

# **Mediocrity**

## **The Power of Fear, Absent Vision and Deathly Apathy**

On some level we have to admit that mediocrity feels pithy, hollow and stagnant. Mediocrity seems a settling for something intentionally substandard. It's a toxic malaise that seeps into our lives. Isaac Disraeli probably summed it up best when he wrote, "It is a wretched taste to be gratified with mediocrity when the excellent lies before us." So it is.

Mediocrity suggests that effort need not be defined by anything other than effort itself, rather than effort being held against a lofty goal or insatiable passion. Therefore, according to mediocrity, if we try, the trying itself is enough. With this kind of thinking, anything we do becomes acceptable because at least we tried. We think we succeed, when in reality we have not succeeded at all. In this manner, our efforts can be cast as adequate, supreme or even valiant when they do not meet any such standard. We then placate mediocrity and live out marginalized or wholly failed lives.

While we find ourselves too often living in mediocrity, frequently to the point of being completely obedient to it, we nonetheless hate being there. When we give in to it, there is something of a pathetic surrender to it all; a valiant pretending that we're going to give what we've surrendered to our absolute best in order to make the surrender something honorable. We surrender thinking that we can control the surrender itself which makes us something less than victims and makes surrender okay. Surrender is purpose forfeited. Purpose forfeited is life abandoned. Life abandoned is nothing of life's intent for us.

### **We Know Better**

We know it when we pull up short and compromise. We have a deep sense of a far greater goal and a far more expansive place within which to live. And because we know it and can at least approximate it as being far beyond where we have chosen to pull up and stop, we have to justify the stopping. We have to make the stopping not only viable, but okay in a sense that it outweighs forfeiting where we could have actually gone and what we could have actually achieved. We have to tell ourselves that this is good for us, that either we haven't lost too much or that we can take what we've settled for and make it into something as good, or better than what we could have had.

We play games of compromise with something we can't compromise. We tell ourselves something is okay when it's a blatant compromise of grander promises and far greater purposes. But we tell ourselves we can compromise. We fully convince ourselves of it. We build lives based on it, we construct relationships around it, and then we wonder why we're unhappy, bored, dissatisfied or disgruntled. That's what mediocrity does.

### **The Paralysis of Fear**

In many respects, mediocrity is a response to fear. It's a permission to dodge goals and wiggle out of challenges in order to circumvent fear. Mediocrity convincingly rationalizes why it's okay not to do something, or to take another course of action, or postpone something, or do nothing at all. And many times what drives the choice of mediocrity is fear . . . plain and simple fear.

We fear that we're not good enough, or smart enough, or ingenious enough, or clever enough, or that we possess adequate resources to achieve a goal. We convince ourselves that we just don't have what it takes. Or we fear failure. We fear that we'll try

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and fail, thereby being blatantly exposed as inferior, incompetent or just plain stupid. Sometimes we fear that we might actually succeed and then find ourselves not knowing what to do with the success that we've had and thereby fail by succeeding. Fear is powerful.

### **The Vacancy of Vision**

Mediocrity can also be a result of a visionless life. Without a vision, there exists no goal or challenge. There is nothing to strive for as some lofty goal or aspiration has never been pondered, shaped and ultimately established. Mediocrity then is a natural and appropriate by-product; the result of having no vision. In this sense mediocrity is what's left when vision is absent. Absent vision doesn't necessarily cause mediocrity, it simply gives it a natural place to inhabit. An ancient writer once wrote that "without a vision, the people perish." Life simply becomes empty and slowly debilitating.

Vision is believing that life has a distinct and intentional purpose, and that we are here to do more than simply exist. It is the antithesis of mediocrity, holding out that life is more than simply existing or surviving, despite how well we might be at doing that. Vision holds that each life is grand, brimming with potential, rich with opportunity and designed to be impactful beyond itself and its apparent limitations.

### **The Drain of Apathy**

Apathy is an act of giving up and giving in. It's a surrender to life; of saying it doesn't really matter anyway, that life is stacked against us, that it's all unfair and that any efforts on our part would result in total failure anyhow. It's permission not to try because trying wouldn't result in anything anyway. Apathy runs hand-in-hand with pessimism; that the odds against anything good happening are so overwhelmingly overwhelming that there's no logical sense in wasting time trying. We embrace our sorry lot in life, acknowledge that simply surviving is victory enough, and we settle for mediocrity.

Apathy sees defeat as terminal. It views unmet challenges as clear and indisputable evidence that the task is impossible rather than viewing a shortfall as a potentially rich learning opportunity. Apathy finds excuses to fail in the belief that failure will always be the outcome and that attempts to succeed are not needed to prove that fact, so why try? It gives up on life and adjusts life to the lowest common denominator . . . and that results in nothing more than a gray, one-dimensional existence.

### **Removing Mediocrity**

It may be time to take these principals, hold them up over your life as a sort of template and see how well they fit. If they fit, it may be time to re-evaluate what you do and why you do it. It may be time to throw off mediocrity and throw yourself into the life you were designed to live. It may be time to remember that "the excellent lies before [you]."