

# perfect moments

by Will Marré

*Every meaningful life is composed of individual points in time spent genuinely connecting with others.*

A few years ago, I was coaching the senior leadership team of KPMG, one of the “Big Four” accounting firms. During that assignment, I met Gene O’Kelly, an inspiring, smart and personable leader who, at the age of 53, became the chairman of that multibillion-dollar firm.

Then the tragic news struck. Within a short time of becoming the firm’s leader, he was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor and given 90 days to live. He lasted 100. Everyone was shocked. He was another example of “the good die young” paradox that has touched many of us personally.

Gene responded to the news decisively. He recognized that his career had dominated his personal life, and decided he would spend his remaining days thanking his close friends for their friendship and more deeply connecting with his wife and daughters. Amazingly, he also decided to write a book, which would ultimately be titled *Chasing Daylight*, about the last months of his life and what he was learning.

In the book, Gene described his quest to find the big meaning of life with his own life burning out quickly. His language becomes crystal-clear toward the end. He describes an afternoon in a small boat on a cloudless day, on beautiful blue Lake Tahoe with his daughter. He tells of a transcendent peace that washes over him as he finds himself fully present with his young girl whose own life is bursting with promise. He describes awakening to a state of awareness where he and his daughter find themselves in a shared consciousness where nothing exists except their mutual love.

He called it a *perfect moment*. His conclusion of a well-lived life is one filled with perfect moments. What a beautiful lesson.

## **BANKING: AN INDUSTRY RIPE FOR PERFECT MOMENTS**

These days I find myself helping the Grameen Foundation spread the power of microcredit to lift the world’s poorest people to self-reliance. One of the village bankers in Bangladesh supported by Grameen reported his own perfect moment at work.

This man had just concluded documenting a tiny loan to a middle-aged mother who was starting a business. When it came time to sign the loan documents, she looked ashamed. She could not write her own name, because she didn’t know how to write. The banker sat with her for the better part of 30 minutes, slowly, kindly teaching her how to sign her own name.

Those 30 minutes seemed to transform the determined mother’s confidence. She finally rose to her feet, beaming with a smile that filled her whole face. She embraced her banker with a tearful, “Thank you. Thank you.” Yes, it was a perfect moment where the best of two human beings connected in ways that cannot be described.

So what do perfect moments have to do with banking or commerce or marketing? Perhaps everything.

Recent research reported in the *Harvard Business Review* confirms that in the past few years, there has been a dramatic convergence in the common yearnings of Baby Boomers and their Gen-Y children. What we all increasingly want is to matter as individuals. Whether we

are employees or consumers, we are flesh-and-blood people first and what we long for is authentic human connection. Even if it's for just a moment, a perfect moment.

This connection can occur in person, on the phone, or even on the Web — as long as it is genuine, two-way, one-to-one communication based on mutual caring and authentic advocacy. The connection must be personal and take into account our special circumstances. All of us feel like we have special circumstances because they're unique to us.

#### MEETING OUR UNIVERSAL NEED FOR PERSONAL CONNECTION

Today's business analysts have sliced us and diced us into consumer categories. Our e-mails and Web searches have been data-mined so that ads can sell to us according to our digital identities. Customer Relationship Management systems are programmed to contact us when and where we are most vulnerable to the allure of certain sales pitches.

But it seems that no matter how good we get at fake intimacy and superficial service, we all have a deeper longing for genuine relationships.

There was a time in banking when risk management was driven by relationships of trust and long histories of mutual loyalty. Perhaps those *It's a Wonderful Life*-like days are gone, but our essential human longing to be individually valued has not.

For younger people, this need is addressed through Web-based services that respect their individual needs and offer multiple ways to connect to real people with personal solutions. For older people, it's still primarily face-to-face, voice-to-voice caring contact. But we all must recognize that our most valuable "possessions" are not those objects that occupy space, but rather those perfect moments of genuine intimacy.

My friend Gene wished that the rest of us could discover the intrinsic point of our lives or our work without being told we have 90 days to live. He wanted us all to recognize that the point of work is not the work itself. It's how we connect with others through our work that matters.



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*Marré recently received an Emmy Award for his writing of the documentary, Reclaiming Your American Dream, aired on public television stations across the country. Will's new book, Save the World and Still Be Home for Dinner: How to Create a Future of Sustainable Abundance for All is being released September 2009 by Capital Books.*

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