



Drive or Ride?

Balancing Structure and Flow

By Josephine Gross, Ph.D.

Some days I catch myself thinking back with a sense of nostalgia to the time when I had a job. For five years, I taught French, Latin and Human Development at a well-funded private prep school in Los Angeles.

Every morning, I would hop on this giant, well-oiled "train" that constitutes a hundred-year-old institution and it would bring me to that day's destination along with 250 colleagues and 1,500 kids.

No matter how I felt, I would get up at 5:30 a.m., be in my car driving by 6 a.m. to avoid the rush-hour traffic, and open my classroom by 6:30 a.m.

At 3 p.m. I would go home fulfilled for having moved my students along the program, attended meetings and taken care of extracurricular activities. To be driven by this "external discipline," as Orrin Woodward calls it in his article (p. 24), felt comforting.

Today my life unfolds quite differently. Being a morning person, I still wake up early and I'm excited to go check my email for any messages that might have come in overnight from business partners in different time zones.

After taking care of any urgent matters, I leave my computer and engage in me time. I put on my hat and sneakers and go for a leisurely hike in the Santa Susana Mountains. I review my goals for the day or let my mind wander in the spaciousness of nature, often remembering things I forgot to do and making mental notes of new ideas.

When I get home, I take a swim or a relaxing bath, and by 9 a.m. I'm back at my desk. And then I'm hit with a startling reality: *I am free*. No one is watching, no one is giving me a to-do list. Whatever I want to create is up to me.

If I want my train to move forward, I have to fuel it with my energy and drive it with my purpose. This realization can sometimes be daunting, even paralyzing, especially in times of change.

Come nighttime, I'm not always sure what I have accomplished. The results of my efforts may not be apparent. The gestation period of business projects is often unknown. So I have learned to trust and go with the flow.

To be crafting my own destiny is a gift I've come to cherish, and the responsibility that accompanies this freedom settles in a little more deeply each day. It teaches me to listen to my inner voice as well as to outer feedback, to be vigilant about how I spend my time—and sometimes, to make a quick course correction.

If you want to build a business, you can't just go along for the ride. Being an entrepreneur forces you to stay alert and engaged.

While at times I miss the comfort and predictability of a job, I wouldn't have it any other way.