

# POWERHOUSE

## COACHING

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### CREATIVE DESTRUCTION AT MID-LIFE

“Every act of creation is first an act of destruction.”

- Pablo Picasso

One evening in 2007, when I was 38 years old, I started reading ‘Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis’ by Peter O’Connor, as I thought it would help my clients. Within two pages I knew I needed the book more than they did.

O’Connor talked about the loss of meaning, the futility, the confusion and exhaustion he’d experienced in his own life, and which I was desperately trying to avoid admitting to in my own.

What followed, through his book, was an understanding of my own midlife and how to address it, which was, precisely and counter-intuitively, to let go. Thus began an amazing journey and breakthrough into something far better than I had before. It was confusing, painful, essential.

I met a man at a social event recently. Intelligent, articulate, forty-seven years old – his façade was unmistakable. Within minutes we started to talk about what was really going on, which involved his bewilderment at not understanding his own midlife. Within an hour he said I knew him better than anyone in the world. That was only because he was courageous enough to be so honest. He also understood that it was his façade that gave him away.

Mid-life is a time when things fall apart. Whatever we have used before no longer works. Whatever we cared about loses meaning. Whoever we thought we were we deeply question, and often no longer believe.

If you’re experiencing this, you are where you’re meant to be. However, the path that many of us *want* to follow is to ignore these feelings, redouble our efforts, work harder, set bigger better goals, and construct that façade we may think is convincing but simply isn’t. T S Eliot wrote a poem about this called, ‘The Hollow Men’, and Carl Jung said the following:

*“Thoroughly unprepared, we take the step into the afternoon of life...  
But we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of  
life’s morning, for what was great in the morning will be little at  
evening and what in the morning was true, at evening will have  
become a lie.”*

I’m all for progress, attainment, achievement. Yet there are times in life when this approach is counterproductive, and midlife is the most pressing of those times. In essence, early adulthood is about chasing the world’s expectations and values...

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Midlife, by contrast, is about digging deeply to discover one's true self and core values, self-knowledge essential to any wisdom or leadership. The landscape beyond midlife involves integrating the self and the world; becoming what is known in adult development as 'self-authored'.

Any decent writing on legacy insists we find and accept our real self before we can do anything truly meaningful in life. Without the courage to face our own midlife we arrest our own development, staying young and foolish.

The second half of our lives requires a different language and different fuel. It makes me smile when I see so many articles online about "how to do more, how to be more". These are 'first half of life' language and ideals. If you are taking articles like that seriously after a certain age, there's work to be done.

If things inside you are falling apart and you're between your late 30s through to early 50s, then this is the winter of your life and time to reorient. Read about it, learn about it, talk about it with people you trust, and find support and resources. Above all validate it, and give yourself permission to carefully and slowly prune that old garden of your life and create something truly valuable. It's our life's work.

Consider:

*Do I continue to follow the script I've been given,  
or is it my time to become self-authored?*

It's up to you.



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