

ON TURNING OUTWARD AND BEING INTENTIONAL

By Rich Harwood

Turning Outward is fundamentally an orientation—it is a stance we assume, a posture, a mindset. Only when you are Turned Outward can you truly see and hear others. Only then can you have reality in your line of sight. It is when we are Turned Outward that we can discover our shared aspirations and make progress together.

But nothing is automatic. Too many of us have chosen to turn inward, away from one another. Sometimes this happens without us even knowing. The concerns and hopes of people in our communities can get obscured, even pushed aside. The desire to position ourselves or our own organization or group takes priority. Our daily lives become consumed by creating long lists of activities. At times we can lose our sense of purpose.

All of us in search of a path that allow us to make a difference in the world, become part of something larger than ourselves. We all want to achieve a sense of meaning in our own lives. But to find that path—and make it real—you must Turn Outward. After all, you cannot pursue your true desires if you are facing in the wrong direction.

But once you turn outward, then what?

You must become more intentional in the choices that shape your actions. Each of us must decide whether we will pursue the path of the status quo that too often is filled by division, disappointment and frustration – or choose an alternate path of possibility and hope. For instance, will we choose to authentically engage people, or simply offer lip service to such engagement? Will we focus on issues that matter to people, or mostly pursue some other agenda? Will we produce positive impact in people’s lives, or become consumed by endless activities? This alternate path is about stepping forward and accounting for the pledges and promises we make.

Being intentional means becoming more deliberate in your actions. It is to make choices about whether to take one course over another. It is to be more attentive to your surroundings – that you hold a greater awareness about who we are, who we want to become and the kind of change you seek to generate. In these ways, being intentional is about being more directed.

But I am moved most by the following definition of intentionality – which comes in two parts. The first involves what I think of as “wakefulness.” I love this word. I encourage you to consider its meaning and potential for your own engagement. Wakefulness suggests that we are alert. That we come to the world awake! Our eyes are wide open, our hearts are open and we are willing to see and hear that which is around us. In being wakeful, we are ready to engage, to be with others. Such wakefulness stands in direct contrast to the blinders we sometimes put on so that we don’t have to worry about certain issues or matters, and the great lengths we sometimes go to take-in only that information that confirms what we already know or believe. Wakefulness is the opposite of inwardness. It is about being present, especially for those things we may not like or want.

The companion to wakefulness is “moral accountability.” All actions have consequences and ramifications. So, while we cannot control everything in our lives, we must recognize – and embrace – that we actually exercise power over much of what we do. This isn’t an absolute power, of course, but enough that we must account for our actions. We must know that we have the potential to positively (or negatively) impact people and our surroundings. That each of our small efforts matter and have ripple effects. So, moral accountability is with each judgment and choice you make. One reason why I so cherish the notion of moral accountability is that, as we live into it, we begin to see our own potential shape the world around us. We become actors, not mere spectators; shapers, not bystanders; builders, not complainers or claimants.

Each day we make scores of choices, and while we cannot control everything, if we become more intentional about the choices we do make, then we can have far greater impact and fulfill our own personal desires.

The idea and practice of intentionality lives throughout the Harwood approach. It is about what we choose to make of ourselves. It is about what we choose to do with ourselves. It is about how we bring our full selves to be in relationship with others. In this spirit, when I speak of intentionality, my goal is not for you to adopt wholesale my ideas – or anyone else’s. That would be the very antithesis of intentionality. Instead the process of deepening your own intentionality requires you to take ownership of the judgments and choices before you. You must find, and declare, your own sense of purpose. You must choose your own course of engagement with those around you.

What I am asking you to do is to seize this intrinsic power within you.