



Baldwin Davis Group
Fueling LeadershipSM

Become a Virtual Time-Traveler *And Discover Meaning in Your Life*

One of the most rewarding things about being a leadership coach is talking with people about what is important to them. Really important. These conversations often help people get in touch with their values and discover answers to some of life's important questions.

*The framework of these conversations evolved for me in 2014 when I reread an old book and saw a new movie. The book is Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, considered one of the ten most influential books in America according to a 1991 Library of Congress survey. The movie is *About Time*, released in late 2013 and written and directed by Richard Curtis, who also brought us *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Notting Hill*, and *Love Actually*.*

*You might wonder how a movie from today's popular culture would add meaning to a book as consequential as Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*.*

Let's take a look.

The Book

Man's Search for Meaning is Frankl's personal account of his three years at Auschwitz and other WWII concentration camps. Before the war, he had developed a theory of psychotherapy, called "logotherapy," designed to help people find meaning in their lives. Frankl used Auschwitz and Dachau as a sort of living laboratory to test his theory, and his book tells the story of how he found meaning in his wretched suffering there.

Man's Search for Meaning makes a sharp distinction between the attitudes of those who survived the Holocaust and those who avoided the gas chamber but died nonetheless. Frankl observed that many who died had allowed their captivity to crush their sense of hope. He would hear them say "I have nothing to expect from life any more." Frankl and many other survivors had a fundamentally different way of looking at the conditions of their captivity. He wrote:

We had learned . . . that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected of us.

Frankl believed that each of us is personally responsible for understanding what life uniquely expects of us – in any given moment and in midst of the specific conditions of our life. Even in our suffering. In fact, he sees this responsibility, this quest for meaning, to be at the very heart of human existence. Each of us is questioned by life, and we each must answer for our own lives.

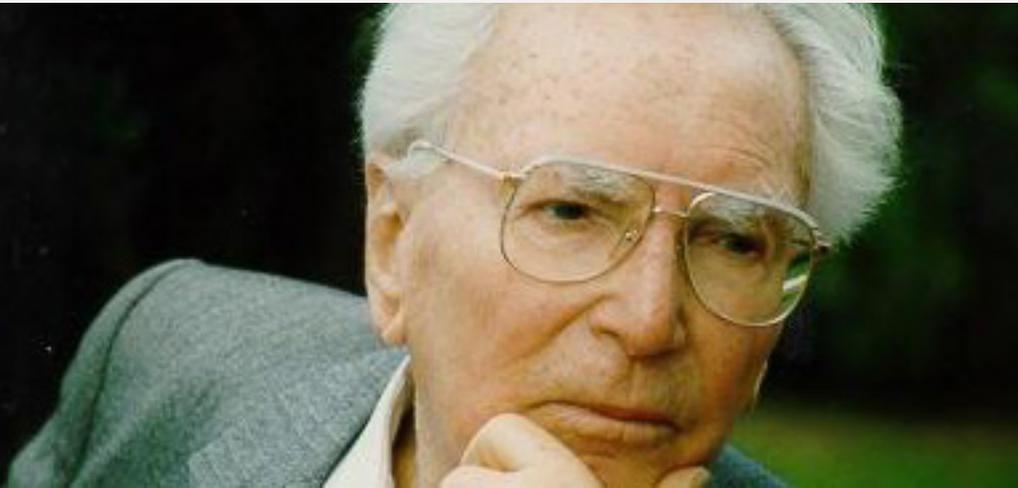
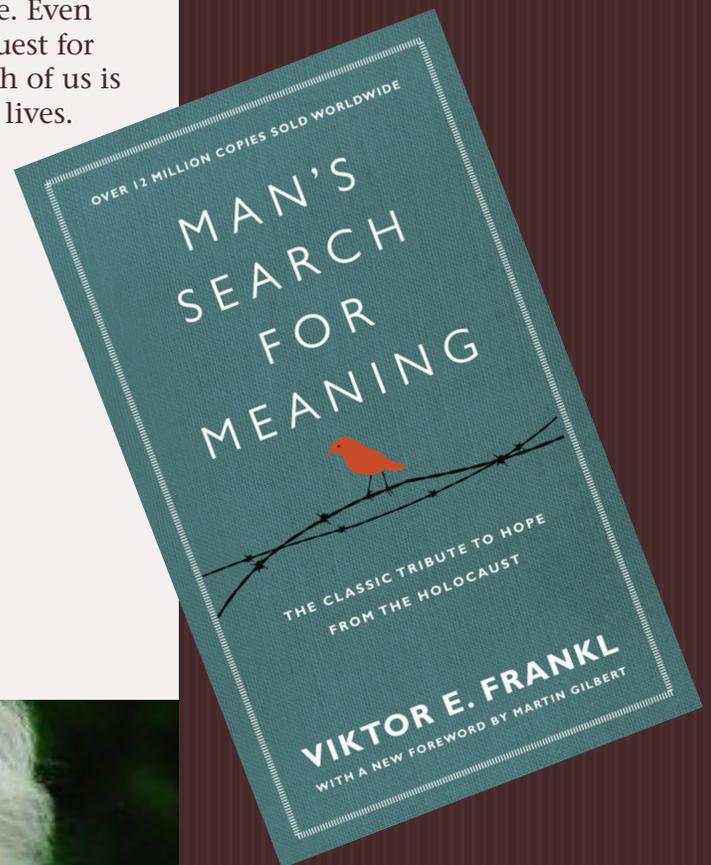
This emphasis on our responsibility to answer life's question is reflected in what Frankl calls the "categorical imperative" of logotherapy:

Live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now.

And here is where many of us stumble. What does it mean to "live as if you were living already for the second time"?

Sometimes a visual helps.

*Live every day
as though you've
deliberately come
back to this one
day, to enjoy it as
if it were the full
final day of your
extraordinary,
ordinary life.*



Viktor E. Frankl

The Movie

About Time is both a charming romantic comedy and a poignant depiction of the love between the movie's protagonist Tim Lake and his dad. It is through this bond that Tim learns and builds upon a profound life lesson and helps us understand logotherapy's categorical imperative.

On his 21st birthday, Tim learns from his dad the astonishing fact that, like all of the men in the Lake family, Tim has the inherited ability to transport himself back in time to any date, place or event in his memory – and to replay the events of his life from that time forward – as often as he wants to.

A disbelieving Tim gives it a try and is stunned to realize that what his dad had said is actually true. Once Tim's initial shock wears off, his dad asks him what he wants to do with this extraordinary gift. Tim says making money would be the obvious thing. To which his dad replies, "A very mixed blessing . . . a real recipe for disaster." So Tim decides to do what a lot of 21 year olds would do: He tells his dad he wants to use his gift to help him get a girlfriend. (His dad's chiding reply: "Wow. Massive.") And romance ensues for Tim.

It isn't until near the end of the movie that Tim learns how to put his inherited gift to its greatest use. In one of his last conversations with Tim before dying of cancer, Tim's dad shares his "big secret." [View the clip here.](#)

As Tim narrates the scene, the "big secret" sounds very much like Frankl's categorical imperative of logotherapy, doesn't it? Tim describes his dad's secret in two parts. Part one: Just get on with ordinary life, living it day by day like anyone else. And then part two: Live every day again, almost exactly the same. The first time, with all the tensions and worries that stop us noticing how sweet the world can be, but the second time, *noticing*.



Nice thought. But if you're following along, you probably are thinking, hold on a minute, we're not time travelers. We don't have Tim's gift of rewinding each day and re-encountering every minute with his exquisite ability to notice how sweet the world can be.

But then Tim solves this problem for us. Check out the movie's final moments and montage. [Here's that clip.](#)

Tim tells us he no longer needs to travel back in time, not even for the day. Instead, as each of us is able to do, he just tries to live every day as if he'd deliberately come back to this one day, to enjoy it as if it were the full final day of his extraordinary, ordinary life.

About Time, then, is a visual illustration, a beautiful and moving one at that, of Frankl's categorical imperative to "live as if you were living already for the second time..."

*It doesn't really matter what we expect of life,
but rather what life expects of us.*

What Does this Mean for Us?

Is it realistic to think we can live our lives as mindfully as Tim Lake declares he will do? Can we remember to show up for the exam, to answer the questions that our lives (and our ever-changing circumstances) ask of us? Can we really live each day of our ordinary lives in an extraordinary way?

Yes. At least, we can move in that direction. We can create new ways of responding to the world we encounter throughout our day. We can learn to live into the best versions of ourselves. We can learn to build awareness of our responsibility to answer the ever-present questions our lives ask of us.

An important step in building awareness, in sustaining a change in outlook, is figuring out how to keep our new insight top of mind. One way we can do this is to design a structure that reminds us to take action in the areas we are committed to changing. Tying a string around your finger is the classic reminder we are all familiar with. Placing post-it notes on your computer screen or dashboard, or writing down reminders and sticking them in your pockets, are other examples.

You can experiment with ways to keep your new perspective fresh and alive. Sometimes using music as a reminder works. For instance, there is a song in the first clip above from *About Time* that overlays the montage of Tim's living his day the second time. It's called *There's Gold in Them Hills*. The melody is beautiful and the lyrics complement Frankl's teaching. [Click here to hear the song.](#)

Consider adding this song to your playlist, and make a practice of listening to it a few times a week. Let the music transport you, as though you were traveling back in time, to a place where you are "living already for the second time as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now."

Look for a structure that works for you and helps you to remember to be intentional about allowing a better version of yourself to emerge. This way, you will be able to find meaning in the small moments of your life and, in doing so, turn your ordinary moments into extraordinary ones.

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There's Gold In Them Hills by Ron Sexsmith

*"I know it doesn't seem that way
But maybe it's the perfect day
Even though the bills are piling
And maybe Lady Luck ain't smiling*

*But if we'd only open our eyes
We'd see the blessings in disguise
That all the rain clouds are fountains
Though our troubles seem like mountains"*

About the author, Garza Baldwin

Co-founder of Baldwin Davis Group with his wife Frances, Garza Baldwin works with leaders and leadership teams in a variety of settings, including law, accounting, financial services, energy, government defense contracting, and not-for-profit organizations. Garza works with people who want to be better leaders – of teams, divisions and organizations. He also works with clients who simply want to learn to become more effective leaders of their own careers. Clients who work with Garza often broaden their understanding of what great leadership and teamwork look like, which in turn helps them see more clearly the kind of leader and colleague they want to be. Garza supports his clients as they co-create and execute plans to accomplish their goals. Along the way, clients often learn to let go of old ways of thinking and acting and to adopt new perspectives and ways of showing up that reveal the best versions of themselves and help them reach their potential.

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