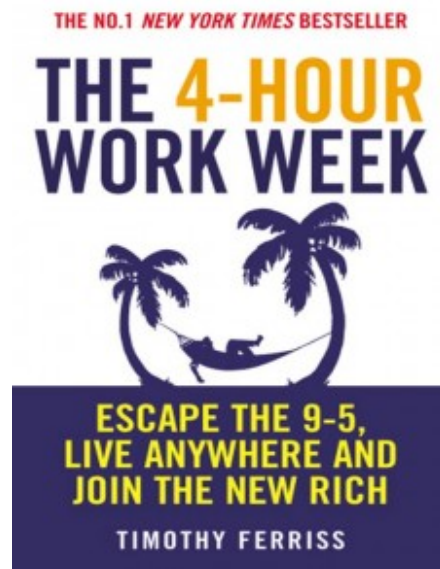
Stuffocation, by James Wallman

"We suffocate under the huge weight of things we do

not need." The book explains how society is headed more and more towards "experiencing" life instead of stuffing it with material possessions. Going for a bike ride in trees (for example [Au Diable Vert](#), Sutton), going skydiving... More and more, people are buying experiences instead of things. The book goes over this concept through time starting in the 50's which was more materialistic, the 60's and 70's which practiced minimalism and the 80's simplification - each of these concepts worked short-term, but none of them are satisfying for the long term. Experimentalisation is the future according to [Suffocation](#).

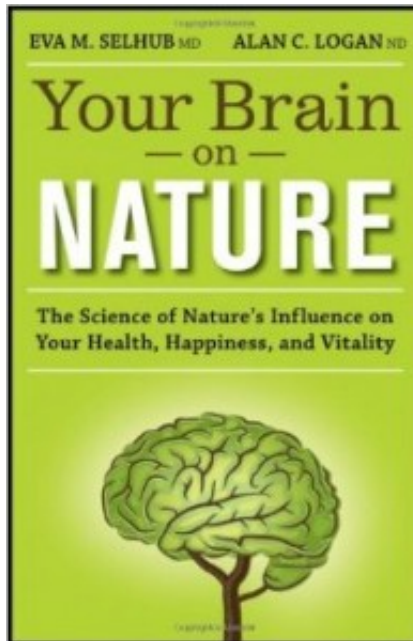
The Four Hour Work Week, by Tim Ferris

I spoke about how there are a few concepts that hit home for me in the Four Hour Work Week - you can read more about why in my [Top 10 Book Suggestions for Entrepreneurs this Summer](#). Tim Ferris helps people dream. Ghislain's favourite part is the "DEAL" concept.



More *Technical* Research-Oriented

Books:



“Your brain on Nature” by Eva M. Selhub and Alan C. Logan

Two Doctors compiled research on how being in **nature** is **better** for people. It begins with the negative effects of being in

front of a screen for 8 hours a day. It is mostly a compilation of research summaries on how nature can positively influence our health, happiness and vitality.

La mobilisation des personnes au travail, Michel Tremblay & Al. HEC Montreal.



And lastly, he recommends *la mobilisation des personnes au travail* which

provides conceptual framework and mobilization techniques and strategies for staff.

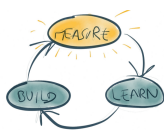
Hope you enjoyed this read! Do not hesitate to [follow Ghislain on Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#). He shares a number of interesting articles on life design and coaching. You could also contact him through [his website](#) if you would like more information.

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