

## “THE JOURNEY OF 15’s”

*“Risk more than others think is safe. Care more than others think is wise. Dream more than others think is practical. Expect more than others think is possible.”*

Cadet Maxim, US Military Academy, West Point



***We are first and foremost, the leaders of our lives.*** It is useful to identify where we are on our journey and to recognize that after the age of 5, life is segmented into 15-year increments. A caveat and an example: this illustration does not mean that because a lot of our education happens by 20 that we can't continue to seek education, degrees, additional skills or certifications into our elder years.

It does paint an overall picture for how life generally unfolds. When unprepared to enter a new phase, minus design and planning, we can find ourselves in those episodes unable to be the leaders that others need from us in the other areas of our lives. It is our responsibility to stay aware of the journey.

Take a trip through the 15's of your life. Locate where you are now, and answer the questions related to your journey so far. Look ahead, and give some thought to the 15's yet to come. Consider your answers periodically as you approach the next phases.

**Age 5-20 - LEANING & LEARNING:** We enter the years in which we lean heavily on others – their experiences, guidance, boundaries, encouragement, love, expectations, financial support, and views of us - as our internal core is shaped. In addition, we are a sponge, soaking up everything from the school curriculum, to each new experience, sports, travel, differences between peoples, the media's presentation of the world, and virtual lives.

***Who do you want to lean on you as they learn?***

**Age 21-35 – PRACTICING & MULTIPLYING:** In the second fifteen-year increment, we are practicing our potential professionally, making our initial mistakes supported by mentors during our development, and usually multiplying our family. These are the intense years in which we are investing heavily in our professional development, potentially furthering our education, finding the loves of our lives, and creating new human beings who need significant attention. How well we absorbed the first formative fifteen really shows up as we move into leadership of our professions, our lives, and our families, at a time when all three need an intensity of devotion.

***What are you practicing now?***

***What do you need to start practicing?***

***What can you multiply as a leader?***

**Age 36-50 – MAXIMIZING & FAREWELLS:** This is the crucial fifteen. Either everything learned, decisions made, professions chosen, and leadership opportunities taken have positioned us for our peak professional years, or they have not. Business will be made or lost, promotions will be given or not, and leadership brilliance will be demonstrated or not. It is not that key leadership cannot be delivered prior or after, it is that generally these are the years in which prime leaps are made. Key farewells in our lives also begin occurring, which require leadership shifts at

home. Children leave, and parents begin to get sick or die. Our Honeycomb of Life enters another stage requiring shifts of how we allocate our time, as we feel the conflict between maximizing our professional opportunities, while shepherding our farewells in a manner worthy of being noted as a leader.

***What are you maximizing as a leader?***

***What coming farewells need your attention?***

**Age 51-65 – MEANING & LEVERAGE:** The years of the great shift happen as the perspective of a long life ahead move to recognition of a shorter remaining journey. The leadership pull to develop succession in business and families and to participate in life only where meaning is multiplied, others are helped, and contributions made prove valuable, appears in neon flashing lights. Opportunities are sought for how to leverage connections, resources, and knowledge to exponentially increase positive impact, while energy and physical and mental health remain intact. Leadership of life before it's too late arrives with urgency.

***What have you not paid attention to that is showing up and demanding your attention that has meaning at its core?***

***How are you going to respond?***

***What is the sum of your life and professional experiences that you can leverage in this phase?***

**Age 66-80 – BONUS & DEPARTURES:** Most of us get somewhere in the area of 5 + 15 x 4 or 5 life phases. Anything in these fifteen years is a leadership bonus. We can take everything we have learned, practiced, maximized, and leveraged and determine how we want to share our final leadership lessons, to whom we want to contribute our precious time to do so, and what will make the most impact. These are the bonus years for us, as we continue to witness departures of the few remaining in the generation before us and our peers.

***What is your vision for your bonus years?***

**Age 81-95 – THE UNEXPECTED:** Whether it's being surprised you reached these years or have lived through health challenges; you are still the leader of your life. Each day is a new opportunity to contribute to others and ourselves in ways that are unexpected. How we choose to show up directly affects the quality of our life and those that are still in it. Leadership is not a title at work, it's a decision about how we choose to BE in life, which in turn has an impact on the outcome and

quality of our lives and those around us, including the years in which we go to work.

***Can you imagine these years, and how would you most like to spend them, based on what you know now?***

**Age 96-110 – THE WONDER YEARS:** During these years, we wonder that we are still alive. We marvel at what we have seen change in a century of life. We wonder how much longer we'll be around. We wonder what we'll miss. We wonder if it's not been long enough. We are still the leaders of our lives and can influence every person with whom we come into contact.

***Do you desire to live The Wonder Years?***

**LEGACY & UNKNOWN IMPACT:** We will all leave a legacy and will never know the full impact of the leadership contributions we have made throughout our lives personally and professionally. What we can know is that we do make an impact with every word, action, intonation, body language, behavior, attitude, and choice. We can have some certainty that how we choose to be, the magnitude of our attempts to positively influence, and the right spirit of our work will either build up or destroy others and their dreams.

***What legacy do you choose to leave?***