

On Sticking to Business
Robert S. Griffin
www.robertsgriffin.com

These days, when I feel the call to do something, I stop and ask myself, “Is this any of my business?” If the answer is no, I get on to what is in fact my business. If the answer is yes, that it is my business, then it becomes a matter of how best to take on this business and how much effort to give it. I’ll explain.

People and situations are always going to prompt you to do things. Your thoughts and feelings are always going to tell you, “Hey, do this thing right now; it’s *the* thing to do.” You have to get in charge of these cues, these beckonings, these ought to’s, these impulses, if you are going to live authentically and well. Plus, simply there are always more things to do than there is time to do them. You have to have a criterion, a measuring stick, to assess whether or not to do whatever is. That measuring stick, I’m suggesting, is to ask yourself “Is this my business or isn’t it?” and then to go with whatever answer you get. But of course to answer that question, you have to know what your business is in your life. And how do you know that? It involves two aspects:

1) It is your business to do what *accomplishes your most important goals as a person at this point in your life*. Your goals are the positive things you are trying to get done. They aren’t what you are trying *not* to do; they are what you are trying to achieve; they are *positive goals*.

So you need to know what your goals are. By “know” I mean you can *imagine* what it’ll look like, be like, when you make your positive goals a reality; you can see that circumstance in your mind’s eye. And, you have *words that will precisely depict* that accomplishment when it occurs; that is to say, you have an articulate, explicit-in-language, understanding of what you are trying to bring about in your life.

I stress that these are your goals *at this time*. Your goals may well change up the line; but right now they are as they are, and they--not something else, not somebody else--direct your thoughts and actions moment-to-moment, day-to-day, month-to-month.

2) You also need to have your goals *prioritized*. For the most part, you want to be working on your most important goals

concurrently. But due to the limitations of your time and energy, there will be occasions where you are going to have to make a choice between pursuing one or the other of two important goals; as a practical matter, you won't be able simultaneously to do both.

Perhaps it will help if I list the six most important goals in my own life now and how I gain direction from them to illustrate what I'm talking about. I'll list my goals in order of their priority for me.

- I want my nine-year-old daughter to feel safe and happy and valued as the unique person she is, and to develop into the best possible version of herself. So that's goal number one, top priority.

- I want to get into the best possible mental and physical shape I can in order to live as powerfully, as effectively, as I can at this stage of my life (I'm in my seventies).

- I want to publicly express my ideas and beliefs about what matters to me—that's my teaching, this web site, and any other dissemination vehicle available to me.

- I want to do what's of the highest quality I can manage: high quality people, high quality art, food, dress, travel, interior design, personal conduct, right down the list. No time for the second rank and junk.

- I want to do my work at the university with integrity, ethically, and to the very best of my ability.

- I want to prepare to enter the next—and last—phase of my life, after I retire from my university position: I want to live well in whatever time I have left as the human being I truly am.

As I live day to day, when something to do comes up that's a possibility for taking up my time and energy, I ask myself "Is it my business to be doing this?" I check out how whatever it aligns with my six goals. If it doesn't serve them, I don't engage it. I'm not a puppet on a string; I'm not going to do whatever someone wants me to do or tells me I have to do or ought to do, or whatever happens to pop into my consciousness, and believe me, I have spent much of my life doing just that.

An illustration from this week: A colleague at the university interjected himself into something I am doing and sent me a snippy, patronizing, put down email. My immediate response was to go into a stew and turn away from what I was doing and take him on. I had enough presence of mind, however, to mediate that stimulus-response chain—he hits me, I automatically hit him back—with the

question to myself, “Is sparring around with this guy my business?” I think he wanted attention and power, and to hurt me, but that wasn’t the point. Given my six goals, is dealing with this character my business? The answer came in about three seconds: taking him on isn’t my business. So I didn’t respond to him, nothing. I simply went on with my life. A day later, as if to say, “Hey, I’m here, look at me!” he took another jab at me, a little stiffer one than the first, kind of escalating the confrontation. I ignored him again. And I’ll ignore him a third time, and a fourth if need be. That said, if he does something that gets in the way of accomplishing my six goals, I will square up with him and the fight’s on, no holds barred.

Other illustrations, which at first glance will seem minor, but I’ve concluded that nothing is minor, it all adds up, it’s all worthy of attention and concern. Yesterday, I was going to have a second glass of wine--no. I turned off a ballgame on TV to stream the director Terrence Malick’s film “The Thin Red Line.” I searched the Internet for an autographed picture of the golfer Stacy Lewis for my daughter, who loves golf. I worked on this thought for my web site. I did an exercise routine, which included a rowing machine for cardio.

Of course, what matters is not what I’m doing but rather what you are doing. Take stock: what is your business, and are you sticking to it?