

Time of Possession

*When I approach a child, he inspires in me two sentiments:
tenderness for what he is, and respect for what he may become.*

Louis Pasteur

I loved my job in corporate America. After all, I worked for a Fortune 500 company, the market leader in our industry, and the world's leading brand. As a creative writer and incentive travel planner in the marketing division of the firm, I was traveling the world, having fun and doing what I loved most---writing. Well, at least, part of the time.

Like every job there was also a mix of stuff I dreaded or downright loathed. And, after fourteen years, that got me thinking. In a perfect world, wouldn't it be nice to design a job around what you enjoy most, where your greatest strengths lie, and where you possess optimal potential? The theory being, spend your career doing what you love most in life.

Is this possible or is it a pipe dream? Over time, I started to research the feasibility of becoming a fulltime freelance advertising copywriter and executive speechwriter. Much of my educational background, professional training and work experience were in these disciplines.

I started talking to freelance copywriters and speechwriters. I read books by the most successful among them and I got on the phone with them to discuss how to directly apply their ideas to my situation in my marketplace.

I looked into self-employment insurance, income taxes for sole proprietorships, and personal property taxes. At first, freelancing fulltime with a family of four on one income was a leap of faith. In time, more information meant less fear and freelancing became a viable career option.

Since my wife Karen was a stay at home mom with our two young sons there was no margin for error. I must succeed. I set a launch date a year out. My preparation included setting up a sole proprietorship, creating a company name, finding an accountant, designing and printing business cards and a letterhead, purchasing state-of-the-art computer equipment, software, printer and office supplies.

Next was the hard part---testing my talent by writing for a broad client base. I started to write for local design firms and advertising agencies to prove to myself that I could write successfully on virtually any product, service or subject. The criterion for success was simple---obtain repeat business. As I built a reputation for myself, I expanded my portfolio and earned repeat business with every client. I continued my day job and freelanced at night. My days were long.

Launch day finally arrived. I had practiced my resignation speech a hundred times. Still, I felt the full weight of my decision. I set up a meeting with my boss and gave him notice. He was not surprised. He knew I had a dream to chase. He congratulated me and we set my departure date.

I was never so excited. I was building a business around my strengths and the one thing I was most passionate about.

Soon, I gained a few large clients, won several advertising awards and cherished the best fringe benefit of the freelance life---extended time with my wife and kids. My sons, David 6, and Mark 4, watched me write from home for almost a decade. Every summer and fall we played

touch football in the backyard, baseball in an adjacent yard and took short ice cream runs and long nature hikes, complete with walking sticks. I made up my time away from my business by working late when the boys were asleep.

It became a time of building family traditions. Football became our trademark. We teamed up with the neighborhood kids. I was the steady quarterback on both teams so I could play offense with each of my sons. I knew their skills so I could pit them against each other and still keep the score even until David would make a leaping catch in the corner of the end zone near the fence and Evergreen tree. Or Mark would run for daylight and dive head first into the opposite end zone near the rotted willow tree stump.

At bedtime as I tucked David in he would ask, “Dad, do you think I will ever be good enough to play in the NFL?”

“It depends on how hard you’re willing to work,” I replied.

“Do you think I will ever be as good as Joe Montana?” he asked eagerly.

I wondered how I would answer. Joe Montana, the San Francisco 49er quarterback, won four Super Bowls and was a legend in his own time. He was destined to become a NFL Hall of Fame quarterback. Yet, I wanted to keep the dream of my then nine-year old alive.

“If you keep practicing, there is no telling how far your talent will take you,” I said as I pulled the covers up to his chin.

Ten years after that conversation, David called me from his college dorm room late one night. We talked about his freshman classes, his desire to study journalism, and his hope to someday become a writer. And we talked about football.

“Pops, do you remember when we used to play football in the backyard?” he asked out of the blue.

“I sure do.”

“Do you remember how badly I wanted to be like Joe Montana?” he said with a laugh.

“I remember.”

“Do you remember how important it was for me to play football in the NFL?”

“Yeah. How could I forget?”

Then there was a long pause and I wondered where the conversation would go. The next words out his mouth were magical.

“Dad, if I could choose only one or the other, I would rather have played football in the backyard with you all of those years than to have played in the NFL.”

This conversation is permanently etched in my heart.

The game of football is filled with statistics. One in particular indicates which team may have the best chance to win. It’s called, “time of possession” and it refers to how long each team has possession of the ball. The theory is the team that controls the ball the longest has the most opportunities to score.

When I reflect on how I rebooted my career by becoming a freelance writer, I realize I rebooted my life too. Today, the advertising awards no longer hang on my home office wall. They found a home in a dusty old box somewhere in a basement closet. Awards and accolades don’t matter. What matters is that by chasing my dream, I capitalized on the one thing most important to me; time of possession with my sons.

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Bio

James C. Magruder is an award-winning advertising copywriter and executive speechwriter and heads the marketing communications department at a Fortune 200 company. He has had articles published in *Writer's Digest*, *Writer's Journal*, *Marriage Partnership*, *Home Life*, *Christian Communicator* and *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. He blogs about the writing life at www.thewritersrefuge.wordpress.com.