

**Jack, Be Nimble! --
What Have You Learned Today? Who Have You Helped Today?**

Donald W. Mitchell

In many cultures, rules, roles, and choices are very circumscribed. I remember speaking once with an Italian friend about gondoliers in Venice, Italy. Gondoliers usually inherit their tiny mooring places from their fathers, who had done the same from their fathers. Most gondoliers live lives circumscribed by their mooring place, thinking about little beyond the small territory within which they typically pole their tourist passengers.

Even when a culture seems overly bound by rules, roles, and choices, there may still be room for a more meaningful life. That door opens when we think about the freedom that follows from being authentic and acting in accord with good ethical standards.

Let's consider the path of one hospitable man to uncover lessons about how to enjoy that kind of authentic, ethical freedom.

Mr. Stephan Earnhart grew up with an unusual connection to two cultures that are seldom in contact, Switzerland and Oregon in the United States. The son of missionary parents from Oklahoma and Oregon, Mr. Earnhart was born and raised during his early years in Switzerland. As a result, his initial perspective was more Swiss than American.

His Swiss upbringing led him to expect to choose his life's work by the end of 6th grade, but he no idea what to select at that time. Someone casually noted that he doodled well and could always go to art school. Pursuing that thought, he was accepted into and did well in a highly competitive design curriculum at a prestigious school. From these experiences, he learned to value creativity.

When Mr. Earnhart was 17, a sad event interfered with this career direction: His family moved to Portland, Oregon to be with a dying grandmother. Despite the change in home location, he was determined to become an influential painter and began studies in Munich at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste. Family ties tugged at him again when a younger brother was dying of cancer, and Mr. Earnhart returned to Portland for the last few months of that brother's life.

But you won't find Mr. Earnhart's work hanging in your local art museum. At 25, he decided to employ his freedom of choice to move in an entirely new direction, a pathway that contained many practical advantages: entering hotel management.

Where did that conclusion come from? As a teenager, Mr. Earnhart washed dishes in the kitchen of a graduate of the Swiss hotel school, *École Hôtelière de Lausanne*, and waited on tables in restaurants. During his college years, he worked in restaurants until someone challenged him to manage a restaurant. Under the mentorship of a hotel manager in 1984, Mr. Earnhart began a management position at the Heathman Hotel in Portland, Oregon.

In subsequent years, he held management positions in many leading hotel chains and also served as a consultant to many of the world's top hotels. From those experiences, he began to develop a sense of the challenges involved in providing excellent service and pleasant experiences for hotel guests.

In 2004, Mr. Earnhart was working as Director of Operations for The Ritz-Carlton in Sarasota, Florida. He believed that the best way for his hotel to keep competitive was to continually improve learning, innovation, and the quality of hospitality experienced by guests.

His guiding principle during his career had been to work himself out of a job by training and delegating, training and delegating, training and delegating -- while doing unto others as he would have them do unto him. In this application of the Golden Rule, he looked to Jesus Christ as his primary mentor.

To test how well he was doing in following his precepts, Mr. Earnhart asked himself two critical questions every day:

1. What have I learned today?
2. Who have I helped today?

At this point, he decided to shift his career and become a professor of hotel management in Switzerland. Without an MBA degree, Mr. Earnhart was doubtful that he could gain a professorship. Searching for opportunities

to express his creativity, he discovered he could study part-time online at Rushmore University while keeping his demanding job at The Ritz-Carlton.

Being ambitious, Mr. Earnhart decided to follow a curriculum more like that of a doctoral student than an MBA candidate. Feeling that attracting, selecting, acculturating, developing, and emotionally inspiring talented people are essential tasks to achieve success in any hospitality environment, Mr. Earnhart wrote five powerful papers exploring the best of what's known about those topics and tying them into practical methods that any hotel could apply.

He also used his work at The Ritz-Carlton to test the practicality of his new ideas. As a foundation for this management approach, he also spelled out a powerful way to use The Balanced Scorecard in the hospitality industry to communicate what the organization's strategy is and to measure how it is doing in implementing its strategy.

Despite having limited free time to finish his degree, Mr. Earnhart was able to complete his MBA program in 2005. With this degree in hand, he has been able to select life choices with more authentic, ethical freedom once again.

This time he moved back to Switzerland with his Swiss wife and two younger children (who are also dual citizens of the United States and Switzerland). Mr. Earnhart now works as Academic Director (after having joined the faculty and served as dean) for Swiss Hotel Management School in Leysin.

One of the benefits of this academic post is being able to live in a Swiss village . . . which he knows from experience is a great place for youngsters to grow up.

Mr. Earnhart's artistic career continues to blossom as a hobby rather than as a vocation, building on the skills he developed while earning a bachelor's degree in fine arts a few years ago at Portland State University. At this point in his career, Mr. Earnhart has a large body of work that he is looking forward to exhibiting for others: Perhaps your local museum would do well to save some wall space for him.

Following the good example of his missionary parents, Mr. Earnhart and his wife have also established a home-based church in Leysin where they help others develop a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In examining what Mr. Earnhart has accomplished, it's easy to realize that even more major achievements are ahead of him as he influences future generations of hotel managers in using better ways to please and delight guests, has more time to spend with his family, develops his artistic interests, and serves Christ in his ministry.

I asked Mr. Earnhart what might come next and he shared that he may decide to earn a Ph.D. so that he could explore and teach about ethics in the hospitality sector and how corporate social responsibility fits within the context of balancing making money with saving the world. I'm sure he'll make fine contributions should he decide to take that authentic, ethical path.

In looking back at his master's degree studies, Mr. Earnhart reports that earning an MBA gave him good skills for conducting research and writing about his findings while also making him feel comfortable in an academic environment. Clearly, his nimble mind made that possible.

His advice to you might best be summarized as: "Jack, be nimble!"

Learning from Mr. Earnhart, you should consider how you could live a more authentic and ethical life . . . no matter where you are and how circumscribed your choices may seem.

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