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Newsletter

Choosing **Your Roles**

Part 3 of The Learning Effectiveness Series

One of the biggest mistakes people make is to drift along in life. One day they wake up and ask, “What am I doing here?” People who struggle with effectiveness are often people who do not know their roles.

The first habits you must develop are learning to determine your roles and goals. Goals drive what you do. If you need to do research to write a report on manufacturing cameras, you wouldn't research how rockets fly. Goals determine your direction, or more specifically, the direction or focus of your thoughts and actions.

So how do you determine your goals? Goals are determined by your values and your necessities. You need to determine these before you can select your goals. How do you determine your values and your necessities? By aligning them with your roles. But what are your roles? Ah ha— now we're getting somewhere!

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* Stephen R. Covey discusses the concept of roles. We each must determine the roles we want or need to play in life. I say “want and need” because you may want to be a professional baseball player, but if you are not good enough, you will need to choose a more realistic job. Possible roles include being a loving spouse, a caring parent, a CEO, or an astronaut. Roles can be anything you desire. But be careful. Roles are what determine your goals and the direction of your life. Do not decide on a role as an astronaut if you are claustrophobic—years of hard

work will go down the drain the first time you enter a spaceship.

With simple decisions, it is easy to see how a wrong decision leads to better decisions. If you check into a bad hotel, you quickly realize you need to look for a better one. That's okay. You simply change hotels. But it is not okay to check into no hotel and wander the streets aimlessly. Then you'll never find the right hotel!

Similarly, sometimes people need to be in the wrong role, to determine the right one. But you can change roles later if you feel you made a mistake, or simply desire to forge a new path. Daniel Levitin worked in numerous music jobs, but decided to go back to school to earn his Ph.D. (<http://www.psych.mcgill.ca/levitin/bio.html>). In Dr. Levitin's case, the knowledge and experience he gained in music were put to use in his career as a psychologist. The important thing is that, at any given time, roles help you determine your goals.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is to drift along in life. One day they wake up and ask, “What am I doing here?” People who struggle with effectiveness are often people who do not know their roles. If you choose your roles wisely, and determine your goals based upon your roles, you will arrive where you wish to be.

There is a limit to how many roles we can perform simultaneously. It is not possible to perform twenty roles at once. A good number to start with is six, especially during your first year developing effectiveness. It is unlikely you can do justice to more than seven.

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“Goals are determined by your values and your necessities.”

Say you decide to choose seven roles. Write a list of possible roles, thirty minutes a day for one week. If you are a husband, a father, and an engineer, those roles are obvious. Use a pen and paper, a spreadsheet or a PDA. Divide the list into upper and lower sections. Review the list daily, adding roles you wish to consider and crossing off those you believe will not make it to the final group. If you use a spreadsheet, you can cut and paste to the lower section roles you believe you will discard, but if you decide to revive one, simply move it back to the top. Create a list of no more than twelve possible roles. At this point, it may be difficult to decide which of the remaining roles you should keep. The exercises will help you create your list and select the seven roles to focus on this year.

Exercise I. Close your eyes. Make believe you are being eulogized at your funeral. Visualize and hear your family, friends and co-workers. What things are being said about you? Do they satisfy you? Are there things you wish they would say that they do not? If they do not mention you played the trumpet, but you always wanted to, then becoming a trumpet player should make it to your list of roles.

Exercise II. Ask yourself what you want to accomplish in the next five years. In ten. In twenty. Some examples may include: Do you want have a spouse or significant other? Do you want to have children? What type of work would you like to be doing? How much income do you require to satisfy your needs? What hobby would you like to develop?

Exercise III. For each role you are considering ask the questions below to determine if it passes the requirements to become a role, and how much time you should dedicate to it. Lasting success requires effort and time. When choosing roles, determine the level at which you will be satisfied, because that will determine how much time will be required. As a rule of thumb, it takes about one hour a day for ten years to master a skill (The Road To Excellence, ISBN 978-0805822328). If you desire to become

an “excellent pianist,” it will require one hour of practice time a day for close to ten years. If you long to play piano for your own personal enjoyment, thirty minutes a day for five years may suffice. To plan your first year, assign one hour a day to perform hobby roles, three hours a day to perform family roles, and seven to nine hours a day to perform work roles. You can modify the time spent for each as your knowledge of your roles increases.

Exercise IV. Answer the questions below for each of the remaining possible roles.

- 1) Will I enjoy this role? Yes or No
- 2) Will this role improve my life? Yes or No
- 3) Do I feel an internal drive to do this role? Yes or No
- 4) What level of expertise do I wish to obtain?
Fair Very Good Mastery
- 5) How many hours per day will this role require? _____
- 6) How many years will this role require? _____
- 7) How many hours in total will this role require? _____
- 8) Is this role worth the time required? Yes or No

If you answered No to questions 1, 2 and 3, cross the role off your list. If you answered Yes to questions 1,2 and 3, this is a definite role for you. If you answered “Yes” to some and “No” to some of the first 3 questions, you have some thinking to do. Determining the time required and considering question 8 may help determine the value of a given role in your life. Future issues of *The Viridiant Business Newsletter* will discuss how to use your chosen roles to improve your effectiveness.

Suggested Reading:

1. Emerson, R.W. ‘Self-Reliance’ in *Selected Essays*, 175-203, New York, Penguin Classics, 1985
2. Covey, S.R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 1989
3. If you are considering a career change: Bolles, R.N. *What Color Is Your Parachute? 2007: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*, Berkeley, Ten Speed Press, 2006

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For more information, please visit www.viridiant.com

Viridiant LLC
210 West 89th Street, Suite 6G
New York, New York 10024

T/ 212.787.2161
F/ 212.787.1994

www.viridiant.com