



How to Get a Life

Three truths about living.

BY JIM CAMPBELL

I've been trying to figure out what it means when someone says "Get a life." Should they get with the latest fad or addiction? Should they throw all restraint aside? Or stop relying on others and take charge of their life because "you can be whatever you want."

It is hard to know. "You can be whatever you want" is an idea that drives our society. It is what we tell young people to inspire them to hold bold expectations. It sounds good but young people soon see that it isn't so.

One of the stellar comic skits of all time featured Dudley Moore and Peter Cook of *Beyond the Fringe*, a old TV program from England. Moore plays a one-legged man named Spiggott, who, hopping on one leg, applies to Cook to play the part of Tarzan.

Cook: "Well, Mr Spiggott, need I point out to you where your deficiency lies as regards landing the role?"

Moore: "Yes, I think you ought to."

Cook: "Need I say without overmuch emphasis that it is in the leg division that you are deficient."

Moore: "The leg division?"

Cook: "Yes, the leg division, Mr Spiggott. You are deficient in it to the tune of one. Your right leg I like. I like your right leg. A lovely leg for the role. That's what I said when I saw you come in. I said, 'A lovely leg for the role.' I've got nothing against your right leg. The trouble is – neither have you. You fall down on your left."

Moore: "You mean it's inadequate?"

Cook: "Yes, it's inadequate, Mr Spiggott. And to my mind the British public is just

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not ready for the sight of a one-legged ape man swinging through the jungle tendrils.”

As the skit points out, you need two legs to play Tarzan. You also need a huge IQ to be a genius, be well over five feet four to play NBA basketball, and if you have a ‘tin ear’ don’t plan to make it as a concert pianist.

And, obviously, only one person can be Prime Minister of Canada and only one person can be CEO of Microsoft at any one time. So to tell someone “You can be anything you want” is to perpetuate a lie. And yet, there are elements embedded in the saying that are true.

The first truth: To fulfill your potential in life requires dedication, hard work and discipline. Without those qualities, people flounder around waiting for the fickle finger of fate to chart the course of their lives.

The late Ray Kroc, former CEO of McDonald’s, often quoted the words of U.S. president Calvin Coolidge: “Press on ... nothing in the world takes the place of persistence. Talent will not ... nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not ... unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Even education will not ... the world has its share of derelicts! Stick-to-it-ness is the essential element.” That’s a message we all need.

The second truth: As we work on



Jim Campbell

designing our lives, we need to be aware that hard work and persistence are not enough. The future is always heavily influenced by the values, principles and ethics you hold, and by old-fashioned qualities like truth, honesty, integrity, faithfulness and self-control.

Of course you probably know all that. In the 2001 movie K-Pax, Kevin Spacey played the part of Prot, who claimed he was from the distant planet K-Pax. One question he was asked was about what the moral laws were like on his planet. He replied, “Every being in the universe knows right from wrong.”

Knowing is good, living is better. It is how you determine whether you carry a burden of unresolved anger, of painful regrets, or carry a sense that you have done your best in your life in your part of the world.

And so we come to the third truth: You can make a life if you only have one leg or lack the gifts to be an opera diva. As Albus Dumbledore, head of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, told Harry Potter, “The course of life is not determined by the talents you were given, but by the choices you make.” Which means we don’t have to be wizards to “Get a life.” 🍁

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DID YOU HEAR...?

- City of Toronto residents recycled 32% of their waste in 2003, up from 25% in 2001.
- 89% of Canadians believe that Canada provides a better quality of life to its citizens than the United States does.