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WANT A VIBRANT PROFESSIONAL LIFE?

CONSIDER APPLYING THESE FIVE LESSONS IN YOUR WORK.

F. Gorham Brigham, Jr. looked like the handsome actor sent by Central Casting for the role of “Boston Brahmin.”

Even his name fit: F. Gorham Brigham, Jr.

F. Gorham Brigham, Jr. died in September, 2016. He was 101.

This article is more than a tribute to a profoundly impactful gentleman. It is a guide for what it means to have a vibrant professional life plus practical steps you can take right now.

Each step is based on the life of Gorham F. Brigham, Jr.

Lesson #1:

You Decide When You Retire.

After 21 years at Boston Safe Deposit Bank, Gorham's boss informed him that his services would no longer be needed. At age 68, what would Gorham do?

"being unwanted is no fun. You should decide to move on when you are ready."

Taking his own advice, Gorham left Boston Safe Deposit Bank and joined the Boston Five Cents Saving Bank. The Bank was acquired by Citizens and he remained with the institution until HE decided to retire...at age 90.

Gorham taught a seminar called "What Happens When Your Company Retires You Before You're Ready?"

You set the date and time of your retirement. Until that date, you may call yourself a "consultant" who has yet to cash that first check. That is OK. You are still "in the game." Once you make a public statement that you are "Retired" or "Semi-Retired," others will react as if you are "out of the game." Gorham elected to be "in the game" until age 90."

If you are out of the game for more than two years, you are out of the game forever.

Let Gorham Brigham be your role model: stay "in the game" until you decide it is time to go.

It is your decision to make. Do not give that authority to a former employer.

Lesson #2:

If You Are Conscientious, Then You Need to Have Something of Value That Will Be the focus of Your Conscientiousness.

Those who worked with Gorham knew that he loved to work. Gorham was a conscientious person and he needed something of value to be conscientious about. So many conscientious people fail to ask this critical question as they approach retirement: what will I be conscientious about?

Gorham also had passion for work because he used work as a platform for meet new people, to learn, and to help others. Work and fun was mixed up for Gorham.

Lesson #3:

Boldly Create Your Job.

When Citizen Bank of Massachusetts President Robert Mahoney first met Gorham, he asked what Gorham did. Gorham replied, "I connect people."

Notice that he didn't say, "I am a commercial loan officer." He defined the job in a unique way. Citizens had no formal job description for "people connector."

Connecting people is what Gorham did. And he was very, very good at it.

Later Robert Mahoney would say, "Gorham would get two or three people he knew from Boston and two or three of our loan officers together and they would connect. I always said we paid too much for the Boston Five. But we did not pay enough for F. Gorham Brigham."

Boldly create the job you want to do.

Most job seekers are "hunters" who are "searching" for that defined job in the jungle called the talent market. And they keep looking until they "find" employment or give up the "hunt." Gorham was a gardener who knew how to plant, cultivate, and nourish something of value that did not exist until he used his creative efforts.

Below is an example from our corporate outplacement practice:

Our client began her career as a quality control manager in a manufacturing company and then moved into human resources in manufacturing. We designed a customized direct mail campaign focusing on her ability to handle both Quality and HR in small to mid size manufacturing companies. Two hundred letters were mailed. And she got one nibble: a CEO had an opening for head of Quality and head of HR and lacked the budget to fund both jobs. He would create a new job called VP, HR and Quality. The job description was customized around her resume.

Lesson #4:

Treat People As If They are Special: They Will Reciprocate.

Alan Faber knew Gorham for many years. “His key quality right to the end was paying it forward, asking people: ‘what can I do for you today?’ He had no agenda. It was always the agenda of the next person.” We can confirm Alan’s comments: he would always be asking, “How can I help you?” And he was genuine.

Nobody exceeded F. Gorham Brigham in follow-up. And his follow-up often consisted of hand-written notes that made the recipient of those notes feel important.

In 1984 John Naisbitt came out with the theme high tech/high touch. It means that as communications get easier and more electronic, the impact of electronic communications decreases. At the same time, high touch communications like Gorham’s hand-written follow-up notes become more impactful. This is basic product differentiation.

Gorham was the master of the brief hand written letter than made you feel special.

One of the authors was having breakfast with another professional. Gorham knew both parties. He walked up to the table and quietly said, “You are in good hands.....” and left. Gorham made you feel special.

Dale Carnegie (2010) wrote a classic book on how to win people over to your side. Carnegie’s answer was to make the other people feel that they are important to you. Give people a reputation they may not actually have. Implicitly challenge them to live up to their potential....a potential you may see that they themselves may not believe.

Gorham was a master of The Dale Carnegie method.

This approach to communications is rare: mobile media-focused communications systems tend to place us at the center of our own little universe and ask the universe, “Universe, what have you done for me today?” Empathy has become eroded. We covered this in an earlier PSYCHOLOGY TODAY piece about how mobile devices change communication patterns, corporate culture, and even how patterns of neurons fire in your brain. (Stybel & Peabody, 2016).

A sincere desire to make others feel special is rare. And it is a great way to differentiate yourself from competitors.

Lesson #5:

Be known as someone who builds communities. In the end, they are your legacy.

Gorham was always going out of his way to help individuals and to convince them that they were more vital than they sometimes felt about themselves.

But he did not stop with individuals.

Gorham built communities that would outlive him.

He was cofounder and board member at the Carroll School. It serves children with dyslexia and language-based learning disabilities. He founded the Treasurers' Club of Boston. In 1963 he joined the Financial Executives International. The BOSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL created a CFO Lifetime Achievement award and named it after F. Gorham Brigham. He served on the boards of several hospitals.

Lessons Learned.

Let the career of this inspiring man also inspire you as you think about your professional life.

Find work that mixes pleasure with work so that you don't feel you are "working."

If you can't find the job title that is a fit, then create the job you want. Go find a company that needs it. Be both a hunter and a gardener.

Your former employer does not decide when you retire. That decision is yours.

High Tech/High Touch: if you want to make an impact, follow up with hand-written notes.

If you want people to help you, treat them as if they are special. Give them a reputation to live up to and tell them you are there for them.

Building communities is your legacy.

Do all the above in a low key, gentle manner that does not bring attention to yourself. If you begin to take these steps, friends will notice a change in your behavior.

And when they ask for your source of inspiration, tell them “F. Gorham Brigham, Jr.”

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This article was first published by PSYCHOLOGY TODAY. Each month, Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel provide their perspectives about leadership and career success. To date three have been 1999,000 downloads.

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<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/platform-success>

Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel are co-founders of Boston-based Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc., an Arbora Global Company. The mission is “Leadership and Career Success:” retained search, coaching, and outplacement for senior leaders. www.stybelpeabody.com.

There are 200 Arbora Global consultants in 25 U.S. cities and 30 countries.

Bruce Farr Creative has published Maryanne and Larry’s perspective about managing your professional life: NAVIGATING THE WATERFALL. Check out the book reviews on Amazon.com.

https://www.amazon.com/Navigating-Waterfall-Search-Career-Management-ebook/dp/B01JQZ8PLU/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1476314129&sr=8-1&keywords=stybel+waterfall

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