

# What I Wish I'd Known

## 9 Simple Principles Make All the Difference

By Jerry E. White

At age 35, I left secular work and went into full-time ministry with The Navigators. For years, I'd carried a busy secular job, plus a heavy schedule of outreach and discipleship. To say my wife and I were busy would be an understatement. Our lives were a rush of activity, along with raising four children.

Suddenly my schedule opened up when I came on staff with The Navigators. So what did I do? I shifted my life into even higher gear.

Now, much later, I reflect on what I wish I'd known and done. Here are some of my personal conclusions.

**1 Spend large blocks of time in the Scriptures.** I'd long been a student of the Word. My Bible studies were done either after 10:00 p.m. or early in the morning. They were solid, but rushed. I now needed to learn how to lead and minister out of a life immersed in the Scriptures. This takes time. I'm talking about personal depth and continued involvement with God and his Word (2 Timothy 2:15).

**2 Have a realistic view of people.** No one's perfect. Even the most gifted people will have glaring weaknesses. The closer you get to people, especially leaders, the more you'll see the cracks in their lives. And what's more, you'll see your own weaknesses and disappointments. What I later learned was to be more tolerant and realistic of others. We're all "cracked pots" and "jars of clay" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Neither we, nor our leaders, will meet our expectations.

**3 Focus on contribution, not position.** The world focuses on promotion and position. Neither, in itself, is wrong. Yet in our age of downsizing and consolidation, many have lost position or have been passed over for promotion. Often they're devastated. We may cluck our tongues and say one should see God at work—until it happens to us! Even in vocational Christian work, promotion and position receive too much notice and importance. We should focus on a contribution instead, and let position and promotion come as God directs—or not at all.

**4 Be a learner, always.** In our board meetings, Howie Hendricks always amazed me with his incessant note taking. He was always learning. We should never reach a point where we stop learning from every person we meet. Once we stop learning, we'll become stagnant, and people will see it, even if we don't.

**5 Work constantly on clarifying your vision and calling.** In both your personal and professional life, your deepest motivation comes from the vision that drives you and its expression in your calling. I urge our staff to review these questions every two to four years: "Does your vision still reflect the vision of The Navigators? Are you called to express that vision in our organizational context?" That's the difference between being a co-laborer and just an employee.

**6 Guard against any root of bitterness.** Work, life and relationships will always produce seemingly unfair or unjust treatment. I've seen many who never recovered from these offenses and became bitter, unable to live with joy and surrender (see Hebrews 12:15).

**7 Allow suffering and difficulties to build your character.** Suffering and difficulties are inevitable. When they come, we can either experience spiritual brokenness and surrender, or become brokenhearted and discouraged. It either builds or destroys character. When my 30-year-old son was killed in a random murder on his job, that struggle exploded into my life. I trust it has and is still building my character.

**8 Make your ministry an overflow of your life and walk with God.** Keep your time with God fresh and vibrant. Don't ever become complacent in allowing God to challenge and change you daily.

**9 Have a high view of the Body of Christ.** We're all part of his Body and Kingdom. No church, denomination, ministry or organization is superior. Each has a role to play. Never speak badly of others laboring in his Kingdom.

I've said nothing about gifts and skills. Yes, they're important, but they take a back seat to these things. I've seen highly gifted people struggle in their ministry because they ignored these simple principles. I've also seen very ordinary, seemingly ungifted people prosper and make an impact through their lives by living out these ideas.

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