



WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE

20/20 hindsight

**Hindsight tells us that our choices matter, that our action
– or lack of action – produces consequences. It really matters what we do.
That's one of life's most important lessons.**

BY JIM CAMPBELL

“We live life forward but understand it looking backwards.” I don't know who said that but it's true. Looking back, we all have perfect 20/20 vision.

Maybe it is the gang I hang out with, but I seem to hear a lot about the wrong turns, the missed opportunities. “I could have bought that piece of land ... taken that chance ... changed my job then ... spent my time at school better ... exercised more ... never started smoking ... refused to run with the crowd. Then today my life would be so much better than it is now.” Well, you know the litany.

When someone takes that sad trip down memory lane to revisit all the “might-have-beens,” the standard advice from friends usually comes in three pieces.

The first: It is impossible to know what would have happened if you had taken that other path. There are too many unknowns. That's undoubtedly true.

The second: You should set the past aside and be grateful for what you have now. Stop beating yourself up. Be thankful. You've survived and done well enough. And besides, maybe fame and fortune are not all that grand; maybe they don't hold a

guarantee of happiness either. That too is good advice.

The third: Look to the future. The future is all we have to deal with, so put the past behind you. This also is good advice.

However, it seems that in all the talk about might-have-beens, there is one simple truth revealed by our 20/20 hindsight. There is what could be called a “law of consequences.” When we complain about what might have been – about missing chances – we are talking about our personal experiences with the law of consequences. Looking back, we know that it matters what we do or don’t do. Our 20/20 hindsight tells us that our choices matter, that our action or lack of action produces consequences. In short, it matters what we do. That’s one of life’s most important lessons.

Now we might want to live free and easy with the attitude that it really doesn’t matter all that much what we do. Live it up, try this, forget that rule, it wouldn’t be noticed, we can fix it later, it’s no big deal. “I’ll be the master of my fate, the captain of my soul.” Looking back, we know that is garbage. It matters what is done and not done, for “the law of consequences” is real.

It is not a bad law and it is not capricious. It delivers good and poor results according to what is done. The law of consequences applies to all that we do, all the seeds we sow, all the choices we make. The things that bring light, joy and blessings to our lives are often consequences of the choices we made and of roads we have taken. Thus, the law allows us to see what went right – the things that worked and brought good results. So good choic-



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es bring good returns.

Which is, of course, the message of the 1946 classic movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. It is about a character named George Bailey who, facing bankruptcy, feels his life has been a complete failure, so he contemplates suicide. Clarence, an angel, arranges it so George can visit his town as if he had not lived. The movie dramatizes the consequences one life can have.

In 1946, it was not expected to endure to become a classic but it has become an annual part of our Christmas TV fare. In one movie directory, it is dismissed as a “feel good” film. Is that ever a put-down! Well, as so often happens, the critics and the cynics can get it all wrong. It is a classic movie, but not because everything turns out well in the end and good triumphs. It is because the movie is honest; it deals with real life as it dramatizes the law of consequences.

So the good news, with all this 20/20 hindsight we are all so richly blessed with, is that we know that what we do matters. Our lives matter in the scheme of things. There are consequences that are impartially reckoned. And so each one of us has the power to mould the future. Actually, we are doing it all the time, for good or for ill.

To change things all we have to do is apply our 20/20 vision forward and not backward. ✨

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