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HARVEST

THE *bounty*

OF YOUR CAREER

DEBORAH F WINDRUM

WITH ARTWORK BY
MICHELE RENÉE LEDOUX

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Harvest the Bounty of Your Career Deborah F Windrum

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2009

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*origins and underpinnings,
groundedness and stability, regulation
and survival...*

roots

anchoring What has supported you as a professional?

nourishing What fosters your growth?

A little too abstract, a little too wise,
It is time for us to kiss the earth again,
It is time to let the leaves rain from the skies,
Let the rich life run to the roots again.

Robinson Jeffers

It's a good lesson to return to our roots after
a period of activity to offer gratitude for the
blossoming and go within for a time, honoring
the alternating rhythms of nature that empower
our lives as we cultivate the gardens within and
around us. *Diane Dreher* (45)

You need to claim the events of your life to make
yourself yours. When you truly possess all you
have been and done, which may take some time,
you are fierce with reality.

Florida Scott-Maxwell

Your past is not your potential. In any hour you
can choose to liberate the future.

Marilyn Ferguson

...whatever good or bad fortune may come
our way we can always give it meaning and
transform it into something of value.

Hermann Hesse

Not that the past can be changed, but by altering
our perspective on it we might then be able to
create our future. *Erin Sullivan* (89)

The past is not your potential for potential has
no bounds. Choose to break free from your self-
imposed limits. Use your imagination to create
a life of endless possibility. Experience your
magnificence first hand. *Frankie Picasso*

If I were to wish for anything, I should
not wish for wealth and power, but for the
passionate sense of the potential... what wine
is so sparkling, so fragrant, so intoxicating, as
possibility! *Søren Kierkegaard*

In this chapter and the next three, we will use the metaphor of a tree to consider your career. Is your career employment from which you have recently retired or a position from which you will soon retire? Is your career a life-long profession or a variety of roles and circumstances? Whatever your answers, the tree metaphor gives you the opportunity to explore your career, however you define it, in terms of the roots or foundation, branches or relationships, fruits or accomplishments, and seeds or culmination and new beginning. Let's begin with your "roots."

Roots, of course, begin with a seed. When a seed sprouts, the first growth to emerge is the root. From the primary root or taproot, smaller branch or lateral roots grow and form a continuously expanding system or network. These roots permeate the earth to locate water and minerals. They also store food as they extend deeper into the ground to collect more nutrients for the growing sapling and eventually for a developed trunk, branches, leaves, and perhaps flowers and fruit.

When I walk past mature trees and notice exposed roots, what seem to be gnarled, earth-born branches suggest slumbering reptiles, secretly breathing a life force and soon to awaken and stretch. Since that may not be a pleasing picture to you, try allowing your own image to form as you walk past trees and observe their visible roots. Imagine you are seeing a tree for the first time. What might you wonder about those earth-bound forms that are only partially exposed? Or, can you imagine sinking your bare feet into the earth to touch the unseen, moist, warm roots of your favorite tree? Perhaps you'd rather imagine that your own legs are roots extending deep within the earth.

Among your own observations, try asking yourself some of the following questions: What do roots suggest to your mind? What do you notice about them? Are you able to connect with them? Do you notice any similarities between them and your self? If you were a tree, what would your root system look like? Feel like? What kind of conversation would you have with them? Recall the image that came to your mind when you imaginatively experienced your self as a tree in the "To Harvest" chapter. How would you expand your previous vision of roots to include these new insights and images?

You may also wish to place plant cuttings in a clear container of water to observe the roots germinate and grow. Imagine those same fragile white strands making their way through the dark soil. Using all six of your senses, allow yourself to imagine what that might look, feel, taste, smell, sound, and be like.

The roots of a plant or a tree are its foundation. Although the bulk of the roots lies beneath the ground, they are that from which the entire tree arose; and they remain that which nourishes and sustains. Roots provide security and support, both holding a tree firm and allowing it to grow. Just as a tree's roots give rise to its growth and development, your past enables your present and provides for possibility and new growth in the future. In this way, your background, history, experiences, and memories are all examples of your roots.

Metaphorically, roots suggest origins and underpinnings, groundedness and stability, regulation and survival. What other associations to the concept of roots come to your mind?

An individual described as deeply rooted may be set in her ways and resistant to change. Or, she may feel supported and secure and thus comfortable with growth and change. If you describe someone as rootless, are you implying that she embraces change and adventure or that she seeks to escape her past and avoid commitment? Did your early family life provide deep roots for a fulfilling adulthood, or have you cultivated and propagated your own root system in order to thrive? Where would you place yourself on a “rootedness” spectrum?

Tree roots are pathways for new growth. Although new growth causes old parts of the root system to die off, the residue continues to serve by conditioning the soil. The traces of former pathways also leave a record of development. How do you trace your development? What pathways in your life seem to have been most significant in forming you—family, places of residence, schools, friends, talents, interests, jobs, careers?

The root and branch systems of a tree are reflective of one another. The girth and height of a tree are determined by the health and extent of its roots, and the overall health of the tree results

from the health of its roots. Without a vibrant root system, a tree will never reach its potential. Conversely, a tree that develops beyond the capacity of its roots will be always be threatened by the elements. If you ever feel “rootless,” consider the stretch of your branches and the nourishment that your life has created for you to thrive. If you ever feel that you are not “fulfilling your potential,” consider the extent of your roots and your capacity to realize your desires.

experience roots imaginatively

Imagine dark, embracing, moist warmth—only that. Imagine, aware and observant only through sensation and motion, a gliding, gliding slowly into a caressing deepness, seeking nourishment from the wisdom of the soil, the earth as source of life. Imagine roots beneath the soil—reaching and growing downward and outward to suck nourishing water and minerals from the warm, moist, generative soil.

Imagine roots as a vast network of branches, gradually narrowing from their widest circumference just at and below the soil to countless minute strands that spread out underground. As branches extend and expand upward to the life-giving sun, so roots extend and expand downward into the generative soil, which they in turn enrich, renew, and protect from dispersal.

Experience roots, deep and abiding, as life source—essential and vital, supporting and strengthening a tree, enabling it to grow. Feel the strength of your roots as they sustain what has been and feed what is emerging. Acknowledge your roots as pathways to your growth, development, and new direction. Witness how, like the trunk, they preserve a record of your development, leaving traces of the pathways that have enabled your growth.

Your “You” arises from your roots. How have you/do you change as your nourishment varies? What forms of nourishment have your environments or circumstances provided and what forms have you deliberately sought out, cultivated, provided for yourself? What has nourished you, what does nourish you, and what would you like to take nourishment from? Is there some new

endeavor, relationship, service, lifestyle, setting, form of self-expression, or creative activity that is calling to you?

As you consider your roots, notice your patterns and growth tracks. Notice how your roots enable your present and future and provide for possibility.

anchoring *What has supported you as a professional?*

As you consider the botanical function of a tree's root system and the metaphorical applications of roots to your career, allow yourself to breath slowly and deeply for a moment. On an exhale, begin to contemplate the question: *What has supported me as a professional?* Does a ready answer come to mind for you or do you foresee yourself choosing to engage in a deeper exploration of your professional root system?

Try viewing your life as a continuum so as to identify foundational interests, talents, accomplishments, skills, and desires that have woven themselves through your experiences and choices. Look for patterns and growth tracks. Can you see traits and inclinations that arose during your childhood and have manifested in your adult activities? I remember, for example, that early in my elementary years I wrote that I wanted to be a teacher and an artist. I never became either of those aspirations per se, but, as a librarian, I have consistently created opportunities to teach, apply my creativity, and be involved with art—teaching research skills and a variety of workshops, promoting my library, and coordinating exhibits and art shows. My child self was certainly mother to my professional woman!

Review your different jobs or positions—perhaps as listed on your resume. How did each arise, conclude, and lead to the next? Which choices were driven by desire and which by needs or “shoulds”? Did you ever take time out or work part time? Were there any possibilities you now consider lost opportunities? Did some jobs prove more useful than expected? Did you experience any obstacles to advancement? In retrospect, do you think any obstacles were imposed by outer

circumstance or by your self? What kinds of differences did it make being a woman professional? How did you blend working with your personal life, family, etc.? What did you give up to be a professional woman? What did you gain? Would you make any changes? How would you characterize your career “path”?

If a crystal ball had displayed your career to yourself as a teen, would you have been surprised? Disappointed? Pleased? If you could visit your teen self as you are now and reveal what would come, how would you present it? How do you think your teen self would respond?

Consider the quality of your work day-to-days. Focus for a moment on days that are particularly stimulating, enjoyable, and satisfying—days when you feel you are doing what you like and do best. What characterizes such days? Do you recall particular activities, interactions, or accomplishments? Did the stimulation come from what you were doing, who you were doing it with, or the end results? Are such days memorable because you initiated an activity, made significant progress, or reached closure?

What are your ideal working conditions? Do you prefer solitude or interaction? Are you more relationship or task oriented? Do you seek direction and structure or autonomy and flexibility? Do you thrive on consistency or variety? Are you more steadfast or innovative? Are you more comfortable in a leadership, collaborative, or supportive role? What are your environmental preferences? How will you integrate your preferences into your next stage?

What has kept you going when you’ve felt overwhelmed or exhausted? How have you learned to release and relieve stress? What has motivated or energized you? When have you felt deep connections to your profession or workplace? Do friends or family provide an important support system? What kinds of support will you create for the current transition and beyond?

In the survey of 6,000 preretirees by Steven Shagrin, from *Facts about Retiring in the United States* [no other information provided in cite by Newman in *Retiring as a Career*, p.32], respondents indicated the following as what attracted them to their work:

Feeling challenged by my work.
Liking the people I work with.
Having the opportunity to learn.
Traveling for the company.
Working as a team member.
Helping the company grow.
Being part of a respected company.
Receiving the income and benefits.
Influencing the company's direction and success.

To what extent do you resonate with this list? What would you add or eliminate?

How has your position, career, or profession nourished your life roots? Is there anything remaining for you to do within your career to strengthen your own personal roots?

You are being prompted to consider a lot of questions! Do you feel like a metaphorical tree in a heavy rain? Is that sensation unpleasant or energizing? Either way, pause for another deep breath. Allow the impact of all these questions and considerations to soften and be absorbed. Know that your inner being will continue to process your responses, in both mind and heart, and that you can just relax into the expansion that will result. You may wish now to simply continue breathing or to jot down a paragraph or list of what has supported you as a professional. You may wish to resume the mantle of your tree self to consider what has supported your professional growth.

When I consider what has supported me as a professional, I recognize that in 30 years of being an academic librarian I certainly have had moments in which I wished to be released from the constraints and stresses of a career. Any thoughts of leaving my job, academia, or the profession, however, have always served to clarify what keeps me in the same place—like a vibrant root system. I value being a part of something that has clear social value. More often than not, I find my work engaging and stimulating. I thrive on the variety and flexibility my job provides. I also have a strong desire to accomplish and to contribute to the responsiveness and sustained growth of a service that must meet changing needs. I enjoy

positive, mutually supportive social interaction—even that which is apparently superficial, but nevertheless authentic.

*I have always loved learning. I have deliberately developed a variety of skills that I enjoy using to support learning, such as “mind mapping” (as featured by Tony Buzan in *The Mind Map Book*), as well as various accelerated learning and PhotoReading (www.photoreading.com) techniques. I appreciate that my work challenges me to pursue new learning and to continuously apply my skills to do so.*

One of my colleagues, in contrast, is supported as a professional by consistent routines and expectations. She likes knowing what to expect each day and the satisfaction of accomplishing what she set out to do. She is goal-oriented and works steadily towards goals. She feels supported when her punctuality and reliability are appreciated. Task-oriented, she is not comfortable when committee meetings devolve into socializing. She does not protest or complain when change is required, but adapts methodically. She takes in new information and develops new skills independently. After taking time to process and integrate, she may create documents and procedures that support others.

nourishing What fosters your growth?

To be creative means to consider the whole process of life as a process of birth, and not to take any stage of life as a final stage. Most people die before they are fully born. Creativeness means to be born before one dies.

Erich Fromm

Evolution always transcends and includes, incorporates and goes beyond. **Ken Wilber**

Reality is the conversation between ourselves and the never-ending productions of time. The closer we get to the source of the productions of time—that is, to the eternal—the more easily we understand the particular currents we must navigate on any given day. **David Whyte** (180)



Allow yourself again to breath slowly and deeply for a moment. On an inhale, consider the question: *What fosters my growth?* Does a ready answer come to mind for you or will you choose to engage in a deeper exploration of this theme?

In the imaginative experience above, you considered the various forms of nourishment that life has provided you and that you have cultivated for yourself. Of course, in addition to basic sources of nourishment required to grow, we must also seek nutriment to sustain our development. As you continue to imagine the roots of a tree branching out and stretching in order to grow and support the growth of the tree, relax into this next series of questions that will support your growth.

What prompted you to become a professional or enter your field? How did you gain the skills and knowledge necessary to begin your career? How have you kept up-to-date and maintained your professional expertise? How have you prepared yourself for new responsibilities, advancement, or promotions? What stands out for you as developmental markers? Identify the similarities and differences between your professional and personal development efforts. As you create your next season of life, are you considering how you will continue to foster growth and development?

Consider what has supported you in your professional growth and development. Have you had supervisors, mentors, or colleagues who have recognized and encouraged your strengths? Have you structured your own continuous professional development or benefited from occasional boosts to your skills or knowledge? Have you risen to challenges posed by new responsibilities or positions? Do you participate in professional activities or organizations, publish or present?

What developmental advances in your life and career have you deliberately moved towards? What motivated you? How did you sustain your determination? How did you generate patience and learn to trust the process? How did you know when the transition was complete? Did you celebrate your achievement? In retrospect, your previous growth processes can reveal patterns to illuminate your present and empower you to more deliberately create the future.

What has fostered the growth and development of your workplace and profession? In what ways have you contributed to the growth and development of your workplace and profession?

As I consider what fosters my growth, I know that autonomy, flexibility, creativity, and self-expression are vital. Although I have not sought advancement or promotion in terms of a career ladder, fresh endeavors are important to me. Graced with a fundamentally humane workplace where professional development is valued, I have been able to create opportunities for new challenges, growth, and change by redirecting my responsibilities and priorities over the years. This has been critical for me given 28 years in the same library with only two different, and lateral, positions.

Many outstanding professional models in my own field as well as others have inspired me to expand as a professional. I am also motivated by opportunities to share information, knowledge, and cultural resources with others.

I have noticed other patterns of growth among friends. One of my colleagues always seems to be up on the latest professional literature. She frequently reviews books in the field for professional journals. She is often an early adopter of new technologies. Professional development is usually a solo activity for her, and she rarely attends workshops or conferences. In contrast, one of my friends has always been a rising star. Outgoing and articulate, she is a natural networker and seems to know everyone in her field. She loves to learn in group settings, and attends many conferences and professional development workshops annually. Many mentors have fostered her growth, as she constantly takes on new challenges in her upwardly mobile career.

Clarity about what has supported you as professional over the years and what fosters your growth is a first step in determining how you will transition to a new season. Your traits and experiences will continue to ground you as you move forward and to sustain you as you encounter new choices and experiences. You could even imagine that as a fresh, new professional you were just an acorn. Now, as you look to a new season, you are a magnificent, tall oak—still anchored and nourished by the roots that gave rise to you and continue to nourish you.

Acorns

Having read this chapter, what particularly stimulates or energizes you?

What holds the most value for you?

What deliberate process(es) are you inspired to create?

What spontaneous process(es) do you expect you will have the opportunity to allow?

If you underlined, doodled, or journaled as you read this chapter, review that now and notice:

Any meaning evident now that was not apparent as you wrote or drew.

Anything that surprises or particularly pleases you.

Any redundancies or patterns.

Anything you wish to complete or follow up with.

Go through this chapter again and respond to the in-text questions. Notice anywhere you feel uncertain, incomplete, intrigued, or pulled, which may provide important clues about how you have yet to fulfill your career...

Ask yourself:

What roots have I grown as a result of my career?

What roots have I contributed to my workplace?

In what ways has my career provided a root system for my life?

What nourishes my roots and all that arises from them?

What will I take from my roots and cultivate in the next arc of my life spiral? Your answer to this question may suggest an element of the future you are now creating.

How do you wish to benefit from this chapter?

Return to these questions at intervals during your Harvesting process and beyond to notice any changes in your responses.

Stepping Stones

The purpose of exploring roots is to identify the environmental conditions, sources of nourishment, and growth patterns that have brought you to this season of life. Giving rise to and sustaining you from beneath the surface, your roots are your origins, what grounds you, and what regulates your life. Your roots enable your future.

Narrative Journaling

Review of the past can offer inspiration for new directions. What “time markers” of your life are available to you? Have you kept journals, photo albums, and/or mementos? Have you maintained school, employment, or health records? How about records of pets? How do you mark birthdays, anniversaries, and other special occasions? Do you distribute a family “newsletter”? Do you have a central place to record major family events, such as births, marriages, deaths? What other approaches have you used as record keeping in your life?

Consider as well your professional records—have you maintained a resume or vita? Recorded major personnel events, such as promotions and raises? Listed employment anniversaries or achievements? Written annual reports or evaluations? You may even find your tax reports and other financial documents informative. What other approaches have you used as record keeping in your career? You might also consider your role in preserving your workplace memory.

Once you have determined what is already available to you, consider what would be useful to you now and how you might go about collecting or compiling that information. Approaches to a career or life review can be conventional or creative, i.e., nonlinear, thematic, or non-narrative. Perhaps you would like to write a narrative autobiography covering your entire life or focusing on your career, intellectual/spiritual development, or some other aspect of your life especially important to you. You may find it easier to create a timeline or other type of graph. Perhaps you would prefer to ask someone else to take your “oral history” or speak into a recorder for transcribing later. The task will feel manageable if you chunk it down—addressing seven or ten-year periods, for example, or pre-school, elementary, high school, college, first job, subsequent employment, etc. Another approach is to cover themes over time, such as key relationships, education, employment,

residences, etc. Or, be more playful—write up your own “best” and “worst” lists, your most embarrassing moments, your most inspired moments, your fifteen minutes of fame.

You may further wish to review and reflect upon your career and life by engaging with some of the following activities.

Review and reflect on your career

Respond to the following questions without preliminary reflection:

What did I bring to my career? What did I give? What did I receive?

Consider the root system of your workplace—what anchors and nourishes it—including its history, mission, goals, values, accomplishments, personnel, clients/customers. In what ways have you contributed to the current state of your workplace? In what ways are your contributions part of the root system that sustains your workplace, keeping it healthy and growing? Are there any contributions you would yet like to make to your workplace that would nourish and strengthen its roots?

If you were to visually represent the roots of your career, what would they look like—size, shape/form, color, texture? How would they be presented? Are they shallow and wide ranging or deep and penetrating or both?

Write about the wisdom you have gained from your work. What lessons have you learned? How will you go about applying your wisdom in the future?

In what ways has your career provided a root system for your life—e.g., financially, daily/yearly routines/structure, professional and social contacts, achievements and acknowledgements...?

Having completed your career review, look for themes, patterns, unfinished business, questions, regrets, lessons, high points, inspiration, hopes, plans...

Review and reflect on your life

Write your autobiography or compile it from journals and/or other self-records.

Write your biography from the perspective of another (e.g., a parent or child, friend or co-worker, acquaintance or stranger observing you, etc.).

Write an essay about highlights of your life or the meaning of your life.

Write a short story (or even a novel!) about yourself.

Write your eulogy or obituary.

Write a letter about yourself, introducing yourself to someone unknown.

Write an introduction of yourself as if you were to be a speaker or presenter.

Interview yourself for a magazine or newspaper article, or ask someone else to do so (submit it?!).

If you were to visually represent the roots of your life, what would they look like—size, shape/form, color, texture? How would they be presented? Are they shallow and wide ranging or deep and penetrating or both?

What questions do you have for your roots? What answers do they provide? What do you require from them to thrive? What questions do your roots have for you?

What nourishes your roots and therefore all that arises from them—family, friends, lovers, community, service, church, spirituality, nature, vocation, avocation, location?

Do you ever feel “root bound”? If so, how will you open more space for yourself?

Conversely, do you ever feel that your roots are too shallow or insufficient? If so, how will you nourish and develop them?

Having completed your life review, look for themes, patterns, unfinished business, questions, regrets, lessons, high points, inspiration, hopes, plans...

Visual Journaling

Create a realistic or abstract representation of roots, and let it speak to you. What questions does it pose? What answers does it suggest? What does it need or want? How does it communicate?

Visually represent the roots of your career and/or life as you described above or instead of describing them verbally.

Rapidly sketch a depiction of roots underground. Write, on the branches of the roots, qualities, experiences, or activities that ground, nourish, and sustain you.

Create a collage of roots. Contemplate your collage in the next day or two. What does it suggest? What stands out? What is missing? Is there anything you would like to change? What is particularly grounding for you?

Having completed your visual journaling for this section, look for themes, patterns, unfinished business, questions, regrets, lessons, high points, inspiration, hopes, plans...

Interpersonal Experiences

Share with someone the steps that brought each of you to your current positions. How intentional or happenstance were they? In retrospect, did the outcome serve you well, or would you prefer to recreate the path?

Ask a relative or someone who has known you all or most of your life to describe your development and your attributes.

Ask someone to write you a recommendation for the next stage of your life.

Workplace Applications

What comprises the institutional memory of your workplace? Evaluate its usefulness and suggest improvements.

Develop a process for gathering oral histories from those who retire from your workplace.

Collect oral histories from and honor already retired colleagues who were with the organization for a significant period of time.

If you are asking yourself:

What is the next stage of my life?

Will it include my current career or some other form of 'work'?

What talents and skills would I like to deepen or develop in that stage?

What are the legacies of my life so far?

What value have I yet to offer?

...immerse yourself in this book and allow your own answers to surface.

An inspirational, reflective, and practical resource, reminding us in tangible ways that at any stage or season of our life, we can harvest and integrate our experience.... [Harvest] allows us to review what we yet wish to cultivate or want to seed for future seasons of growth or incubate in order for new cycles of interest to emerge. Angeles Arrien, Ph.D., cultural anthropologist, author of *The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates of Wisdom* (www.angelesarrien.com)

[This] beautiful book helps you pause, reflect, and discover your evolving inner wisdom—a compassionate guide for anyone entering a new season in life. Diane Dreher, author of *Your Personal Renaissance, Inner Gardening, The Dao of Womanhood, The Dao of Inner Peace*, and Professor of English/Research Associate, Spirituality and Health Institute, Santa Clara University. (<http://www.dianedreher.com/index.htm>)

...for women who find themselves in the autumn of their life and the latter stages of a career.... an inspiring journey offering profound wisdom about the natural cycles of the seasons of women's lives. The book offers insightful metaphors and guidance for reaping the fruits of one's career while gracefully transitioning into the next phase of life. Leslie Botha, women's health educator, radio talk show host, and internationally recognized expert on women's hormone cycles (<http://holyhormones.com>)

Goethe said, "All things are metaphors." All things are expressions of that which is indescribable. Michele Renée Ledoux's body of work, "alchemy of align," is masterful and thought provoking. With her unique combination of printmaking, painting, drawing and photography, she has created harmony that goes beyond metaphor. The beauty of her work lies in the various techniques of her artistic expression. Her work has an inviting quality, which becomes more revealing each time it is viewed. It is like discovering the soul. "[A]lchemy of align" celebrates the variety of metaphoric expression that underlies and connects us all. Kimberly D. Moore, Curator, Evergreen Fine Art


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