

It's time for emotional spring cleaning

By **Stephanie Cary** Staff Writer

Spring is a season for budding flowers, but it's also a perfect time to ensure your life is blossoming.

Professional life coach and author John McKee says this season of renewal is a good time to evaluate where you are in life.

The Thousand Oaks resident is co-author of "The Plan" (Lulu, 2011) — a self-help book that aims to help people increase personal balance, career success and financial strength.

For the past 20 years, he has worked mostly with corporations and individuals as a business life coach.

"People will usually find me for career issues and then when we start getting into it, it's very clear many of the things they are facing on the job are entirely related to what's going on in their personal life," McKee said.

This is why he recommends people take a step back, once a year, to look at their three separate lives: personal, professional and financial.

Though they are intertwined, McKee said, when it comes to overall happiness, each area needs to be separately examined.

Though many people take time to reflect on their life around the new year, McKee said that isn't an ideal time, because too much is going on and resolutions are usually quick-fixes that are abandoned within weeks.

But, he said, there is a natural relationship with the environment during spring that promotes starting fresh.

"It's a good time of the year because you are kind of in-between activities — indoor, outdoor," McKee said. "So it's just a natural time to be doing your spring cleaning, which is why people do it in their house at this time. But it's a natural time emotionally, too."

During this time, McKee

said, people should look at what is working in the three areas of their lives and figure out how to make more out of those positive aspects.

He also suggests looking at negative habits that have developed — for example, dealing with a partner in a way that may no longer be appropriate or spending in a manner that no longer coincide with your budget.

Greg Larsen, a Torrance-based professional life coach, also believes people need to regularly take time to reflect on what is and isn't working in their life.

Larsen — who calls his business Happy As Humanly Possible Life Coaching — said looking at your negative patterns will help you break through them to find what truly makes you happy.

"A lot of times we get insights about what would make us happy," Larsen said. "But because of our conditioning and the patterns and habits we are already in, we never take action toward those things that would make us happier, steps toward those activities, or steps in deepening our relationships or growing closer in our relationships."

In "The Plan," McKee outlines an approach to re-evaluating and moving ahead more productively in the personal, professional and financial areas of life.

There are three questions he said you should ask yourself:

- Is there emotional baggage holding me back?
- Have I given my power to somebody else?
- Have I forgotten what I said so clearly to myself?

Then for each life aspect, he said, create a plan with a long-term goal and daily tasks to ensure you are making progress.

He isn't suggesting mapping out a 10-year plan because, he said, it's unrealistic and so many things change in life.

Rather, he advises creating a picture of what you would like each life aspect to look like.

"It's giving yourself the freedom to say, 'In 10 years, I'm going to be this old. What does my personal life look like in 10 years?'" McKee said. "Am I surrounded by friends and family or am I off in a mountain in the Himalayas?"

"What does my career look like in 10 years? Am I doing the same thing I am today except I have a promotion and I'm happy because I have a staff? Or am I into something totally different? This type of approach works very well."

Once you decide what you want your life to look like, you can start taking steps to make it happen, McKee said.

Though each life aspect is more important to different people at different times, if you are progressing toward each of your goals, you will be satisfied and successful, McKee said.

Another theme of "The Plan" is that people should take into consideration what they will do if the worst happens, like losing a job, McKee said.

Part of this involves making sure your fate has not been put into other people's hands, he said. People need to take control of their own destiny, and having a plan begins to take power away from other people.

"Most of us are kind of waiting for the right guy to show up in our life — or woman — for the boss to give us that raise that we're certainly due. And then all of a sudden the environment comes along and all bets are off," McKee said.

"Perhaps, something happens in your personal situation where the individual that you trusted was going to be there for a long period of time isn't. And so by having something that you can use as a road map for your own life allows you to deal with whatever destiny throws in your way and come out of it at least as successfully as you could have."



Though Larsen agrees that having goals and taking daily steps to reach them are important, he said happiness is living in the moment. People often become stressed about the future or have negative feelings about the past that paralyze their ability to be happy today, he said.

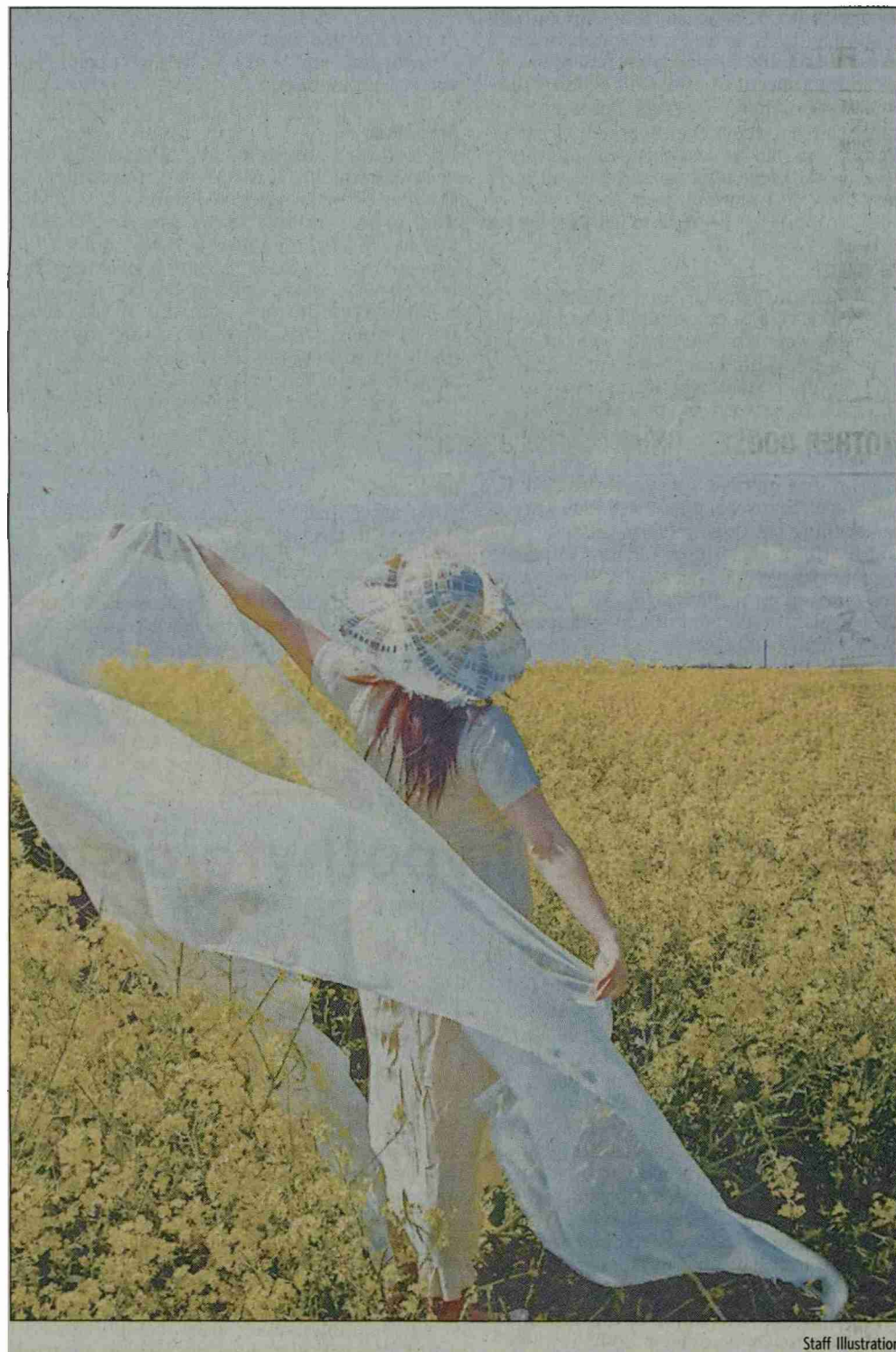
To be happy, he said, people need to explore their purpose, including what they are passionate about and what excites them. Once they determine that, they can begin taking steps in that direction and will feel like they're contributing to society at a deeper level.

But whether or not you're cleaning out your closet or gearing up to switch jobs, Larsen and McKee say now is the time to make sure your life is blossoming to its full potential.

"To follow the natural cycle of the planet, in the spring we plant seeds and in the fall we harvest. So this is the perfect time of year to take some time to reflect on what you want to create, set some goals," Larsen said.

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