

The Life Coach

Francine Campone

Get Cookin'!

Making a satisfying meal with the ingredients of your life

I ENJOY WATCHING TELEVISION COOKING SHOWS and on occasion attempt to recreate what I've seen Jacques Pepin or one of Julie Child's great guest chefs whip up in a half-hour. Sometimes, I don't have access to exactly the same ingredients and choose to make a substitution. Or the size of my pan is a little larger or smaller than what the TV chef has used. Perhaps there's some no-name cocoa powder that's been in the closet for a while and surely that will work as well as the hand-ground, organic cocoa beans from a small region in Mexico? The results are somewhat akin to, but more often a half a state away from, the unique and complex flavors of the original.

I sometimes encounter clients who feel that they, too, have lost their original flavor in some translation process. They recall how they used to be "more"- more lively, more curious, more spontaneous, more fun. Some, especially those in mid-life, have made attempts at resurrecting their "old selves" with remedies ranging from mild (such as a makeover) to moderate (purchasing a snazzy red sports car) to extreme (a divorce, an affair). Inevitably, these individuals want to explore "What happened? How did I get this way?" It doesn't take much exploration to identify the components in the life translation process. The routines of work, family life, community commitments take time and energy. A look at the average person's schedule clearly shows an attempt to cook way too big a meal in way too small a pot. Like my kitchen experiments, we may find ourselves substituting what's easy and at hand for what we originally, authentically want or need, unwilling to pay the cost of the real deal. After a while, we notice that nothing has quite the zest, the flavor it used to have- including ourselves.

The Life Coach

Get Cookin'!

One of the things that kitchen artists can teach us is that originality is not a static quality and that the best results may be obtained by allowing a gourmet meal to evolve and take on a life of its own. Instead of attempting to recreate a self according to a classic recipe, I encourage clients to take the approach of an a true chef and create a new classic with the materials and ingredients at hand.

Look at your life as a menu for an elaborate, multi-course meal. It's important to be very clear about what constitutes your one main course: relationships, work, creativity, intellectual or spiritual life, health. The main course of life must be what is most nourishing to you. The "chef of life", for example, who is a writer in his soul must write and all else- including the work he does to pay the rent- may be a side dish. Recognizing the most nourishing aspect of your life does not mean that everything else gets short shrift or that the preponderance of time and resources must be devoted to its pursuit. In some meals, the main course is so rich and complex that a small portion is sufficient to satisfy.

Take inventory of the resources and materials at hand. In his book, *Instructions to the Cook*, Zen teacher and peacemaker Bernie Glassman details a project which he and others in his organization undertook to teach baking and business skills to homeless people and to help them change from life on the streets. In the course of the project, resulting in the creation of a bakery which for several years now has sold gourmet items to restaurants and outlets all around New York City, Glassman learned the value of knowing exactly what he had to work with. He and his colleagues learned to view the survival skills of their target populations as valuable assets and to incorporate every personal quirk and oddity into the creation of a completely unique community. Glassman notes that we can't afford to waste anything of ourselves and that what may be seen as faults, in fact add spice. So in planning your own life menu, consider everything that's in your "spice rack". Look around in the corners and don't reject anything up front: the weird and unexpected gifts (like new interpersonal skills acquired in short-term or peripheral relationships); the stuff you acquired on impulse and never expected to use (a chance spiritual encounter, a course taken or book read out of pure curiosity);

The Life Coach

Get Cookin'!

quirky, little used tools in the back of the drawer (a creative pursuit or skill taken up and then abandoned long ago). Of course, we may on occasion discover that that there are no usable leaves left on the head of lettuce in the bottom drawer. Good cooking requires using the freshest ingredients and whatever is stale just has to go. Simply taking inventory can sometimes rekindle an old passion or inspire ways to infuse the day to day with rediscovered excitement.

Look at how your resources (both new and old) match your menu plan. The hard-driving, professionally successful individual may find that he's starving to death spiritually with only twenty minutes a day of reflection time, snatched while driving to work. The committed teacher who is fully engaged in the classroom, on committees, and professionally active may find she's neglecting her garden and her artwork. I encourage clients to create "quality of life to do lists" and even give themselves specific goals for how many times or how much of their day/week/month they want to engage in a nourishing activity. One client had a daily walk on his quality of life list and gave himself a gold star for every day that he took a break from work and went outside at lunch. Another set up a count to increase the number of jokes he told or heard every day. These may sound simple but, as we know from watching Julia Child, it sometimes helps to have a recipe from which to start.

Being a chef of your life requires constantly creating and recreating as new materials come to hand and as old, stale material is discarded. It requires occasionally cleansing the palate and objectively tasting, then making adjustments as needed to keep true to one's vision. It also requires flexibility, a willingness to adaptively use what's at hand to explore alternative directions, new tastes.

The Life Coach

Get Cookin'!

Francine Campone, Ed.D., PCC is a Coach and Consultant. She specializes in coaching mature professionals who want to make sustainable changes in the quality of their personal and professional lives. You are invited to contact Francine at fcampone@rushmore.com or via phone at 605-390-5308 for more information about coaching. Visit her virtual office at <http://francinecampone.interfaceias.com> to find out more about current programs and teleclasses.

© Francine Campone, Ed.D., PCC

www.francinecampone.com