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“Be all that you can be,” I have tried to live up to this motto even since my enlistment in the US Army at the tender age of seventeen. As I think of this motto today it has an almost completely different meaning. It wasn’t until I rededicated my life to the Lord that I paid much attention to these few simple words. These words have more meaning to them than what first catches the eye. I am still unsure if the person that coined this phrase was thinking about how rounded this motto actually is. From my experience, as a recruit in the US Army it seems that the author was just speaking of the physical implications of this motto. I only had a small taste of the power of critical thinking; it wasn’t until I took this self development class – with other Christian students – that I realized the wonder of this ability.

I think the whole idea of living a life with purpose is best depicted in one of the most influential books that I have ever read. A book by Rick Warren, named *The Purpose Driven Life*, in this worldwide bestseller he explains how to better understand one’s own self through observing what he calls a person’s “*SHAPE*”: Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experience. He approaches self-evaluation by teaching us understanding the role that God has given us to play in this world, which will in turn lead us to understand our purpose in God’s kingdom. I believe very strongly in what this teaches a person. Not long after I studied this book I understand more about my life message and God-given mission. I considered that my purpose here on earth was to serve our Lord completely, and then I made one of biggest decisions in my life. I decided to become a US Army Chaplain, and immediately started college to get a Bachelor of Science degree in Ministry. I came to this conclusion by merely self-evaluating myself and making a list of character qualities, experiences, and abilities that I possess; and held them against another list of those qualities, experiences, and abilities that I felt that I

lacked. This ended in a purpose/mission statement that rolled up into a set of goals that I wanted to accomplish.

An approach used in our textbook, *Becoming a Master Student* by Dave Ellis best explains what should happen after understanding what one's life purpose is. Learning Ellis' approach, which depicts our life purpose as a guidance system for a rocket, promises to keep our plans on track while uncovering a path for success. This is similar to the approach that I used to help me consider many courses of action while developing my short and long-term goals. I'm sure these ideas sound wonderful, but as I was quick to find out, none of the goals I set for myself held up without a good contemplated plan.

The most challenging task of being a student to me was coming up with a sound daily plan. Because of the type of work I do and the swing-shift work schedule, making a plan that will encompass: God, family, schoolwork, personal fitness, sleep, and work is still an on-going process. Using the methods that can be learned in *The Man in the Mirror*, by Patrick Morley is the way I will try to plan the more important life-altering events. In his book he teaches that the most effective time management strategy starts with us not wasting time trying to do our own will. By taking lessons directly from Proverbs, "*Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed.*" (Proverbs 16:3), we should humble ourselves and listen for instructions to be given by God. "*The Lord works out everything in its own ends.*" (Proverbs 16:4). For me it's not the life-altering events that are the problem, it's the small day-to-day events. Referring back to the textbook; after doing the time monitor/time plan exercise in Chapter 2, I found that this exercise is geared for people who have "normal" day jobs. In my case I had to monitor my time during all four of my shifts: early shift, midday shift, night shift, and my week off. Every week is structured totally different so there is a different time for doing homework; by using critical and creative thinking skills I decided to monitor twice every

week to find a somewhat reasonable plan to mirror the daily tasks and events. By evaluating every day individually it was easier to find the time that I would have otherwise misappropriated.

Using the approaches from *The Thinker's Way* by John Chaffee, Ph.D., I believe to have learned how to use critical and creative thinking skills to think more correctly. I believe being a critical thinker is the best character trait that anyone could have. I am striving to become a thinker that can think critically but creatively all at once. I noticed how important this type of thinking is to us on a regular basis, because every day we are confronted with problems, decisions, and ideas that if not taken seriously might change our entire life. Taking advantage of this new knowledge will without a doubt help me with my studies and with my career. Learning how to effectively use this knowledge will inevitably change the way my life progresses. Knowing that I have contemplated my thoughts will keep me from ever wondering if I missed something along the way to my solutions and decisions.

Without knowing it, I had already started using one approach that Chaffee speaks of which explains about how one could adjust their workspace to design a sanctum for producing creative thought. Before I remodeled the third floor of my house for my daughter I planned and built such an area. I had planned it without at first thinking of it as a sanctum of thought, but with time it became a place where I always found myself going to when I needed to think or study. I learned to see it in a different light after studying John's ideas.

One of the most influential ideas in John's book is being able to choose freely. Here I learned that I should stop complaining about my circumstances and blaming somebody or something for my situation, embrace my freedom, and take responsibility for the circumstances that I myself create. Doing this will enable me to make wiser

choices and give me back responsibility for my life. Meaning that I should take advantage of my freedom to choose how I will live my life instead of giving the power to someone else. So, while applying this to my life I must check my thoughts to make certain that the decisions that I make are a cause of what I myself choose to do. If I let all of the circumstances, including internal and external pressures, and compulsions to dictate my choices, then I am not really choosing without restraint. Therefore it is most important that I think critically about my possible choices to ensure that it truly is a choice without constriction. Although some decisions will be made as a direct result of certain compulsions or intuitions given to me by God, they still will be chosen because I choose to serve the Lord.

In summary I believe that if I identify my bad habits and slowly change my behaviors, keep an open mind to all new information, keep my goals within sight, plan with the Holy Spirit's guidance, and choose freely I will without a doubt be the best student I can be.

References

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