

## The One Thing That Will Change Your Life

Welcome back to a new session. In this session, we're going to begin looking at a tool that is really foundational to a life of intentional leadership. Remember we asked the question often, are we living accidentally, or are we living intentionally? So, today we're going to begin looking at this tool that will help us make progress personally.

The important thing for us as leaders, for every leader, is that we first know ourselves in order to lead ourselves, because we cannot lead other people until we can lead ourselves well. We can't lead well until we lead ourselves well. And in order to lead ourselves well, we need to know ourselves. You'll say, "That's kind of weird. You know, I know myself. I've been with myself ever since I was born." Well, what we're talking about is knowing how our actions and behaviors appear to someone on the other side of us, someone who sees us on a regular basis, someone who interacts with us on a regular basis.

And so, this simple personal plan has become a foundational tool that many of the other tools that we're going to learn as we work through these courses in the coming days, coming months, coming years build upon. Let's get started here.

I've been using a simple personal plan since 2004. And to be honest, for the first seven years, it wasn't very good. I didn't make much progress in my life; I didn't make much progress in my work.

In 2011, I threw it away and I started all over. I completely rewrote my personal plan to be more intentional and help me increase my effectiveness. Here's what I want you to do. Before you kind of check out on us, maybe you've tried this exercise before, maybe you have something similar, I want to share with you my experience. Again, I had my personal plan, it wasn't working very good. I completely rewrote it and I had a very different experience after that. So, if you have one, even if it's working, you're going to learn some things as we walk through this that will take you deeper, richer, and fuller experience with your personal planning process and the results that you get because of it.

So, it's your opportunity to think through who matters most and what matters most. Whether you already have one, or you're starting fresh; we'll see things, we'll experience things, and we're going to hear things that we hadn't necessarily considered before. So, this gives us a new opportunity to start fresh and work on these things.

So, as we start this session, I want to encourage you to approach it with an open hand, with an open mind and with an open heart. And allow your perspective to be shaped by what you hear and by what you're going to experience.

Over the past several years, I've taken the time to know several ways that the personal plan has helped me. And the first thing that has done for me, is it has given me a solid foundation for my life and for my work. It has helped me to understand what I want, and what is most important in my life and in my work, and then how my work should fit into that overall life.

Many people do that backwards. Maybe, you've done it backwards. You say, "Hey! I need a job because I have a certain lifestyle." And so, we go get a job, and I have talked to people, even in the last few weeks, that had said to me, "I absolutely hate my job. But I like the pay, or I like where I go or whatever it is." They hate the work that they're doing, and they're only doing it in order to maintain the lifestyle or the standard of living that they have created for themselves and for their family.

That's not living intentionally. That's living accidentally. That's allowing life and work to just happen by chance, and that's not the way that you want to live. See, my personal plan makes the majority of my decisions for me. The best time to make a decision is before you'll make it. If you're in the moment, it's hard to make the right decision because you're thinking, "Okay. What is this person think that I should do? Or what is this situation dictated me?" and so, you're fretting over what to do. And it becomes a whole lot more challenging in the moment to make those decisions.

So, if there's any way that we can make some decisions before we have to, then we are much better prepared to deal with the challenging things in the moment. In fact, let me tell you a story.

My daughter is the one of those mellow, compliant people in the world. And if you grew up with me, or with my wife and I'm like, "Hey, how did your daughter get so mellow

and so compliant and so respectful?" I mean, Sarah and I, we're just all out. I mean, we're all on all the time. But Madison has always been that way.

Several years ago, I came home from work one evening. I came in the door and I was talking to Sarah and I realized Madison wasn't there. And we're talking about our day and how things had gone.

A few moments later, my phone rings, and it's my neighbor's number and so I said, "Hey babe, let me answer the phone." So, I answer the phone and it was actually my daughter. And she's over at their house, they were getting ready to sit down to dinner, and Madison was calling and she says, they've offered to let me sit down for dinner. So, in my mind I'm thinking, "The neighbor kid is over here playing and it's time for her to sit down and to eat dinner, we don't want to send her home and make her feel she's not welcome in our dinner table, so we'll just grab another plate. So, I said to Madison, "Madison, why don't you come home? I want to hear about your day – we normally play this game at dinner, where we ask each other the best part of their day, worst part of their day and we talk about those things at dinner. And I said, "I want to hear about your day, why don't you just come home?" And she's like, "But Dad, they said that I could stay in for dinner." And I'm like, "I know babe. But I want to see you. I've not seen you whole day. I want to spend time with you."

All of a sudden, there's a click on my phone and it goes silent. And I said, "Babe? Madison?" and she doesn't respond. She hung up on me. So I looked across the counter to Sarah and said, "Sarah, Madison just hung up on me. She hung up the phone."

A few moments later, our front door opens and she comes to the door. We sit down at the table to dinner and it was awkward. So we make it to dinner and being the good parents that we are, we told her she could go back to her friends and play for another hour or so before she gets ready for school. And so, she's over there playing an hour or so later, I don't want to be hung up on again, so I don't call over there. I walked across the street and I knocked on the front door. And again, ironically, Madison answers the door. When she answers the door, I say, "Babe. It's time to come home. We're going to get ready for school tomorrow." And she said, "But dad, we're just getting ready to go out and ride bikes again." And I said, "I know babe. They live here, we live next door. I mean, we can come back tomorrow, we can ride bikes." And she said, "Dad!" She reaches back and grabs the edge of the door and slams the door right in my face. I'm

standing there, and I'm sure my jaw is laying on the sidewalk. I mean, just mortified. Like what in the world just happened with our daughter?

I picked up a couple of things there on the sidewalk and I walked back – I knew if I stood there, it wouldn't be good for her or for me. When she came out the door, I walked in the front door and said to Sarah, "Sarah, she just slammed the door in my face. She hung up the phone on me earlier. We need to sit down and talk to her."

So she comes in the door, she goes upstairs to get ready for bed, but before she got in bed we said, "Hey babe. Why don't you just come down sit with us? We would like to talk to you for a minute." We sat down in the couch, and I asked her, I said, "Madison, tell me about what's going on. I mean, you hung up the phone on me, you slammed the door in my face. I just want to understand what are you thinking? What are you experiencing, what are you feeling?"

Tears just start coming down on her face. I mean, this is Madison. This is the real Madison. She said, "I don't know. I don't know why I did that." My wife is a counsellor, Madison's mom, and she starts asking Madison, "Tell me what are you thinking about this? How are you feeling about that? I'm psychoanalyzing the situation." And Madison was just struggling to answer. And I said, "Madison, tell me this. What could mom or I have done?" I always try to take personal responsibility – I want to make sure I'm communicating clearly, and I'm being a good leader. I don't always get it, but I try to take personal responsibility.

I said, "Madison, what could Mom or I have done differently to help you?" without hesitating, she said, "If you had just given me time, if you had just told me what time to be home – what time to be home for dinner, or what time to be home for bed, I would've been there."

I know that it is true, even though she was very young at that time. I know this is true because this is a girl who's been getting herself up with her own alarm clock since she was four years old. And here's what she was saying, "When I'm prepared properly, I would better respond in the moment."

See, we can't anticipate all of the decisions that we have to make. I talked about my simple personal plan making many of the decisions for me. We can't anticipate all of the decisions, and it's the decisions that we can't anticipate that we can prepare for. While

we can't anticipate them, we can be prepared for them so that in the heat of the moment, when it's most challenging, we can still respond appropriately.

Almost immediately when she said that I thought of the experience that I had just two or three weeks earlier. I was sitting in a board meeting, sitting around the table, where all of these colleagues, and something that we had talked about, my other colleague and myself, two or three times in the privacy in my office or his office, he brought up to the whole group – the grandstand or the showboat, and when he did, I tried to ignore it. I tried to let him do his thing. Ignore it. Just take it. But, he didn't stop there. He looked straight at me, and he wouldn't let the meeting go on until I responded to it.

Finally, I just said calmly, "I think that is the stupidest thing I have ever heard. You and I have talked about it privately two or three times. So you know where I stand in this situation. And to bring it up to this meeting is stupid."

The glance in the room, there were jaws on the table. And I realized that the words that are coming out of my mouth is not the best thing to say at the moment. The reason why I reacted wrong in the moment is because I wasn't properly prepared for him to be an idiot. No, I wasn't properly prepared to respond in the moment.

So, number 1, the personal plan gives me a solid foundation for my life and for my work.

Then number 2, It helped me understand myself more fully. As I work through simple personal plan, and as you work through this again, you're going to think really deeply about it. "Who is more important and what is most important?" It's going to help you get clarity on how your work should fit in your overall life and help you understand yourself more fully.

Then number 3, working through some simple personal plan has allowed me to live with focused purpose.

The personal plan will lead you to answer the question, "What was I made to do that nobody else can do?" When we can clearly answer this question, life becomes more manageable and we're able to grow and live with purpose.

Now, here's what I'm not saying, I think we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to think about the one thing that we're supposed to do with our life. That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about you are placed here in this community, and you are placed here in this place and for this time, for this specific reason.

And you are placed in your workplace for a specific reason. And so, while you are going through life, and while you are navigating your work, personal plan helps you to navigate those venues, to navigate those experiences, thinking about who's most important, and what's most important and how you operate or function within it.

They helped me live and they'll help you live with focused purpose. And that will keep you on track even in challenging situations. So, when you've worked through personal plan, and you're regularly reviewing it, it'll remain fresh and exciting to you. If you've done the work, it'll remain fresh and exciting to you. And my regular reviews encourage me and energized me. When I go in to them, when I'm down, when I'm frustrated. When I get away, they help me recharge and get refocused.

So, here's our action step for today. What's one way that you think that personal plan can help you. Write down one way that personal plan can help you.

Then number two, this is important, you have done this over and over again as you've worked in the last three sessions. I want you to write it down and then post it in the Guidestone University Leader Community.

And we'll see you in the next session of Guidestone University.