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Dynamic self understanding: Pursuing personal excellence



AYO AYENI Apr 20, 2021



“Excellence is a superior quality, but it is always a moving goal as we are never there fully” – Wayne Ottenbreit.

The annual business meeting of the Humanistic Management Network (HMN) was an insightful and timely one as we’re gradually coming out of a global pandemic and adapting to a new normal, trying to get in-depth understanding of ourselves and our capabilities beyond what we are used to, and finding ways to excel at them.

[Chat](#)

HMN-Nigeria is part of an international, interdisciplinary, and independent network that promotes the development of an economic system with respect for human dignity and well-being as well as accelerating transition towards a life-conducive economic system.

Everything we do is imbedded in our world view, including things (constructs) we consider valuable; For example, family, friends, fame, wealth, power, learning and so on, and these impacts our decisions and how we do things. For example, if we prioritize money, we will find ways to make more and get richer. If family, we will find ways we believe serves them better.

How do we then structure our lives for excellence? The best way to do this is to base our lives on principles, which are stable qualities that give meaning and direction to all aspects of our lives. A great and practical way to think of these principles are the cardinal virtues which can be described as foundational descriptors or good human living. The cardinal virtues are: Prudence/wisdom, Justice, Fortitude/strength of will, Temperance/self-control.

These, along-side theological virtues based on Christian traditions: Faith, Hope, Charity/love.

If we think about it, every good quality we have, or lack, are based off aspects of these seven virtues, hence, excellence then fundamentally includes seeking to grow in these virtues. How do we then go about achieving or improving upon a principle-centred life?

1. Being proactive is important; This is taking intentional responsibility for one's own life. It involves acknowledging that we are key agents for our life's decisions. We are the primary authors for what happens as we make choices in response to opportunities and challenges. We are never victims and we can always make a change. By doing our part, the only part we can do, we contribute to the growth of virtues everywhere. Being successful at this also entails assessing our strengths and shortcomings, what is reasonably within our abilities and where we need to look outwards. It is also beneficial to investigate, and reflect upon our family of origin,

multiple cultural orientations and natural dispositions. Although these do not fully define us, without greater energy and will, we tend to repeat patterns we have been used to. However, it is always within our capabilities to create something new:

- What have we learnt about ourselves; strengths and weaknesses, pattern of thinking and acting)?
- What do we need to understand better?
- Where can we get information?

2. Begin with the end in mind; This is a great place to start our journey towards a more excellent version of ourselves and it means defining what excellence means to us as individuals and the desired outcomes we seek. Virtues may be universally important to master but it should not be our only focus. We all have multiple important roles in life that show up differently daily. Sometimes glorious and other times challenging. Excellence requires that we plan for these by considering that not only is today the first day of the rest of our lives hence we can begin whatever changes we choose at any time, but until tomorrow, it is also the last and we should take responsibility for the finite nature of each moment. So, what are the requirements needed to be an excellent parent, student, boss, professional, friend and so on. Requirements, however, are not the only place for us to seek excellence. In his work in counselling and personal development, Wayne uses a model he calls “seeking life’s fullness”. This is based on the premise that there is much more joy and potential available to us than we realize in the very act of our pursuit of excellence, but we settle for less because it involves some effort in reflection, intentionality and energy.

- What could be better/different?
- What ideas really excite and inspire you?
- What talents can you bring to benefit others considering that while many others have your exact talent(s), no one has your unique combination of talents, life experiences and approach.

3. Set Priorities; It is important to prioritise. We must understand our unique qualities, virtues, world view, approach, responsibilities and opportunities and the way we can use them to make the world better. We can ask ourselves these questions:

- How well do I use my time and energy?
- Could I reasonably use them better?
- What would be the consequence of using them better?

In our pursuit of personal excellence, we must be committed to being intentional. It helps to make use of the imaginary benefit of hindsight. Envision yourself in the future you want and weigh how current decisions and choices affect you, your relationships and wider society both now and in the long run.

Wayne's discussion was based on the book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" by Stephen Covey.

Ayeni is a Business & Family Life Strategist, Advocate for Women & Children's Wellness & Perinatal Mental Health Care Practitioner, and member of the Humanistic Management Network, managed by the Christopher Kolade Centre for Research in Leadership and Ethics, Lagos Business School. Contact: crle@lbs.edu.ng, hayouronline@gmail.com.



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