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INSIDE: We offer this special issue of the ILR in the hopes that the pieces in it – all written in the midst of the first weeks of the Covid-19 crisis, will help us come together as a field, keep learning from one another, and build collaborations, especially across field specializations and professional networks.

INTENTIONAL PRACTICE WHEN IT MATTERS MOST

By Randi Korn

Intentional Practice is about zeroing in on what is most important and reorganizing teams and work to achieve that one important thing. My work helping museums articulate the impact they want to achieve among the public was fulfilling a year ago. Today, it is on the back burner. I am not devaluing it, but first things, first. Growing up and into my 20s, I had many wonderful conversations with my grandfather. Oddly, I remember only one piece of advice he gave, maybe because it was the most important advice an elder can offer: health before wealth.

A few nights ago, I participated in a virtual #DrinkingaboutMuseums get together. We are in uncomfortable and uncommon times, yet according to participants, museum leadership was wanting their staff to operate as if we weren't. People were struggling with continuing to do what they have always done, yet they weren't sure why they were doing it—working from their dining room table while homeschooling their children when they had a chance.

Who among us can ignore what is happening? I imagine no one. So why pretend otherwise? We are at a pivotal moment where museums can still make a difference in people's lives (which is how I define impact), but before doing so, they may need to step back. If museums are to make a lasting difference, they have to prepare themselves before doing so. What do such preparations look and sound like in times like these? Prior to preparations, though, we have to acknowledge and let ourselves feel the harshness of our situation.

Viktor Frankl, author, Holocaust survivor, and “thrivor”¹ who became a neurologist and psychiatrist, wrote: “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”² With space, the power to choose will emerge with the weight of enormous responsibility. Museums have always felt a great responsibility towards their publics, but a changed environment requires different decisions. Frankl also said, “When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”³

So, after letting ourselves process utter shock, sadness, and anger, the challenge Frankl notes above is before us. Creating new practices and daily habits (the hardest part of Intentional Practice) is no small matter, and both require

fortitude and relentless focus. However, our physical and mental well-being is paramount, because without physical and mental health, little else matters. If we take care of ourselves first, then we will be able to take care of our families (as flight attendants say, “Place the mask on your face first and then help others”), and then we will be able to change our professional selves to fit the situation and do good museum work, albeit it might be different museum work. Will museums operate with a new, deeper purpose? Will they think about the needs of humanity differently? After caring for themselves and their families' health and well-being, will they become experts at fueling wellness and positive attitudes? Will they radiate new versions of themselves, and with their community, share and exchange new learnings and practices that strengthen us all? First look inward with your family and ask, what attitude do we want to exude? Which actions will we take?

FOOTNOTES

¹Elizabeth Lesser, Executive Director of the Omega Institute, refers includes “thrivor” when discussing Frankl because of the productive life he led in spite of his horrific concentration camp experience. Lesser read from Frankl's book during a Zoom gathering on 4/2/2020.

²Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. First published in 1946 in German, and it has been republished many times. Its original title, translated into English, was *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*.

³*Ibid.*

Randi Korn founded Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. (now RK&A). She is the author of Intentional Practice for Museums: A Guide for Maximizing Impact <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538106365/Intentional-Practice-for-Museums-A-Guide-for-Maximizing-Impact> She can be reached at korn@rka-learnwithus.com.

