

No Matter What Your Age:

The Value of Having a Long-Term Vision

by Kate Wendleton

We are living in a culture that emphasizes immediate gratification, does not value planning, and gives slight consideration to consequences. Hence, far too many people, young and old alike, are saddled with credit card debt and live as if there's no tomorrow. We are urged to live one day at a time, especially in the face of adversity, and that may be all some people can handle. But this is not healthy for most, and one-day-at-a-time does not qualify as a goal.

Many of our favorite clichés are *wrong*. Tomorrow does not take care of itself. Not everyone learns from his or her mistakes. "Following your bliss" does not necessarily make you happier. And sometimes it doesn't "all work out." Instead, many people end up resigned to bad situations and "live with it." They say, "This is what fate had in store for us."

Ironically, Americans are action-oriented and like to think they'll figure things out as they go along. I've even heard very famous people brag that they don't have a plan, which adds to the mystique. But they *do* have a solid strategy, which they follow religiously. They may let someone else figure out their detailed plans, but they are not as haphazard as many would like to pretend.

For example, when I heard a successful children's book author give a speech, I was intrigued by her lack of candor. People in the audience were dying to know to what she attributed her success. She said it was pure luck, that she rarely got out of her pajamas, and the money kept pouring in. Yet, she wrote four or five books a year and had many deals for related items. I believe she was far

more *planful* than she let on, and she simply didn't want to tell us any of her secrets.

I once appeared on the radio show of a major, nationally syndicated host. As we were waiting for the show to start, he asked about the contacts I might have at the prominent TV shows I had been on and what I thought of each. Then he bragged that he was lucky because he'd never had to job search in his life! He said things just happened to fall in his path. But that wasn't true: he was using me to network! He was actually job searching *continuously*, although not formally, *and* he had a plan for himself.

Many successful people don't like to admit that they plan. It ruins the aura. But most successful people are always aware and always planning—and modifying their plans depending on what they learn.

People are happy when they are working toward their goals. When they get diverted from their goals, they are unhappy. Businesses are the same. When they get diverted from their goals (for instance, because of major litigation or a threatened hostile takeover), tensions build and morale sinks. Life has a way of sneaking up and distracting both individuals and businesses. Many people are unhappy in their jobs because they don't *know* where they are going.

People without goals are more irked

by petty everyday problems. Those with goals are less bothered because they have bigger plans. To control your life, you need at least a *tentative* vision of your future that encompasses your whole life.

Dreams and goals can be great driving forces in our lives. We feel satisfied when we are working toward them—even if we never reach them. People who have dreams or goals do better than people who don't.

Setting goals will make a difference in your life, and this makes sense. Every day we make dozens of choices. People guided by dreams make choices that advance them in the right direction.

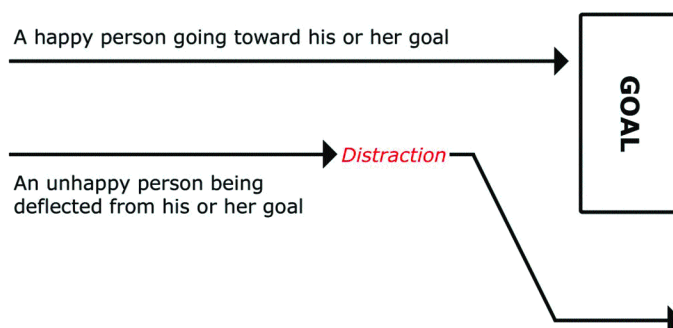
Dreams are the equivalent of the North Star. People without dreams also make choices—but their choices are strictly present oriented, with little thought of the future and are more likely to have bad consequences. When you are aware of your current situation, and you also know where you want to go, a natural tension (between what you face today and what you're trying to create!) leads you forward faster.

When you find a believable dream that excites you, don't forget it. Write it down. Look at it daily. It's less likely to slip out of your mind in the heat of day-to-day living. Happy people keep an eye on the future as well as on the present.

Lack of Vision and Depression

Herbert Rappaport,

Ph.D., conducted extensive studies on the way people thought about time (temporal attitudes). His book, *Marking Time* (Simon and Schuster, 1990), is sub-titled "What our attitudes about time reveal about our personalities and conflicts." Dr. Rappaport



asked various people to draw “timelines” of their lives: on a horizontal line representing a life span, make a dot to indicate the “NOW point” of life, noting your age. Then note your age at every significant event before NOW and every significant event after NOW.

In one poignant example, he notes the timelines drawn by two women in their early 70s. One, who was depressed, imagined *only two* significant events in her future. The second was fully engaged in life. She imagined almost as many events *after age 72* as she had before that age, and she noted the end of the line — her death. “Death for this woman is a motivator rather than a suppressor of goals and objectives. The acceptance of death as a ‘punctuation’ point in the life cycle signals her to ‘crowd’ the future with the unfinished business of her life.”

Rappaport points out that although the two women are approximately the same age, they view life quite differently. The first woman seems to have little in her future to look forward to. She spoke frequently about aging and was considering moving into a retirement community. The second woman had a sense of urgency and planned to “work until it hurt too much.”

Having a vision is important *at every age and stage*. Without a vision, we are on a journey without navigation. We are taking day trips and not heading toward a significant destination.

Since I read his book, I, too, have noticed this temporal difference in individuals. One elderly couple, in their late 80s, still has goals and milestones. They are determined to crowd the years ahead with events. They look forward to the marriages of six of their grandchildren who happened to get engaged at about the same time. They also look forward to the renewal of their wedding vows on their 60th anniversary. And they also picked out the plot where they want to be buried — with great cheeriness.

A second couple, in their early 70s and 15 years younger, said they no longer wanted to have photographs taken of themselves because they weren’t

going to look any better than they now did! They are cheerful but full of nostalgia for the good old days. Their only anticipated event is the high school graduation of the youngest of their eight grandchildren, which will take place in four years. Otherwise, they plan events one day at a time.

Both couples are aware of their future deaths, but one couple takes great joy in the details of their future. The other has their feet planted firmly in the present and *past*.

When a person focuses mainly on the past, that person is often described as depressed. Depressed people, experts say, often have a hard time thinking about the future. The present and its immediate extension are all there is. Rappaport has an opposing and compelling point of view about depression:

“Typically, it has been reasoned that the patient cannot relate to the future *because* he is depressed ... While some individuals clearly become depressed in response to problems such as divorce, death, job loss and natural calamities, there are also individuals who seem to be depressed without a clear precipitating cause ...

“Eugene Minkowski (1970), in his profound treatise on temporality and depression, suggested the opposite: ‘Could we not, on the contrary, suppose the basic disorder is the distorted attitude toward the future.’ The future and its possibilities are for Minkowski and a host of other existential theoreticians the force that energizes us and carries us forward in our lives.”

Rappaport and others are suggesting that rather than being unable to relate to the future because he is depressed, **the person has become depressed because he is unable to relate to the future**

And don’t people know this intuitively? When a friend is having a down day, it comes naturally to encourage him or her to think about the future. We say that tomorrow is a new day and the possibility of a bright future is there. “This is just a bump in the road,” we say. We all know

to steer the person *away from the present and into the future*. “Things will get better.” This applies, of course, only to those everyday “depressions” we all experience — not to clinical depression or depressions caused by a chemical imbalance.

An Ability to Move On

One interesting aspect of the Fifteen- and especially the Forty-Year Vision® is how it helps people to overcome being programmed by their past. A woman whose parents both died in their 50s cannot imagine a life for *herself* beyond 50. We urged her to push her imagination a little and see what her life *would* be like if she lives until 80 — which is probably what *will* happen to her if she stops counting on dying at 50!

Some people *overcome* traumatic childhoods and others are *bound* by them. Some people overcome by re-writing the past. They *choose* to remember certain things or interpret the past in a certain way. Others may choose a negative interpretation. One may become proud of one’s poverty-stricken roots rather than feel deprived by them. As Alfred Adler (a disciple of Freud) said, “What an individual seeks to *become* determines what he remembers of his *has been*. In this sense, the future determines the past.” (R. May, E. Angel, and H.F. Ellenberger, *Existence*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1958). A Fifteen- or Forty-Year Vision can help a person to create a new future, and re-frame a person’s past so that it no longer disables.

People must move on. We are sad not just because of some traumatic experience, but because we feel *tied* to it. It controls us; We can’t get over it. One of my aunts in her 90s lost her husband of 70 years. She doesn’t want to go out; she says she wants to “spend the evening with Frank.” Even at her advanced age, we are trying to help her move on, because the years she has left *can* be brighter.

We must replace lost loved ones — those who are no longer in our lives for various reasons. When my grandmother was in her 80s but still vibrant, she volunteered to rock babies at an orphanage.

Those babies perked up the minute she walked into the room. She knew that her efforts were worthwhile, and the babies satisfied her need for the everyday caring of children after her own children and grandchildren were grown. That was *her* bright future, instead of sitting home thinking about the past.

Her daughter, my now 87-year-old mother, makes hundreds of rosaries for the missions and volunteers at her church, helping others and making friendships at the same time.

Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked.

Viktor E. Frankl

“We stop growing when our human losses are no longer replaced,” wrote George Vaillant in *Adaptation to Life*. “Letting go” and moving on — making the replacement — is a healthy response.

When one’s life has become unsettled, such as through the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, and other situations, to thrive again one *must* envision a new future. It takes hard work, and sometimes it takes years to figure out what your new life should be like. But it’s the same result at any age: You will have a more satisfying future if you put effort into analyzing yourself and also exploring your options.

Work alone does not do it. Without love for others and from others, it is hard to grow. It is the continuity of those important relationships that keep us going over the decades. If you don’t have them, you must make them.

The Impact on Older People of Imagining a Future

We say your vision should push you past age 80 so you can see what can happen if you live that long. People are sometimes emotionally scripted for bad health or unhappiness. But all of us *can* break away from the script and

re-write the future — as well as the past. We can re-write the way we see our past. We can decide to have very different lives from those we grew up with or now have. That different life requires a different vision of our future.

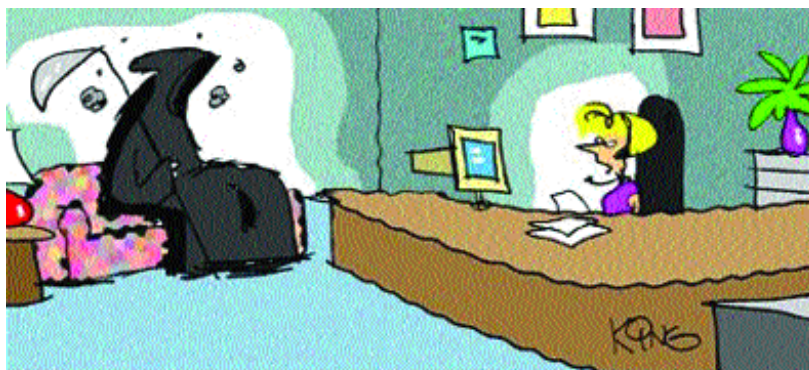
No matter what a person’s age, the process of imagining a future is difficult and can provoke anxiety. We would all like to “go with the flow” and hope it will all work out. Rappaport noted: “More so than individuals who are in their forties, for example, those who are over sixty have a great deal of trouble extending into the future.” Yes, those who are over 60 may feel that imagining a future is wishful thinking. Even some career coaches titter at the thought of a 60-year old doing a Fifteen- or Thirty-Year Vision.

When Rappaport met with older people who were simply living day-to-day, doing what needed to be done and essentially wasting time, he asked them: “If you learned at the beginning of a two-week trip to Alaska that the trip had to be shortened, would you forget about your itinerary and aimlessly wander around your room? Would you pick up and go home, or would you accelerate and get as much done as possible?” The reality of death can make us get more out of the time that we do have, including making our wills and putting our houses in order. We’re all going to die. What matters is *what we do with the time we have*. It makes sense to accept our future deaths and *make the most of the time we have*.

When he asked someone over 60: “What would you do if you were told you had a few weeks left to live?,” the question helped a person to explore his or her priorities. Rappaport found that, in most cases, people who had been wandering aimlessly became energized and focused on what was important to them.

Most of us *do* have a lot of time left. Being 60, 70, even 80 is not the end of the road. The average life expectancy today in the United States is 29 years longer than it was in 1900. Because of better healthcare, these years have been added to middle age, not old age. You have the time to learn and be productive for many, many years. You could have your greatest life accomplishments after the age of 50 or even older. Why give up now? You have plenty of time to make great progress toward whatever you plan. When Jean Calment of France was asked on her 120th birthday what kind of future she expected, she answered, “A short one” — but, guess what — she lived for two more years!

So, the after-retirement years may add up to 30 or more. We have plenty of time to make progress toward our vision of the future. Yet, people “retire” with no thought of how they will spend that time or how they will manage their lives through the decades. People may want to retire to get off the treadmill, but to do *what*? I have met too many retired people who are depressed and at a loss for what to do with their time. If



"Mr. Reilly, your 1:00 PM appointment is here. I've taken the liberty of cancelling your 2:00, 3:00 and 4:00 PM appointments."

a person was used to a vibrant career, this feeling of dislocation can go on for *decades*

Often *unplanned* years are full of self-oriented pursuits: shopping, traveling, and keeping physically fit. But many don’t *think through* what their lives will actually be like. Some decide that they want to live in an adult community where

there are no children around, but later become sad at being around all these old people. They think, "I'll travel or play golf." But 30 years of self-indulgence is a long time. Where is the sense of momentum and purpose?

Self-oriented pursuits are not considered the healthiest for the long haul. If you have been working hard for years and deserve a break, take a break. Cut back. But stay involved with life, especially in pursuits that *help others*.

Rappaport says that one of the common themes he sees among depressed adults in his practice is the deep sense of regret for not "stretching oneself" at different life stages. It is not too late to become deeply immersed in something that matters. Rappaport found that those who engage in meaningful activities are happier than those who engage only in self-indulgent activities.

Yet the evidence at hand suggests that ultimately life does not appear satisfying or socially valuable when approached as an opportunity to be free of responsibility.

Herbert Rappaport, Ph.D.

All of Those Years Ahead

People usually imagine retirement — if they imagine it at all — as one big lump of time. But 50 is *different* from 70, 80 and 90, just as 10 is very different from 30, 40 and 50. Each of the segments over 50 can be envisioned and planned for.

Let's take living arrangements, for example. You may want to continue to live where you do now until age 75, and then move to something smaller — say a two-bedroom apartment instead of a four-bedroom house. Then, at say age 85 or 90, you may have to move to a retirement home, and finally to a nursing home. If you don't like this vision for yourself, that's okay. Write your own! Where do you want to live geographically? What does your residence look like at each stage? If you live to be 90, your living arrangements will be worked out somehow, by someone. If *you* don't plan them, chances are, you won't be happy

with how things work out. In the Fifteen- and Forty-Year Visions, you will plan this for each stage of life ahead.

Now, what about your preoccupations? Are you planning to travel when you retire? Thirty years is a long time to travel. How much time can you actually spend doing that? Many older people are depressed and bored. Life seems to drag. That's because the retirement dream was too vague and not well thought out, *i.e.*, "travel." They're not productive and contributing. More and more people are in great physical health and not as well off emotionally because they're *drifting*. They lack goals.

In the Fifteen- and Forty-Year Visions, we suggest that you push yourself to at least age 80 so you can see what can happen if you live that long. According to Kubler-Ross, while there is life, there is still potential for meaningful behavior. Rappaport, in a study of adults in a retirement community, found that those with an unstructured future ended up being present-centered, which is actually stagnation. For those in their 60s and 70s, there is a link between lack of purpose and death anxiety. Planning for the rest of life and retaining a sense of forward motion are at the core of mental health. "Once we get people over the bias that it is frivolous to [plan] at these ages, there is usually ample time, focus and financial resources to face these critically important issues."

What would you like your pursuits to be? If you are now 60, for example, why not now imagine what your pursuits will be like at age 70 and get started in those pursuits now. This may take a lot of thought and exploration, just as it would for a young person choosing a profession. Would you like to raise dogs, for example? Then join dog-related associations now.

When I retire, which is many years away, I envision myself working with some disadvantaged population, perhaps continuing to teach in prisons. I have already researched the prisons and their educational programs in the geographic area where I plan to live — just to make sure the vision is doable. I also envision

having an active role as a grandparent and have had serious discussions with my children about living in the same community. If that doesn't work out, I imagine myself doing something with young adults. I also imagine myself gardening, always my favorite hobby, and cooking more — although I do now cook just about every day. I also imagine myself writing another book, but probably not about careers. Working with young adults and inmates, gardening, cooking, writing books: I can research and plan now for all these activities, to assure that they don't remain pipe dreams, but can have real structure and content.

What kind of future would *you* like to imagine for yourself? You may have to work hard to make it happen, and you can plant the seeds now. The present is an opportunity to plan what we would like to do with the rest of our lives, but ironically that happens only when we accept that there is only so much time. Then we begin to worry that there is not enough time. Time becomes precious, not something to be squandered. We can still play bridge and go to the movies, but they become pastimes — just as they were during our "productive" years, and the foreground of our lives become areas of contribution.

Your Age: How Much Longer Do You Want to Work?

Age puzzles me. I thought it was a quiet time. My seventies were interesting and fairly serene, but my eighties are passionate. I grow more intense as I age.

Florida Scott Maxwell

I started this business at age 40; my brother started his business at age 55. With the Fifteen- and Forty-Year Visions, you realize that you have the time to start and be successful in whatever your pursuits are. Would you like to make an impact on an environmental issue? Your family? Other families? A community issue? Or just on the quality of life? Would you like to learn new things (you still have time to become an expert in something new)? Actually work for a not-for-profit? Do consulting work?

Culinary expert Julia Child, for example, brought joy to millions when she was past 60. She died at age 91, and is a striking example of those who don't really hit their stride until they are older. She was forced to abandon her first career because she married a fellow civil servant, Paul Child. After several years of searching, she discovered French cooking when her husband was assigned to France as a USIA officer. Starting at about the age of 35, Julia trained as a chef, founded her own cooking school, and worked on a cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. In 1960, when she was almost 50, the couple moved back to the United States, where the book was published. A chance publicity appearance on television led to her famous TV series.

At one point, by the way, after a double mastectomy, Julia was convinced that her life was ruined. But after many weeks of grieving and weeping, she snapped out of it. "After all, I could be six feet under," she said, "but I'm not." She resumed her forward motion. She had a new lease on life and decided to make the most of it.

Any why not? At age 40, 50, 60, you will find that you are now using everything you have ever learned in your life and bringing it all together. You don't have the pressure of putting the kids through school. You can afford to take risks. Some fields, such as consulting, often favor the older folks. Who wants a twenty-year-old financial advisor?

The trouble with the future is that it usually arrives before we're ready for it.

Arnold H. Glasow

The Fifteen and Forty-Year Visions®

Our business is about helping people with their careers, but we have always urged our clients to do the Forty-Year Vision — or at least a fifteen-year version of it. You can't consider one part of your life without also considering its impact on the rest of your life: where you want to live, your relationship with your family, and so on.

Write down, in the present tense, the way your life is right now, and the way you see yourself five years from now and fifteen years from now, using the questions below.

When you have finished the exercise, ask yourself how you feel about your life as you laid it out in your vision. Some people feel depressed when they see on paper how their lives are going, and they cannot think of a way out. But they feel better when a good friend or a Five O'Clock Club coach helps them think of a better future to work toward. If you don't like your vision, change it—it's your life.

Start the exercise with the way things are now so you will be realistic about your future. Don't think too hard. See where you wind up. You have plenty of time to get things done.

The fifteen-year mark proves to be the most important for most people. It's far enough away from the present to allow you to dream. Here are the questions to ask yourself:

- What is your life like right now? (Say anything you want about your life.)
- Who are your friends? What do they do for a living?
- What is your relationship with your family, however you define "family"?
- Are you married? Single? Children? (List ages.)
- Where are you living? What does it look like?
- What are your hobbies and interests?
- What do you do for exercise?
- How is your health?
- How do you take care of your spiritual needs?
- What kind of work or work-substitute are you doing?
- What else would you like to note about your life right now?

We know that engaging in the Fifteen-Year Vision (at least) has energized many people to turn their lives in exciting new directions.

We are prone to judge success by the index of our salaries or the size of our automobiles, rather than by the quality of our service relationship to humanity.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Old-Fashioned Career Coach

In the old days of career coaching, coaches focused on what was called the "job-person match." They helped clients understand their values, accomplishments and interests — but did not discuss a person's goals or vision for a future. In fact, for some coaches, the entire assessment consisted of having the client write a lengthy autobiography — perhaps 30 or more pages long! Coaches simply helped people straight-line their past. A career change was an after-thought. The focus was to help the person get into an organization that matched his skills, abilities and values, but with an assumption that it would be in the same kind of job.

But Five O'Clock Club research in the early '80s proved that coaches had to help people not only analyze their past, but also *envision their future*, a future that looked at the whole person. We pointed out that coaches who did not do that were doing their clients a disservice. It took a decade to convince coaches — inside and outside the Club — of this necessity. But it makes sense. In the old days, people were stuck in their careers: once you were an accountant, you stayed as an accountant. Today, there is no reason for a person to feel stuck. It's easier to talk about the past than to plan for the future. But a coach can help someone envision a new future, regardless of that person's age. Today, 58% of the people who attend the Club make a career change, moving to a new industry or field. For example, one person went from being a high school science teacher in Canada to pharmaceutical sales in New Jersey. Another went from accounting to sales to human resources — two major career changes in under eight years. You, too, have a future. Try developing a vision and research it. ●

Man's Search for Meaning

by Viktor E. Frankl
Author & Concentration Camp Survivor

On Choosing One's Attitude

"There is also purpose in life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces."

On Committing to Values and Goals

"Logotherapy...considers man as a being whose main concern consists in fulfilling a meaning and in actualizing values, rather than in the mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts."

"What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost, but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him."

On Discovering the Meaning of Life

"The meaning of our existence is not invented by ourselves, but rather detected."

"What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general, but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment."

"We can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by doing a deed; (2) by experiencing a value; and (3) by suffering."

On Fulfilling One's Task

"A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an

unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the 'why' for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any 'how.'"

"It did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life — daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual."

Above quotations reprinted from:
Frankl, Viktor E., *Man's Search for Meaning*
Simon and Schuster, New York, 1963.

On Success

"Don't aim at success — the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to see that in the long run — in the long run, I say! — success will follow you precisely because you had forgotten to think of it."

Preface: *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*

What Human Resources Executives Say About Five O'Clock Club Outplacement!

"This thing works. I saw a structured, yet nurturing, environment where individuals searching for jobs positioned themselves for success.

I saw 'accountability' in a non-intimidating environment. I was struck by the support and willingness to encourage those who had just started the process by the group members who had been there for a while."

— Employee Relations Officer,
financial services organization

"Wow! I was immediately struck by the electric atmosphere and people's commitment to following the program. Job hunters reported on where they were in their searches and what they had accomplished the previous week. The overall environment fosters sharing and mutual learning."

— Head of Human Resources,
major law firm

"The Five O'Clock Club program is **far more effective than conventional outplacement.** Excellent materials, effective coaching and nanosecond responsiveness combine to get people focused on the central tasks of the job search. Selecting the Five O'Clock Outplacement Program was one of my best decisions this year."

—Sr. Vice President, Human Resources,
manufacturing company

"You have made me look like a real genius in recommending The Five O'Clock Club [to our divisions around the country]!"

—SVP HR, major publishing firm

"Selecting Five O'Clock outplacement was one of my best decisions this year."

—SVP, HR,
consumer products firm



"I have only one rule here: do a good job and you'll stay off my wall."