

## CHAPTER FIVE

# How to Overcome Suffering— Especially in Your Career

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*From that hour Siddhartha ceased to fight against his destiny. There shone in his face the serenity of knowledge, of one who is no longer confronted with conflict of desires, who has found salvation, who is in harmony with the stream of events, with the stream of life, full of sympathy and compassion, surrendering himself to the stream, belonging to the unity of things.*

Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*

**A**t The Five O’Clock Club we participate actively in the career aspects of our clients’ lives. This puts us in a great position to make suggestions that can help the employed and unemployed. These same lessons apply to a person’s personal life.

Our coaches across the country have noted what we call the unhappiness factor. Many people are unhappy in their professional careers for a variety of reasons. Indeed, they often describe themselves as actually suffering in their present positions. These complaints can include:

- I need more money! \$250,000 is simply not enough to support my family.
- I am single, 43, work very long hours, and like having things my way. I definitely intend to have children, but have yet to start looking for the right man/woman.
- Everyone else seems to be moving ahead of me. I live very nicely, but feel left behind and I want more.

We can learn a lot by analyzing these situations in light of Eastern traditions. Buddhism talks about suffering as much as any religion does.

Many people love the story of the Buddha, which means “Enlightened One.” He was born Siddhartha Gautama and lived in northern India from 560 to 480 B.C. Gautama’s family was wealthy, yet he himself was unhappy with the pleasures of the royal life. So, as a young fellow, he left his wife and son, and

sneaked out of the palace and into the woods to become enlightened about the true meaning of life. Pleasure did not seem to be the key to a happy life.

After practicing yoga under religious masters, he concluded that it is best to avoid extreme asceticism. These masters followed a life of extreme self-denial to the point of begging for food and dressing in rags. Buddha finally left this sect and came to his moderate approach (the “middle way” between extreme asceticism and extravagance) while meditating for 49 days under a bo tree. Once he had achieved such enlightenment, he returned to ordinary life for the sake of others.

He was a compassionate teacher with a cool head and a warm heart. Once enlightened, the Buddha came to understand four things:

**First**, suffering is a part of life. There are the traumas of birth, sickness, old age, fear of death, separation from loved ones, etc. There is passing, constant change, and mortality.

**To be sure that your goals (desires) will bring you happiness and not suffering, analyze them for their wisdom and compassion.**

**Second**, unreasonable desires or expectations cause suffering. Failing to show wisdom, restraint or compassion, people cling to what is either too much or can never be permanent. People can put themselves at the center of the world, and become intoxicated with themselves and their desires. They seek permanence and an ease of life that are impossible to have. They look out for their own welfare without having compassion for others, or regard for the rest of the world.

**Third**, the good news is this: Overcoming desire can break the chain of suffering.

**Fourth**, the way to overcome desire is through a life of wisdom and practical compassion (as taught by the “Eightfold Path”).

So, a Buddhist would analyze the three complaints of our suffering employees in terms of the wisdom and compassion that they do or do not show:

- If you “need” more than \$250,000, are you clinging to what is really unreasonable, unfulfilling, and passing? (The average per capita income in this country is after all about \$32,400!). Does your preoccupation show a lack of compassion for the 99.99% of the planet’s population that has less? Have you considered the middle way, living in between the extremes of poverty and riches?
- If you are single and insist on having things your way, have you put yourself at the center of the world? Are you too used to seeing yourself falsely, as a separate and isolated individual? Have you abandoned being compassionate, making intimate social relations difficult? Does this make the desired goals of a happy marriage and family practical impossibilities?

- If you live nicely, but feel left behind compared with others, are you a victim of some false view of the world? One false view is that of the isolated individual locked in competition with others (American individualism) as opposed to being part of a larger whole. The perspective of isolation logically cuts off compassion and heightens envy.

We can see that the root problems as suggested by Buddhism are a lack of wisdom and compassion. These are exemplified in having the wrong views of the self and the world, improper individualism, extravagance, clutching at permanence, selfishness, and greed. All of these lead to suffering.

The Five O'Clock Club recommends that you look into your future to set goals that are right for you. To set your goals, write your own obituary (to see how your life would have gone), invent your ideal job, decide what you would do if you had a million dollars (and do it anyway), and write your Forty-Year Vision<sup>®</sup> (see the Appendix on how to create this vision). The above discussion should help you to do these exercises, since all of us have happiness and the overcoming of suffering as major goals. To sum up, analyze your goals (desires) for their wisdom and compassion to be sure that they will bring you happiness and not suffering. Even this small glimpse at Eastern thinking can challenge us Westerners in varied and positive ways.