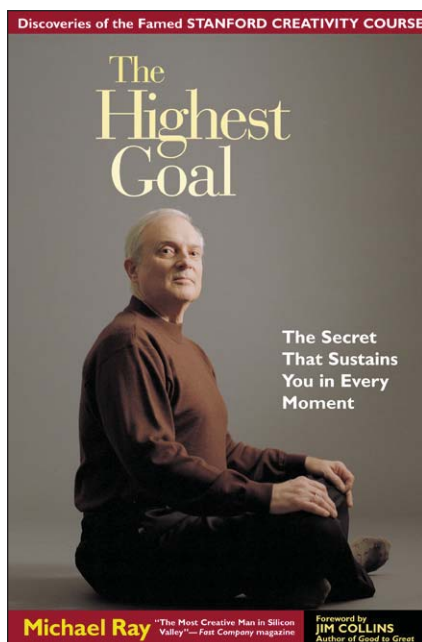


# BOOKS



## Defining Happiness



### The Highest Goal: The Secret That Sustains You in Every Moment

By Michael Ray

Reviewed by Josephine Rossi

The first image that came to mind when I started reading this book was the scene in *Hamlet* in which Lord Polonius tells his son, “To thine own self be true.”

In a lot of ways, Michael Ray’s message in *The Highest Goal* is the same as the Bard’s: self-respect through self-understanding. Ray’s message, however, is more than just doing what is good; it’s about understanding what truly motivates us and keeps us satisfied.

Our “highest goal” transcends common, material aspirations. This force is the essence of our being: It defines our happiness and makes us feel connected to something higher than ourselves. And

once we ascertain what that goal is, we can live in a way that takes us closer to true happiness. Ray devotes most of his book to leading readers down that path of enlightenment.

Defining our highest goal, however, might be the most difficult hurdle in adopting Ray’s philosophy. That’s because most of us haven’t fully recognized it as the compass in our lives. Ray vaguely describes that realization as an experience in which we know that “we are great, that we have a connection with everything, that we have potential.” While most of us have had that kind of epiphany, we’ve learned to suppress it in

search of a more socialized definition of success. The inferiority, frustration, and lack of energy we often feel in our careers or personal lives are the direct results of not being true to our highest goals and to ourselves.

Sound a bit heavy? I thought so, too. But then I realized the beauty of the book's message: There is no "right" or "wrong" way to live. Each of us has a unique course to travel through life. The trouble is that we're so used to experts spewing out perfectly planned, one-size-fits-all prescriptions—communicate better, switch careers, stop eating carbs—that it's easy to get frustrated with a book that doesn't. Ray never pretends to know his readers well enough to tell them exactly what to do. He makes simple suggestions in the hopes that something will work for each reader. I found that lack of condescension to be refreshing.

The biggest part of *The Highest Goal* is devoted to heuristics, or what Ray calls "live-withs," that can be applied to all segments of life. Most of the chapters deal with various live-withs that help readers draw upon their inner resources and strengths. For example, Ray tells readers to take a week and "have no expectations." He challenges readers to take the risk of preparing for situations without having any attachment to their outcomes. That exercise is supposed to help foster a truer understanding of the difference between expectations and goals.

Another enlightening activity deals with finding prosperity. The exercise involves assigning qualities to lists of things you love to do and hate to do. What you discover is that you dislike certain activities because they lack the qualities that your favorite activities possess. In other words, you determine the traits that need to be incorporated into your life's work.

By far, the best aspect of this book is that its author realizes that few, if any, readers are able to do a total life makeover immediately. Ray understands that most

of our thinking and opinions come from our upbringing and that they are hard habits to break. So, he assigns exercises to demonstrate how gradual changes in our behavior and attitudes help to rub out the negative influences in our lives. He teaches us, bit by bit, to listen to our inner voices instead of looking to others for approval.

So, is the information new? I'd say so, although in some ways it's akin to books that deal with the Buddhist concept of "right livelihood," such as the bestselling *The Art of Happiness*. Both books maintain that real gratification comes from work that positively influences the world around us. They also reject labeling experiences as "good" or "bad" because such preconceived expectations impede our ability to learn from them. But where Buddhist teachings require tempering natural reactions in tough situations, Ray's notion of adhering to the "highest goal" prevents readers from being in an unpleasant position in the first place. When you are true to yourself, it follows that your life will be filled with satisfaction and happiness.

For anyone considering reading *The Highest Goal*, I suggest devoting some time to it. This isn't a book that you can read for a few quick tidbits of advice. Do the exercises, reflect on your own experiences, and take each step one by one. Otherwise, I suspect that you'll become frustrated.

I give the book three and a half cups of coffee and recommend it to anyone willing to use tough introspection as a means of self-discovery.

**Editor's Note:** This book will be released in August.

*The Highest Goal: The Secret That Sustains You in Every Moment*, by Michael Ray. Berrett-Koehler Publishers: San Francisco. 178 pp. US\$24.95

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## If This, Then....

If you're looking to create a more balanced lifestyle, try these titles.

### Beyond Juggling: Rebalancing Your Busy Life



By Kurt Sandholtz, Brooklyn Derr, Kathy Buckner, and Dawn Carlson (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002, US\$16.95)

Although this book is a few years old, it con-

tinues to be great source of information for people who multitask. Instead of juggling, the authors say that we should look for a better way to balance our busy lives.

*Beyond Juggling* teaches readers alternative strategies, and they decide through case studies and examples which strategy is best for their lifestyle.

 **Development (March 2003 T+D) for more information on this book.**

### Leave the Office Earlier: The Productivity Pro Shows You How to Do More in Less Time...and Feel Great About It

By Laura Stack (Broadway Books, 2004, \$12.95)

*Leave the Office Earlier* deals with the problems of overworked professionals. It details 10 ways to deal with stress- and time-management problems. Stack addresses a variety of issues, such as distractions, email overload, and poor organization, and her solutions can be applied to both work and personal life.

### Office Feng Shui: Creating Harmony in Your Work Space

By Darrin Zeer (Chronicle Books, 2004, \$9.95)

The more than 75 tips in this book are designed to help increase productivity and promote harmony at work. Readers learn a variety of methods, including how to arrange a desk for improved concentration.