



Shifting to a New Understanding

Changing the Way You See Your Life

EXCERPTED FROM

Getting Unstuck:

How Dead Ends Become New Paths

BY

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Shifting to a New Understanding

CHRISTINE DUPREE was twenty-eight years old and a second-year student at the Harvard Business School when I first met her. She is someone who injects warmth and intensity into any conversation, but even more so when talking about her twin passions: the arts and community service organizations.

“Music was important to me from an early age,” she told me in our first meeting. “What I wanted to do when I grew up was to both sing and teach voice. I went to a performing-arts high school half a day as well as a college-prep high school half a day, and performed on the side.

“It is also important to know that I grew up in the church,” she continued. “My father is a Methodist minister and a professor of the

New Testament, and my mom is a professor of education. So I came from an academic background and a community-focused background. Being involved in the church, I did a lot of volunteering with homeless shelters and adolescent programs at the local community center. In high school, I apprenticed to a chorus program for inner city youth and got to perform in schools and got to teach some of the kids.”

Like most students coming to business school, Chris did not have a preconceived destination. She did not come from a business family nor did she major in economics or business in college. She had done well at the entry-level jobs she took right after college. She knew that business graduate school would open up many possibilities, but she was not sure what path she should follow. As she looked around, it seemed that many of her classmates were beginning to focus on their career goals (most of them were, like her, still at sea with this process). With the energy generated by hundreds of fellow classmates focused on their career direction struggle, just being in graduate school was creating an impasse. The clock was ticking; graduation seemed uncomfortably close. What was really important for her? How should she focus her efforts?

Through an impasse life is saying, “You are not paying enough attention to vitally important themes and tensions. Stop now and identify them.” Moving through impasse to a new place requires both the letting go that we worked on in the free attention exercise and the opening up to a new type of information that can move us forward.

Making the Shift

This shift to a new type of information comes when we have “come to the end of our thinking” (that is to say, from the end of the

thinking that is possible using our old mental model). The shift can occur in many ways and can be catalyzed by different means. Much of Carl Jung's work was devoted to helping his psychotherapy patients recognize the messages of the unconscious mind, through a greater awareness of the images that come from dreams, art, and techniques such as his "active imagination."¹ In many approaches to meditation, the practitioner is guided through a process that allows a shift away from the information and associations of the discursive mind to information and knowledge available from more intuitive and sensing-based modes of apprehension. There are many stories of dramatic shifts that people experience when faced with a sudden danger that forces them to call on capabilities and instincts they barely knew they possessed.

We can cultivate the ability to shift to a new perspective and a new mode of understanding. The Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh tells the story of a difficult decision he faced during the Vietnam war. Nhat Hanh was the leader of a community imperiled by the growing conflict in their immediate area. How could community members protect themselves? To whom could they appeal for help? Should they go or stay? Nhat Hanh turned these questions over and over in his mind to no avail. He got up and began to do a meditative "walking practice" that he had cultivated for years as part of his Zen training. He walked slowly in circumscribed patterns, doing the specific practice that goes with this method. After many hours, the answer became clear to him. They must leave right away. Leaving one's home and becoming a refugee is never an easy decision, but in this case it was necessary. In retrospect, this decision, difficult as it was, saved the community.

Analytically breaking down and examining each piece of information that was available to his discursive intellect hadn't helped

Thich Nhat Hanh. The various alternatives each had their pros and cons, and a great deal of information was simply missing. However, by shifting to a deeper and more intuitive mode of understanding, he was able to grasp the whole of the situation, and when the decision came, he knew at once that it was right.

Again and again life demands that we let go of the surface features of analytical thought and move closer to the core of our being and our being-in-the-situation. Rarely will the demand be as urgent as the one Thich Nhat Hanh faced, but each demand requires that we arrive at a new type of information before we can move forward.

In my work with students and clients I have developed several exercises designed to enable a shift to accessing a new type of in-

DEEP DIVE

The One Hundred Jobs Exercise

Step One: Select Your Most Exciting Work Roles

Reading through this list of one hundred occupational roles, select the twelve roles you instinctively feel would be the most exciting, engaging, and meaningful. Move rapidly through the list and use your first intuitive impression. Do *not* consider whether you have the skill or training to perform well in that role. Do *not* consider its financial rewards. Identify the twelve roles that would simply be most engaging.

When you have selected your top twelve, rank them with number one being the work role you find most exciting. If your

formation or, more accurately speaking, to a new focus. These exercises are not infallible techniques—they work only if we feel the urgency and make the effort. But that effort is rewarded when we focus our attention on the themes, images, and dynamic tensions that carry essential information we had overlooked when performing analyses based on outmoded mental models. To help Christine Dupree move along the incipient path to her future, I led her through the One Hundred Jobs exercise. This exercise is a deceptively simple procedure for identifying essential work and life themes. Before we learn from Chris’s experience with this exercise, each of us should do it on our own. (See “Deep Dive: The One Hundred Jobs Exercise.”)

first choice is much more important than your second, you might leave an inch of space on the page to indicate this. If your first and second choices are essentially equal in importance, list them one after the other with no space in between.

One Hundred Jobs Exercise

List of Occupations

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Marketing researcher | 7. Social services professional |
| 2. Child-care worker | 8. Salesperson for high-tech products |
| 3. Computer software designer | 9. Litigator (courtroom lawyer) |
| 4. Sports coach | 10. Psychotherapist |
| 5. Manager at a manufacturing plant | 11. Manager of a retail store |
| 6. Salesperson in a retail store | 12. Public relations professional |

- | | |
|--|--|
| 13. Advertising executive | 40. Research and development manager |
| 14. TV talk show host | 41. Real estate developer |
| 15. Theologian | 42. Music composer |
| 16. Speech therapist | 43. Veterinarian |
| 17. Newscaster | 44. Advertising copywriter |
| 18. Secretary | 45. Senior manager of a manufacturing business |
| 19. Automobile mechanic | 46. Nurse |
| 20. Electrician | 47. Ship captain |
| 21. Entertainer (singer, comedian, etc.) | 48. Research sociologist |
| 22. Optometrist | 49. Manager of information systems |
| 23. Professional actor | 50. Investigative reporter |
| 24. Senior hospital manager | 51. Medical researcher |
| 25. Fine artist | 52. Chief financial officer |
| 26. School superintendent | 53. Office manager |
| 27. Leader of a product-development team | 54. Police officer |
| 28. Religious counselor | 55. Investment banker |
| 29. Financial analyst | 56. Manager of a restaurant |
| 30. TV or film director | 57. Entrepreneur |
| 31. Personal financial advisor | 58. Vacation resort manager |
| 32. Director of human resources | 59. Electrical engineer |
| 33. Graphic designer | 60. High school teacher |
| 34. Economist | 61. Professor of political science |
| 35. Business strategy consultant | 62. Theoretical physicist |
| 36. Homemaker | 63. Computer systems analyst |
| 37. Senior military leader | 64. Fiction writer |
| 38. Chief executive officer | 65. Newspaper editor |
| 39. Librarian | |

- | | |
|---|---|
| 66. University professor | 84. Event planner |
| 67. Military serviceperson | 85. Administrative assistant |
| 68. Diplomat | 86. Credit manager |
| 69. Venture capitalist | 87. Elected public official |
| 70. Military strategist | 88. Motivational speaker |
| 71. Logistical planner | 89. Mayor of a city or town |
| 72. City planner | 90. President of a community
charity |
| 73. Accountant | 91. Real estate salesperson |
| 74. Bank manager | 92. Professional athlete |
| 75. Architect | 93. Clerical worker |
| 76. Carpenter | 94. Foreign trade negotiator |
| 77. Manufacturing process
engineer | 95. Bookkeeper |
| 78. Firefighter | 96. Emergency medical
technician |
| 79. Marketing brand manager | 97. Statistician |
| 80. Surgeon | 98. Manager of a stock or
bond mutual fund |
| 81. Investment manager | 99. Proofreader |
| 82. Stockbroker | 100. Civil engineer |
| 83. Director of nonprofit
organization | |

Step Two: Identify Underlying Themes

Looking over your list, identify themes that seem to tie together many of your occupational role choices. A theme does not have to apply for all of the choices on your list, but it probably should be present in at least four or five of them. Examples of themes are:

- Love of technology
- Finance

- Creativity
- Managing
- Power and control
- Influence
- Structure
- Entrepreneurship
- Tangible products
- Teamwork
- Energy and passion
- Public service
- Autonomy
- Interpersonal transaction
- Doing rather than analyzing
- Individual contributor
- Customer contact
- “Front room” rather than “back room”
- In the spotlight
- Intellectual challenge and problem solving
- Helping people

There are innumerable possibilities. The goal is not to get as many themes as possible but rather to find the wording that truly captures each essential element that underlies your list. Be creative. Push yourself. The first few themes come easily, but the most useful and least conscious are likely to come at the end of your theme analysis just when you are most tired and ready to quit.

Step Three: Identify Dynamic Tensions

Dynamic tension is present when a theme seems to apply to several occupations on your list, while other occupations seem to contradict that theme. An example of such a tension might be “Maximum Financial Gain vs. Public Service” or “Autonomy vs. Leading Teams.” Some people’s lists contain a number of dynamic tensions, others’ contain none. We all have such dynamic tensions in our personalities and in the visions of our lives. One part of the self finds attraction in one direction and another part of the self is drawn to an apparently contradictory direction. Working with these tensions is a necessary part of growth. Your job now is to simply identify any tensions you can.

Step Four: Paying Attention to Spontaneous Images

As you work to identify themes and dynamic tensions, continue holding your free attention. You will from time to time become aware of images that come to you spontaneously. These images may also come later when you are rereading your list and the new list of themes and dynamic tensions. Examples of images are “standing in a spotlight,” “walking a tightrope,” “standing on top of a mountain.” Images may also come in the form of popular songs that occur to you as you do the exercise. Write every image down, as irrational or irrelevant as it may seem.

You will end up with a written document containing your list, as well as themes, dynamic tensions, and images that emerged from your work on the list. This is a living document that you can return to in the future when you do the exercise again, or when other exercises stimulate deeper imagination. The real product of the exercise is an expanded understanding of the themes that are essential for you at this time in both work and life.

The Shift: Working with a New Type of Information

Once we have generated our list of themes, images, and dynamic tensions, we must amplify and analyze them so that we can understand them and their message as fully as possible. To help us with this process, I interviewed Chris after she had done an extensive analysis of her One Hundred Jobs experience with her “career team.” (At Harvard Business School, students work on career impasse in small groups called Career Teams.) The theme analysis of the One Hundred Jobs exercise can be even more powerful when done in a small group. Each person takes a turn in the spotlight and the other members of the group generate his or her themes, images, and dynamic tensions. The person whose list is being analyzed simply records the group members’ comments. At the end, he or she can join the analysis and ask the other members to expand on their comments. Steps three and four can also become more powerful in a group setting. Doing the exercise in a small-group setting will provide a wider range of images, themes, and dynamic tensions. When working with a small group it is helpful to use a large “flipchart” so that all group members can view the original list and the emerging lists of themes, tensions, and images as the work proceeds.

This is what Chris had written as her top twelve choices, in rank order (Chris was using an earlier version of this exercise, so the wording of some of her choices is different from the wording used in the exercise in this book):

1. Music director (changed from TV or film director)
2. Director of a social service agency
3. Elected member of a congress or parliament

4. Research and development manager

(Chris left some space at this point to indicate that the choices above represented her “top tier.”)

5. Entertainer (singer, musician)

6. Management consultant

(Again, another space to separate this grouping from the one below)

7. City planner

8. Architect

9. Leader of a product-development team

10. Research sociologist

11. Newspaper editor

12. Mayor of a city or town

Reflect on Chris’s choices and write down the images that come to mind and the themes you recognize. What major themes emerge that would underlie many of these otherwise disparate choices? The most challenging analysis is the recognition of dynamic tensions—what themes seem to be contradictory? Chris’s team identified nine themes, an unusually high number (four to five themes is the average range). Three particular images came to different members of the group during the exercise. Three dynamic tensions surfaced among the team members and an important fourth dynamic tension emerged when Chris had a counseling session with me after the group had ended.

Chris's team looked at her choices of music director, entertainer, architect, and city planner and saw a Creativity theme. They saw a Public Service theme in her selections of director of a social service agency, elected member of a congress or parliament, and mayor of a city or town. Looking at the number of selections that had a "manager" or "director" title or were elected public officials, Chris's team saw a Control theme.

Chris and I both agreed that the team's Community theme was a big part of her life story reflected in her volunteer work and her high level of involvement with extracurricular groups at business school. I asked her next about the Diversity theme: What did her team mean by "diversity" and what does that mean to Chris?

"It means two things," she answered. "The first is diversity of interests; being in jobs where you're doing different things, playing in different worlds, talking to different people. But diversity, I've come to discover, also means the type of people you get to deal with, which ties into the Business vs. Artist dynamic tension. Finally, because I grew up in Atlanta, cultural and ethnic diversity are enormously important to me."

"How about the Energy and Passion theme?" I asked.

"That's what drives anything, and anyone who's successful has to love what they do," she replied. "When I took a job as an internal auditor after college and juxtaposed that against my work with the community chorus, I decided I was just cheating myself because I wasn't doing something I was passionate about. And I found that having other people around me who are passionate is just as critical."

“So that’s an element of organizational culture, being with other people who are excited about what they are doing, that you’re going to be looking for?”

“Yes, definitely,” she said.

I encouraged her to explore the Tangible theme.

“It to me doesn’t mean that I need to be able to see that a widget comes out the other side to be happy. In fact, I’m sometimes more comfortable working in the theoretical world than in the truly pragmatic. But it comes back to seeing something happening. Purely theoretical without any result, just to have thought the thought, isn’t a very efficient use of anyone’s power and creativity. I loved singing but it was even more fun to direct the community chorus and to see a program through from conception and rehearsal to performance. To see the power of it and its impact on people.”

Chris was less loquacious when I asked her about the Structure theme. She at first didn’t even think structure made a theme. I prodded, and she offered her thoughts:

“I think about it more as sort of that problem-solving approach than I do the type of environment that I would be working in. Although I guess when I think about all the jobs that are on my list, there’s an element of structure. Like with a performance there’s a timeline.”

“How about the Needing Teams theme?”

“I think that’s very, very true. When you’re dealing with something that’s creative and something that’s out of the

box and new, teams are really important. No one person has all of the brilliant ideas. I find the team dynamic exciting. Everything I look at now has to have some sort of team element.”

Then I shifted to a discussion of the dynamic tensions her team recognized. They had called the first one Doing vs. Observing.

“I definitely feel that tension,” Chris mused. “I think that’s the tension that I see as academic vs. pragmatist. If you put my twelve jobs into either an arts bucket or a business bucket, you see that tension in both buckets. You’ll see entertainer being the person on stage and you’ll see music director, the person who’s making it happen. Within the business bucket you see management consultant but also leader of a product-development team. I think a lot of people have that tension of ‘I want to advise people, tell them how to do it and I want to be the one to do it.’ It’s definitely a challenge finding roles that have both.”

“The ‘two buckets’ you mention reflect the Artist vs. Analyst dynamic tension your team identified,” I responded. “Also, your team saw you as someone who enjoys problem solving on your own and who also enjoys a leadership role. They called that dynamic tension Individual Contributor vs. Leader or Manager.”

“I think that one’s probably the least clear to me simply because I’m not quite sure where I fall. I love team concepts and I’m very happy to step back and just be one person. At the same time when I see a problem, I see solutions,

and if I don't feel like things are going that way, then I want to be the leader."

Finally, we looked at the three specific images different members of Chris's team experienced while working on her material. They were: "kissing babies," "onstage in the spotlight," and "cutting the ribbon."

Christine laughed. "I think I was uncomfortable with all three of those images. It's funny. I don't really want to be a senator, but I like the concept of what they do. I think my team hooked onto that. It's an interesting theme because the first two images come from my two biggest passions, different as they are. Kissing babies definitely ties into the public service image, and the next one, being in the spotlight, into the arts image. But because I still love the conceptual work, I usually don't think of myself as being the person getting the reward and the spotlight, but at the other times I do. I constantly mull over in my mind whether that spotlight image needs to be kept in check, but I don't know if that's the right way to approach it."

I found this interesting. It struck me as a dynamic tension that Chris's group did not recognize, "Serving Others vs. Being the Star." "The way you were pushing it away makes me want to probe it more," I said, "because this is something you're not fully owning. And I think you are being judgmental about the 'Star' pole of the tension. This is something for you to look at. Martin Luther King, Jr., would not have been able to serve unless he had been able to take the spotlight when it was very dangerous for someone with his

background to do so. I think you can find many examples like that. Is this a frontier for you?”

“Yes, I think so. Part of it’s a tension because of the value judgment, part of it’s a tension because I’m just a strong introvert, and so there’s an element of the spotlight that sounds exhausting to me. I’ll need recuperation time to recover from that constant out-there personality. But at the same time, when I look at the jobs that I want, I value being able to stand in the spotlight. So while I don’t want to think of myself as someone who needs attention to feel rewarded, I think it’s interesting to think about—can I use the attraction to the spotlight as a tool rather than as a distraction?”

“There is real energy and genuine meaning here for you,” I replied. “And, for some reason, you’re uncomfortable with it. It is something that you tend to label ‘not me.’ ‘Being in the spotlight’ wants to come out and find itself in your daily life.”

The Shift: New and Familiar

The “shift” is a “dropping down” into more imaginative and less conditioned ways of looking at ourselves and our world. Every venture into exercises such as the One Hundred Jobs is a return to our essence, as it is speaking to us at the present moment. We shift from cognitive analysis based on an old mental model to information that comes from giving our essence a chance to speak in the fresh language of image and metaphor. This “new view” may indeed have a very familiar feel, for it comes from the core of our being. Rilke was able to recognize the message of the Apollo statue because his

life of instinct was always there, waiting to emerge and take its rightful place in his daily living. He always had a life of the body with its instinctual intelligence, but his mental model of what was important had been blocking that intelligence for many years. The experience with the image of the statue allowed him to wake up and own what was already in place. Chris's need to express power and put herself forward as a recognized leader was not new, she had simply not acknowledged and allowed for how important it really is. "All knowledge is remembering" Plato observed.² The shift is a deeper kind of thinking that allows us to find words for things that have been important all along. (See "Deep Dive: Further Work with the One Hundred Jobs Exercise.")

DEEP DIVE

Further Work with the One Hundred Jobs Exercise

The One Hundred Jobs exercise resulted in a list of the key themes, dynamic tensions, and images that came to you spontaneously. From reading about Christine's experience with this exercise, you can get a sense of how these can reveal a new type of information about essential life themes. Return to your own list. Can you expand on the themes and tensions you identified? Do new images come to mind as you reread your list?

Although the One Hundred Jobs exercise is based on stimuli from work roles, it is not just a career exercise—the themes that emerge are relevant to both work and life.

Deepening the Shift

Amy Orlansky called me two years after she had attended an executive education class I had taught in San Francisco. Then fifty-one, Amy had led a rich and varied life. With undergraduate degrees in philosophy and computer science and an MBA from the Kellogg Business School, she had worked in her early twenties in a successful rock band and later in a strategy consulting firm and a *Fortune* 100 corporation before moving to San Francisco to start a family. When she was in her forties, she and her husband and their two young children had lived in a remote African village as part of a church mission. At the time of the workshop, Amy had been living in San Francisco for many years, and, partnered with her husband, operated a real estate business from their three-bedroom flat.

Amy has always oriented herself to the needs of others, and when she came to the workshop, the demands on her attention were many. With a daughter in high school and a son, several years younger, who was learning disabled, Amy's responsibilities as a parent were substantial. That, combined with her business partnership with her husband, left her little time to herself. Her very decision to attend the workshop was, at some level, the beginning of an awareness that change was necessary.

When Amy called two years later, she was eager to work with me in career counseling. She reminded me what she had written in response to an exercise I had led two years earlier.

I see a wood-paneled room, like my office. I see light and windows and plants. I don't feel other people. I don't feel what it is that I am working on. Instead, it is a peaceful, confident feeling.

Somewhere I feel creative people or a team near me. Am I a writer? An artist? I am not accountable to a client, am I? I am just there, at peace in a warm, indoor garden. I don't want to work? Just be?

I do see art, I don't see the struggle, and I see the beauty, the result the unity of peace and confidence, light and green, and warm wood. Authenticity.

I am alone, it seems, and this is worrying me as I become conscious of what I am writing . . . I am in charge, in control, using my mind.

The exercise that had prompted Amy's vision is one I call Image Gathering. I developed it after many years of working with clients who were at impasse, when I realized that most were starting in the wrong place in their attempts to move forward. They were either trying to "think through" their situation or they were immobilized by the overwhelming emotions of the impasse. There was no way for a new perspective to find its way past the barrier of either old ideas or a fear of drowning in feelings of depression, anxiety, anger, or shame.

Cultivating Images

Clients at impasse who come to see me all share one thing: they are feeling stuck, and the next right step is not clear. Months or years earlier they may have been deeply engaged in the work they were doing or deeply satisfied with their lives. But for some reason they now find themselves unable to focus. After a few hours of conversation, this often begins to change. Almost always this "stuck" person is able to offer all sorts of information about who he is, and

about how he is different from everyone else around him. He is able to call up memories and images about those times when work and life have deeply engaged him, and what those memories and images mean as far as the new situation that, at some level, he knows that he now wants.

So if this information is there, why can't we just reach in and pull it out? The Image Gathering exercise is designed to get us back to the place where we can tap those impressions of what it means to be fully engaged in a way that is fully satisfying.

It shouldn't be so hard to sense such information, but somehow it is. There is a clear "signal" down there sending messages about who we are and how we're different and what that means about finding satisfying work. But for most of us, noise jams that signal.

As we saw in chapter 2, conscious and unconscious messages from important people in our lives often barrage us. Messages from our culture about what work is good, what work is prestigious, and what success means also assail us. Messages about what a good life is add to the noise. Our fears about our lack of knowledge or skill, or just about life generally, add to the cacophony.

How do we silence the noise and home in on the clear signal about who we are and what work we were born to do? How do we formulate a vision of a newer, truer life? What we do *not* do is begin with analysis. A new life vision has to come from employing all aspects of our consciousness to realize a full-bodied experience of the self and the situation. It has to arise from deep intuition.

Image Gathering is an exercise that summons this deep intuition. There are two versions of this exercise; one is focused specifically on career vision, and the other on broader life vision. You may participate in either or both of these exercises by letting me lead you through them at www.careerleader.com/gettingunstuck. This

exercise, unlike the One Hundred Jobs exercise, is not necessary in order to use this book fully. It will, however, add to the variety and texture of the insights you gain from the One Hundred Jobs exercise.

In the Gathering Images exercise, we start by letting images come to us through a guided meditation. Just images. What do we know in the depths of our being about the work environment we want, the types of people we want to have around us, the types of activity that will engage us every day? Like a vivid dream that grips us even after we awake, an image taps all aspects of awareness and may include visual, emotional, and intuitive dimensions. These sensing, feeling, and intuitive dimensions can be complemented by a “thinking” or analytical awareness as well.

The Gathering Images exercise moves through three phases.

- The first phase circumvents our day-to-day conditioned thinking and elicits the essential images associated with a new, emerging vision.
- The second phase, a writing phase, highlights these images for closer inspection. This writing is the start of a living document that we may return to as often as we need to continue envisioning our future path.
- The third phase analyzes the deep imagination brought on by the first two phases. It involves a specific approach toward this disciplined imagination.

We must learn how to let the images work on us before we can begin the work of appreciating the coded messages they bear. The images that arise from the Image Gathering exercises lead us to look at aspects of ourselves and our world that are not “in the future” but are already there, awaiting discovery.

These images are preverbal messages, aspects of self-awareness that have not yet been processed through the language centers of the brain. In being preverbal they have a premonitory quality. They bring news: hints about what might be if we are able to get the message and act on it. They point to knowledge about ourselves and our world that will be known more completely only later, when we have had time to take it in fully and express it in words.

Once we have collected these images, we will go back and say, “So what are the patterns here?” Then we will bring our analytical consciousness to bear and say, “What are the core themes? What are the dynamic tensions?” Analysis can help us become strategic and tactical about how to move forward. First, though, we must slow down.

Amy’s Images

Amy had been surprised by what had come to her during her first Image Gathering exercise. Here are Amy’s responses to the seven questions I asked at the end of the exercise (I would add two more questions two years later):

1. What is the essence of two or three core activities that showed up in your images?

Alone, at peace, clear concentration

Using my mind, writing

Creative team nearby

2. List five adjectives that describe the atmosphere of where you were in your images:

Clear, concentrated

Light, happy

Nature, green, wood, light

Peaceful, creative

Alone but not lonely

3. List five more adjectives that describe the people around you in your images:

Separate, independent

Creative, synergistic

Subordinate or equals (but not boss or authority)

Friendly team

Cooperative, helpful

4. Who does this type of work (the work that showed up in your images during the exercise)?

Marjorie (sculptor)

Writers

5. Who else does this work?

Joyce (sister, small design firm)

Painters

Julie McArthur, author

6. When in your life have you been closest to the work that showed up in your images?

PR project for not-for-profit organization

Writing book about rock band experience

Making the photo project

7. When in your life have you been farthest away from the work that showed up in your images?

Working for consulting firm (office atmosphere)

Working for a money center bank

Sharing an office with Martha

Working with Victor (PR) in his office

Working in my ugly subbasement studio

When Amy called me two years after that executive education class, she wanted to move to a deeper analysis of these images. In the intervening months, she had begun to imagine being a marketing, public relations, and general business consultant to artists and nonprofit organizations, something that she had recently done quite successfully for a San Francisco sculptor. We scheduled a counseling session. In that session, I asked her to respond to the two new questions:

8. What's going to stop you from realizing the vision indicated by your images?

Continuing to let the family business dominate my time

Always taking care of people: children, parents, and sisters

Fear

Inertia

Feeling that I should continue to be available for family (daughter in trouble, son with special needs, husband used to my help for last twenty years, father dying and needing help)

Fear that my age (fifty-three) is going to stop any group from taking my application seriously

Embarrassment that my résumé reads like an adventure story, that I will be seen as a dilettante when what people need are specific talents

Fear that although I have a good sense of strategy, it is all based on gut, and I need further training to call myself a business consultant

Inability or unwillingness to carve out time to discipline myself to work through these barriers

A feeling that there is something missing in me, fear of exposure

No office, no private phone, and no uninterrupted free time: i.e., fear that to do a search well or even to accept clients or a project, I will be overwhelmed by trying to do it in my present environment—yet am I ready to rent an office and fly solo?

9. Who or what will be your strongest allies in making your vision real?

Strong inner compass

“Spiritual” daily practices that ground me

My own strengths: humor, vision, creative energy, and true sense of adventure

Strong inner belief that this is my path—that I should not stay “hidden” and safe

At the time of the original exercise, Amy had been surprised that the most compelling image placed her in a large room—and there

were no other people there. She found this very troubling. “Perhaps,” I had said then, “what you need now in your life is more space.” In fact, after the workshop Amy became drawn to Buddhist meditation, working with a teacher versed in the Tibetan tradition. The practice of visualizing and meditating in open space as an experience of free, unconditioned, and unbounded existence became the foundation of her spiritual work. Finding “space” had indeed been what this busy mother and manager of a family real estate business needed most.

There was nothing prophetic in what I had said. I was looking at her image and reading it in the same way I would approach any image in art, literature, or dream. The image was a message from a preverbal aspect of awareness that was pushing for full expression in Amy’s life. It was there because there was a real urgency in the message, an urgency that moved Amy to begin to imagine what she needed next. She acted on this sense by starting her Tibetan Buddhist practice.

Amy’s story suggests how we can take the images that come to us through the Image Gathering exercise and apply them in life. The application need not be something as esoteric as beginning to practice Tibetan meditation. The message might well be that what you need is more money, or a schedule that leaves more time for family or for going to the theater.

Understanding the Images

After we finish with imagining and writing, we can begin the next phase of our vision work: decoding the images that surface. The first step in decoding is to simply pay attention to the way the image is affecting us. For Marcy Kaufman, it took careful attention, bringing a

charged awareness to bear, before she could truly understand the image of the cherry-red van. Packed into this one image was the emotional “meaning” of her father’s presence in her life: strength, warmth, protection, caring, and presence when he was needed.

Like Marcy, Amy at first had little idea what the image of an empty room with no other people meant. She was shocked, for her previous understanding of empty rooms was “loneliness” or “alienation.” Only by paying attention—studying an image with the full being (thinking, feeling, intuition, and sensual awareness)—was she able to experience the message of a need for more space and realize that meditation would get her into that special room.

We too must pay attention to images, which is an art in itself. If you are an appreciator of painting, sculpture, or poetry you have already had some initiation into this art. As you spend more time not analyzing, but simply paying attention to how images affect you, your skills in this art will grow.

Once we have identified an image, our first tendency is likely to be to assign it to categories, theories, experiences, or frameworks we already know. If we do this, we will miss the new message. We need to enlarge the image, “amplify” it and let it grow inside of us until we see more of it, and in greater detail. We must learn to let the image lead and watch intently to see where it takes us, what it does to us. A theme may begin as an abstraction but amplification can prompt specific ideas for the way it needs to enter our lives. As we let the metaphors, images, and themes soak in, we will begin to notice what entertaining them brings to mind, and how they affect us in a deep and very physical way. Letting an image work in your body is a way of “knowing with your bones.”

When life forces us to make difficult choices, having an idea, as insightful and intelligent as it might be, is not enough. We must act

from the deepest place possible, understanding and assenting with the very fiber of our being. Soon we become accustomed to making decisions from that place. It moves us beyond what is sentimental or dreamy. It is a practice for returning to what is most important, to something deeper than our wishes, opinions, and flights of fancy. It allows us to return to our core.

The Themes Behind the Images

Once we have settled on a suite of images and learned to know them in our bones, we can proceed to a more analytical process of understanding them. Looking for themes involves coming up with general principles based on the raw data of the imagination experience. Themes capture the “deeper” message latent within the specific images.

As a way of beginning, refer back to Amy’s images earlier in this chapter. Look at all of imagery: What are the essential elements that would best capture the essence of all of this information?

Here are the themes that Amy and her workshop colleagues found in her spontaneous writing, in her answers to the questions, and in imagery that surfaced as we reviewed them in our later counseling session:

Creative work so important

Solitude status quo but meeting with others at my discretion

Important to integrate work into entire being, comes from inside

Really important: CONTROL OVER ENVIRONMENT

*Create environment that is nourishing, refreshing,
what the spirit needs to be at peace, to spark the
creativity*

*Working on my own terms without judgment or
pressures*

*Doing something unique, creative in peaceful, harmo-
nious place*

*Picked up teaching element—intense potential to help
others not to feel bogged down by “noise”*

*Helping people see that other things are important
(beauty, serenity)*

In these themes we see the need for her own space, for more creative work, for control over her time, for the ability to make her own work decisions, for both a sense of solitude and connection with creative collaborators, and for altruistic service.

Amy found a way to move beyond just creating a sense of personal space through meditation; eventually this sense of space began to express itself as assertive independence and she was able to bring this experience into the way she worked with clients. Working with this new more expansive sense of herself, as well as with her vision of a deeply personal way of working as a consultant, she expanded her business to serve small companies in the areas of marketing, business systems, and negotiations. The idea of personal space could now be put together with her desire to engage the world outside of her family more actively. She began a new cycle of “giving” that drew on deeper sense of her own work rather than on the demands of her husband’s business.

The analytical challenge for both the One Hundred Jobs and Image Gathering exercises is to extract the deep metaphors, themes, and dynamic tensions that underlie our choices (from the One Hundred Jobs exercise) and our images (from the Image Gathering exercise). The imaginative analysis is what completes the shift to a way of understanding our situation that is at once refreshingly new and familiar.

Amy was able to act on the new imagination of her situation that came from the work that started in her workshop with the Image Gathering exercise. She was helped by the fact that she had many experiences and deep self-awareness to draw on. The self-awareness we gain from each episode of this impasse work accumulates over time. With this growing insight, we gain a greater understanding of the life patterns that hold meaning for us. Understanding those patterns is the task we take up next.

Continuing the Journey

An Annotated Bibliography

THE IDEAS elaborated in this book, even the findings of my original research, are in many ways inseparable from the ideas of the psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, psychotherapists, and poets upon which they rest. However, I chose to write this book without the encumbrance of footnotes to bring you directly into the experience of the work at impasse. Thus the book is not a treatise on the ideas that support the work, and its tone is deliberately one of immediacy rather than abstraction. Those ideas do provide the deeper, and richer, underpinnings of the work. Therefore, I share my sources with you here, so that you can pursue in greater depth those ideas that you find most compelling, meaningful, and useful.

Readings for Chapter 4: Shifting to a New Understanding

“We must learn how to let the images work on us before we can begin the work of appreciating the coded messages they bear . . .”

The work with images portrayed in chapter 4 comes from my many years as a student of Jungian and archetypal psychology. Archetypal psychology studies the images that represent the essence of both culture and the individual human experience within that culture. This outgrowth of the Jungian perspective looks to understand trends in contemporary culture, as well as the psychological difficulties individuals experience, and the way those trends and difficulties are represented in images found in architecture, popular art, political discourse, legal documents, fashion, or the dreams of a client in psychotherapy.

A primary dictum of archetypal psychology, provided by American psychologist James Hillman, is “follow the image.” In other words, do not overlay the image with theory or analysis based on models derived from previous experience. The image is a messenger for a larger paradigm than the one you have in mind. This is true

if you are standing in front of a statue in the Louvre, as we did with Rilke in chapter 4, trying to wrestle with feelings of anxiety or depression, or reading Shakespeare (or Einstein, for that matter).

Hillman is the leading figure in contemporary archetypal psychology. A good introduction to his work is the anthology edited by Thomas Moore, *A Blue Fire: Selected Writings by James Hillman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989). Other important books by Hillman include *The Dream and the Underworld* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) and *Re-visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975). Thomas Moore himself is an important author in this field. His books take the ideas and approach of archetypal psychology into the territory of everyday life and include *Care of the Soul* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) and *Dark Nights of the Soul* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004). Other important authors in the tradition of archetypal psychology include Raphael Lopez-Pedraza, Murray Stein, Adolf Guggenbuhl-Craig, David Miller, Henri Corbin, and Robert Sardello. A very good book on letting your dreams “work on you” is Robert Bosnak’s *A Little Course in Dreams* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1988).

NOTES

Chapter Four

1. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, volume 9:1, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959).

2. *Meno*, translated by W. K. C. Guthrie in *Plato, The Collected Dialogues* edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).