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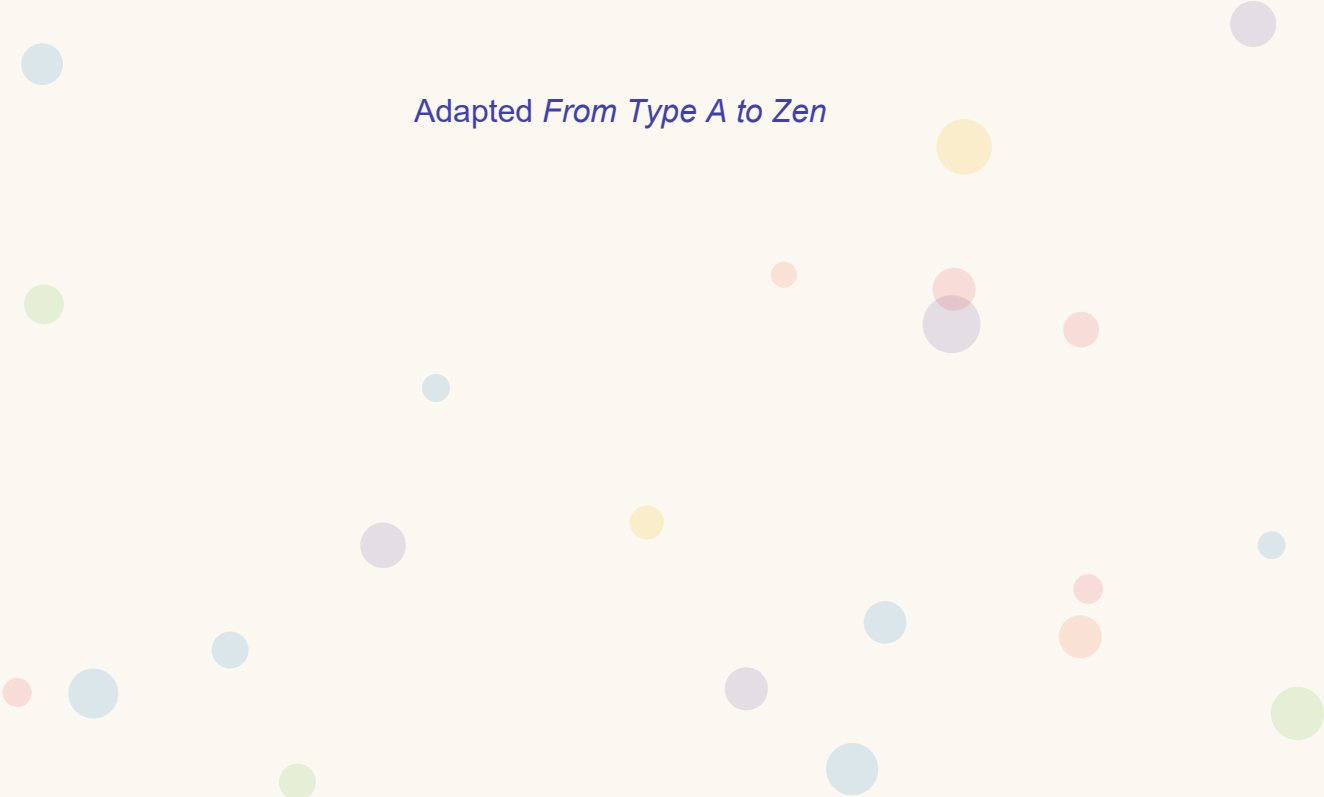
A chapter from the anthology *Voices That Carry*

You've Got One Life

Adore Your Journey

by Wendi LeVigne

Adapted From Type A to Zen



You've Got One Life — Adore Your Journey

by Wendi LeVigne

You Matter. You always have. This was a lesson I had to learn the hard way. Success comes at a price. My wake-up call came at 52, on a gurney in the hallway of the Emergency Room of UCSF hospital. My blood pressure was around 180/140 – a medical crisis. While I waited for imaging and the verdict – my thoughts were racing. Was it a stroke? Would I be okay? I lay on my back, staring up at the ceiling and felt time stand still. I was present in that moment. I will never forget that feeling in my chest. I remember my exact thought: "If this is how my life was going to end, and I never got to the fun part – this BLOWS!" I decided then and there that life as I had been living it had left me out of balance and depleted and would no longer work. I felt a combination of anger, sadness, and compassion that I had driven myself so hard for so long, and this was the result. Until now, I thought. I was clear and resolute.

This health crisis became my permission slip. Every decision I made from that point prioritized my health and happiness. I forged a new path toward peace, purpose, balance, connection – among other things I felt were missing. I redefined what success in life would look like for me.

Cracking the Code

We all start with an invisible blueprint – an internal "operating system" that drives how we move through life. It's developed very early in life. When we are born, our precious nature is our golden core. To that unsuspecting self, we add layers of "code" with every experience, every decade. Most of our programming is informed by our external environment – our culture, geography, family, friends, school. As we move into adulthood, adding those layers, we drive that operating system harder with more demands, more expectations. Work, family, friends, hobbies if we're lucky, and then more work. Until one day, we wonder: how did I get here? Is this what "success" feels like? Looking through the layers of a kaleidoscope lens that shapes our current reality, we're not sure we recognize our life as the one of our dreams. We may feel dulled, defeated, tired or even traumatized by an event or situation. Why does it feel like so much effort? Where do I get the energy to keep it all going? And if I get that energy to keep it all going, will it bring me joy? These may sound like questions you contemplate on your commute to work or at the end of a long day. This is the stirring of your soul. Your golden core daring to speak up to be recognized once again.

The Hero's Journey

This concept is described by Joseph Campbell as a consistent construct within Greek mythology: a hero is shaken out of their ordinary existence, called to an adventure complete with obstacles and adversity, and in a decisive crisis wins a victory, then comes home changed or transformed. Examples are also found in more modern-day stories such as in Disney, Star Wars and Harry Potter. Campbell believed this framework is so deeply woven into the human experience that it doesn't just apply to ancient myths

and fiction, but to everyday personal growth.

Most of us will face our own Hero's Journey at some point. We feel the stirring of our souls calling us back to our "home base", free of the attachments and identities that no longer serve us. The Hero's quest is to peel back the layers of a fully loaded life, to find once again our golden core - our authentic self – and design a life honoring that. When living out of alignment with our authentic self, we live stressed, unbalanced, burdened with conflict and resistance. Things don't work smoothly. We feel unfulfilled. When living in alignment with our authentic self, we find energy, meaning, fulfillment and our days unfold with ease and flow. Life shows up with delightful surprises. We are clear on our purpose. That has been my Hero's Journey. And this is an invitation to embark on your Hero's Journey, should you choose to accept it.

Your Life, Your Journey

Are you caught up on your own hamster wheel in life? Do you find yourself running furiously through life focused on tasks and titles, exhausted from staying up to keep up? Are you absent from your own to-do list to the point you hardly recognize yourself, and wonder where your happiness went? On the other hand, you've had great success, so what do you have to really complain about - doesn't everyone have stress and anxiety? If you're just getting through your days and weeks, living out of balance, striving and surviving, tired of being tired – you're not alone. This is frequently the life of a Type A person in a Type A culture. Nothing wrong at all with achieving and succeeding. This is just a checkpoint to ensure your highly productive self is also enjoying a life in balance, internally designed versus externally controlled. In short, are you living a life that is true to you?

If not, flip the script! Start living guided from the inside out. Expand your life, before you expend your life.

There IS another way. And you can do it without risking it all. This is Your Hero's Journey: to discover who you are now, today, and who you are at your golden core. The Authentic You under all the layers. The Me you came here to be. Not sure who that is? You're not alone there either! It will take some honesty, vulnerability, and clarity with yourself and others, but you can do it. I have, and you can too – before you have your own forced life reset.

"Follow your bliss and don't be afraid, doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be."

— Joseph Campbell, architect of the Hero's Journey

From Gurney to Great

A primary aspect of my Hero's Journey has been to live life by intention, instead of reaction. To go from an externally driven, energy-draining existence, to an internally driven, divinely designed journey. Living from the heart instead of the head. The reward of this journey is feeling happier and complete inside, living in alignment with what I feel authentically feeds my soul, fuels my body, gives me energy, relaxes me, makes me curious and expands my horizons. Work is no longer the only focal point; it has become one of the pillars in a more balanced and interesting life. By tuning into my own needs and interests, I have also improved my outward experience engaging with the world. I used to be frequently irritated and impatient with everything because I was operating at full capacity with things I felt I had to do and had no room for things I wanted to do. I now choose the design of my life, which allows me to show up in relationships with more patience, wisdom, care and fun. I created room at the top of my reservoir to allow space to flex. By living more in tune, in flow, at ease, I've found a new level of personal fulfillment that brings more energy and, dare I say, joy! I live in the moment and enjoy the days and weeks as my life journey unfolds. This has become the new definition of my success. And I was the only Hero that could deliver it.

A Roadmap - Practically Speaking

Those close to me have seen the somewhat dramatic, positive changes. People have asked how, so I will share a bit here. It started by recognizing that I matter. My health, wellness, and happiness were important, and I needed to prioritize them. Taking care of ourselves is not selfish. It is life-support in the truest sense.

I also took accountability and realized that only I can make the changes needed in my life. That may seem obvious, but how many times have we found ourselves thinking, "Why doesn't so-and-so see how busy I am? How can they keep asking this of me? How do you get help around here?" The truth is, you have likely trained others to rely on you, and you keep adding to your list of responsibilities. Whether at work or at home, it is likely your cup overfloweth. Stop. Empty the cup and redesign your days to support health and wellness first. The body keeps the score – make sure you win that game. Then, identify work or family responsibilities you absolutely must do and allow the rest of the tasks to fall away, or you negotiate with others to do. Be brutally frugal with what you assign yourself for a period. Learn to set boundaries and politely communicate them. "I am not available at this time...". "I would love to but am unable to...." "I can do this but will have to give up something else...." Once you've stabilized the ship, then you can selectively add on. Hopefully your add-ons will be limited to the pursuits that create the life of your dreams...and leave room at the top to flex!

How long did it take for me to get my life back? I began by "changing in place," which means I didn't give up my job and go live in a cave. I continued my career, but within reason and with boundaries to protect personal time. Results are felt immediately the moment you put a boundary in place, with work or with people. Small changes add up: I built in time for sleep, play, rest, new hobbies, friends and my energy recovered. Within a year I had unwound the stress and felt good again. My body had indeed

been keeping score and there was a lot to unwind. Frequent therapeutic massage and chiropractic care were needed to break down the stress stored in my body from a lifestyle with no release valve. The body needs movement to function at its best, so with walking, Pilates, Yoga, Zumba and Pickleball, I got my groove back. Within 2 years, I had redesigned my schedule, my physical health and ultimately my mindset.

I needed to make sure I didn't create another health crisis through overwork, so I had to address my mindset. I invested time in personal development – one-off courses online, in-person workshops, extended retreats. I was hooked. Ultimately, I found myself on a 3-year journey of Life Coaching certifications. The first year proved to be fundamental in understanding myself and "recoding" my internal operating system. The next 2 years expanded my understanding of any person's patterns or behaviors, and the mindset and action needed to achieve transformation. The coaching pursuit was the medicine my mind needed and excited me about my purpose.

I have fundamentally transformed how I approach life. I gave myself permission to "let go" of what wasn't working, and "let grow" through personal development. By tuning into what was most important to me, I downsized life, changed my geography and created a life outside of work. I expanded my life not by doing more, but by doing what meant more to me. I feel like I'm living life, not driving through it, waiting for some finish line or for someone to tell me I could stop. I was that someone, and I did it for myself.

Getting to Zen – It's an Inside Job

I've been on this journey of intentionality, in tune, in balance, with a focus on health and happiness for a few years now. We often talk in terms of Type A and Type B personality types and the perceptions associated with each - Type A being uptight, yet productive; Type B may be more relaxed, maybe more enjoyable to be around. True, there were some behaviors as a Type A person that I had to take note of. Then thought I had to abandon that side of myself to live at ease and at peace. In my journey, though, I discovered that becoming a "Type B" is not my nature - I lose energy when not feeling "engaged" or "productive". I'm not even sure you can change your fundamental nature.

What I have learned is that there are aspects to both personality types that are strengths. I've also learned to shrug the labels and just be yourself. We are each unique and have great things about ourselves and not such great things. That is true for every person you will meet. In my quest for balance, I sought many new experiences and ways of being - some that had me in awe, some that amused me. I feel as though I've integrated learnings from all these explorations and have since rounded out my Type A. I've become a better version of the self I've been all along and did not have to "trade it all in". In short, a wiser Type A, curious, creative, a lifelong learner, in balance and at peace. Instead of Type A or Type B, I like to think I've found my Type Zen.

I encourage everyone to intentionally design your life and find small joys that build into consistent happiness and peace in daily living. A business colleague once shared this wisdom: if you don't have a plan for your life, you'll become a part of somebody else's. A truism, whether applied to career, marriage, family or community. Understand what makes you tick and ensure those pillars are in place. Be committed to what you see as important to your health and happiness. Find your purpose and live meaningfully. I'll share a few questions that I considered on my journey that I hope save you time as you get started on yours:

Who would I be if it wasn't about what I do?

What really makes me happy?

What brings me peace?

What do I need?

What detracts from what is important?

How am I showing up in life? In my relationships?

Am I living intentionally, a life by design, or just reacting to what comes up?

My wish is to reach you before life forces a reset and encourage you to give yourself permission to stop. Assess. Adjust. Carry on and get a life you adore. Your life can change in an instant. Or. You can change your life in each instant. With each decision, design a life that you deeply desire. Be your own Hero. I can assure this: you'll inspire others who need your model of courage to follow.

You Matter. Discover yourself and adore your journey. You deserve it.

This is an arm around your shoulders, a whisper in your ear. "You're not alone, you'll be okay. Let's make some changes and make this your year!"

Love, Wendi