

# DOORWAYS OF HOPE

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by Joe Smerkers

In this world of unfulfilled expectations, fractionated communities and nations, overstressed families, misguided egos, and misplaced values there exist doorways of hope. They are portals to a life of contentment. Of peace. Of balance. Of prosperity. Of freedom.

There are no fees, dues or other obligations to enter. The only requirement to pass through is a desire to improve our own personal and professional lives, and make the world a better place to live and work.

On the other side no one will tell you what to do, or how to do it. Each us takes charge of our own growth, our own transformation, our own destiny. We work at our own pace sometimes acting only on the faith that HE will guide us. We draw strength and wisdom from HIM and from those who have gone before and those who journey with us.

I first discovered the doorways about three years ago. I had been a management consultant for eleven years working to implement organizational change.

I had borrowed ideas on change from the best and the brightest, adding a few of my own. I was a master at facilitating workshops and helping people understand new ideas and models. But very little stuck, with very few people. Little real lasting change occurred. I was earning a living but failing to make a long term contribution to my clients. In my mind I was failing to do what I was getting paid for. I became exhausted and unfilled with a sense of powerlessness.

Reading the management literature I would find a story, every once in a while, about a Leader who had for various reasons undergone a transformation during their lifetime. The leading authorities on the subject called it 'transformational leadership.'

They came from all walks of life - executives, teachers, statesmen, politicians, ordinary men and women - all stepping forward through their doorways of hope to assume their

destiny's as Leaders. "Their object", as Abraham Zaleznik writes, is to "profoundly alter human, economic, and political events."

Special people, others would say, who have been given the gift of leadership. Bull. They have earned it. Throughout their lives they have taken the risks and failed. They have struggled but continued to follow their 'inner voice.'

These are not the appointed impostors that are so prevalent in positions of power today. These are the silent ones who others come to for guidance; who maintain peace amidst chaos; who, though very successful, maintain the character and humility of the servant.

What I discovered was that events in their lives had caused them to fundamentally rethink who they were; what they had become; and what they wanted to be. It was only when they had reflected on these questions and were ready to "break through denial and confront reality" that it became possible to take an honest look at their lives and remake themselves anew.

Sadly for most of us muddling through life, we stand at the doorway of hope dabbling with these issues of Self, breaking through only after "hitting bottom. "

I recently had a telephone conversation with a very dear friend who is struggling mightily. He is seeing a therapist who seems to be offering excellent help. I posed a question to my friend. "For the last 20 years people have been telling you exactly what the therapist is saying now. Why is it that you are willing to accept what she is saying but rejected what others had said in the past?" He responded, "It's because I almost jumped out of a window."

At first, still being a consultant, I tried to package what I was learning into a 'Leadership Model.' How to create leaders throughout your organization. Seminars and workshops and 360° feedback. All new and different. All based on the erroneous premise that I could save those in attendance. OOPS.

Frankly it took me two and one-half years to realize and internalize that I, Joe Smerkercs, can not change you. The best I can do is offer support when needed, and serve as an example by working on changing myself. I had found my doorway, and was ready to pass through.

I thought that I had it all figured out now. But my true transformation was just beginning.

All I had to do at first was admit to myself that I was powerless over \_\_\_\_\_ and that this was making my life exhausting and unfilled. No problem. My attempts at trying to change others certainly qualified me. I even added an addendum that 'trying to manipulate or control others' was equally unproductive.

At first I tried it out on close friends. Gradually I expanded the loop and even put it in writing. Many feared for my well being. How could I earn a living if my services did not try to change people, nor attempt to put in place systems and procedures that controlled and manipulated.

I had a choice to make. I could go back and give people what they wanted and take their money. I could be a whore. Or I could keep going and hope that a Higher Power might show me the way.

But who and where is this Higher Power? What is his name? And what price was HE going to exact? Luckily I didn't have to answer any of these questions immediately.

New friends, especially one who acted as a guide, said be patient, the understanding, the acceptance, the transformation takes time. This made me feel much better hearing it from one who had been there.

Now I had to confront the issue of GOD, of a HIGHER POWER of religion and spirituality. To be transformed, to become a true Leader did I really have to turn my will and my life over to HIM?

Believing in a HIGHER POWER was not hard although I still rebel at all the packaging we put on HIM for our own needs. It's enough for me to believe that a POWER greater than us

exists. And I am comfortable calling him GOD. Others may call him by a different name. That's their decision. Remember on this side of the doorway no one is going to try to change you or tell you what to do.

Now I must tell you how hard it has been to let go of my will and turn my life over to HIM. All my life I have been raised to make things happen. Create. Drive. Control. Manipulate. Motivate.

How would anything get accomplished if I let go and trusted HIM? How would I know what to do? To the best of my knowledge HE doesn't send email messages. Or does HE?

As I reflected on will versus HIS I just decided not to fight it. No breakthrough retreat, one-on-one dialogue, or book. One day I just let go.

What an experience. The weight of the world was off my shoulders. I had the same responsibilities as I did a day before but now they were not as unsolvable. I knew that HE would help me find a way. I began to truly understand what these words mean.

*Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow is HIS.  
Today is all we have.*

Today I am at peace. I am still trying to become a Leader. I continue to pass through my doorway daily to reflect on who I am and what I am becoming. I still question whether I am pursuing HIS will or my own ego. And I still wonder what he has in store for me. But I have faith that, whatever lies ahead HE will provide the strength to achieve my destiny.

The doorways of hope are always open. They are but one step away for any of us. They exist not at a retreat, or college, or meeting hall but within ourselves,

We need only to look inside.