

A Moment of Real

R o b e r t F r i t z



One of the most dramatic moments in our IT (*Instructor Training*) for *Creating Your Life* was when each of the participants stood in front of the room near the end of the course. They were ready to talk about the learning they experienced over the past three days. But before they did that, I asked them to stop. Not only stop talking, but stop trying to be some way or other in front of people. Stop trying to present themselves to the group. Stop trying to take on a role. Stop trying to do anything.

This is a lot harder than it sounds. We are so in the habit of being "something" for others. We want to communicate, make a good impression, reach out, have impact. This is natural. But even as we try to be as honest as we can before other people, it is so easy drift into an "act." To be standing in front of a room and to suddenly have to give up doing anything can be a bit of a transformational shock. If you're not trying to do anything, what are you supposed to do? Good question. Here's the answer: nothing.

As any Zen master will tell you, nothing is a lot harder than something. Our natural tendency is to act, do something, anything. Put on a smile so every knows you're happy to be there. Make a joke so you can put others at ease. Say something of value so people will not think you are wasting their time. How many ways we have of doing something. How little experience we have with doing nothing.

Doing nothing doesn't mean having nothing in us. Some people get confused about this. They think doing nothing means to slip into the role of a mindless robot, devoid of thoughts, feelings, sensibilities, desires, values, observations, preferences, or personality. This is not doing nothing. It is trying to take on the image the Zen student may think the teacher is after. But it is all surface without substance. Just another kind of act.

Doing nothing means doing nothing. It doesn't mean being nothing. In fact, when the person standing in front of the group actually begins to do nothing, something wonderfully real emerges. The person seems to glow. The real beauty, substance, individuality, character, and essence of the person comes to the surface. Something real is happening.

Professional actors train to have the ability to be real. It's a discipline that takes rigor, practice, and years of dedicated work. They, of course, have to create reality through the means of fiction. They create a role, but then the role must be brought to life. Actors must reach a core of truth in themselves to bring to bear on the fictional character they portray. And when they succeed, we can become involved in the character's life. But if they fail to reach the core of truth, we don't get involved, and then we lose interest in the play or film.

James Cagney once said about acting, "You look the other guy in the eyes and you tell him the truth." Certainly actors have an act. That's their business. But they also have an art. The foundation for their art is to be real, even within the context of the fiction they are creating.

In our society we have learned to avoid being real, especially in important situations. How real are we on a first date, in front of an IRS inspector, interviewing for a job, or even looking in the mirror. How many photographs do we have of ourselves with the real us showing

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up for the world to see. If you need to think about this, just notice you use the same picture smile in every one of them!

In my latest book, *Your Life As Art*, I write about creating many vehicles that we can use as we go through life. We may have the parent vehicle, the professional vehicle, the friend vehicle, the traveling through the airport vehicle, the hanging out at the party vehicle. The point I'm making is that there are many dimensions to us as we go through our lives. It's even a good idea to spend a little time improving some of these vehicles. But one point I'm not making is to be phony, to put on an act, to, as we say in the music business, "shuck and jive." If we stop trying to look a certain way, make an impression, try to communicate, and if we simply "relax into ourselves" and then do nothing, absolutely nothing, something real can begin to happen. And all of the vehicles you have available to you as you create your life have one thing in common: the real you. So if you do nothing, what's left over is what's really there, your humanity, spirit, and the beauty of your soul.

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Robert Fritz is an accomplished composer, filmmaker, and writer, and he is also an organizational consultant for some of the largest companies in the world. Over 80,000 people have taken his courses, and his pioneering work on structural dynamics has had impact on such diverse fields as the arts, third world development, organizational development, strategic planning, and personal and executive coaching. He is the author of the best-selling *The Path of Least Resistance* as well as *Creating, Corporate Tides, The Path of Least Resistance for Managers*, and, most recently, *Your Life as Art*.

Robert and Rosalind Fritz will lead a module at the 2004 Summer Program on "The Creative Process in Action." See http://www.shambhalainstitute.org/2004/module_fritz.htm