

PROLOGUE: WHAT IS THE MOSAIC PRINCIPLE?

In 1953 Sir Winston Churchill won the Nobel Prize. This seemed like a fitting tribute to the esteemed British prime minister who had led the successful fight against Nazi Germany in World War II, and who had then helped restore peace across a shattered Europe.

But Churchill didn't win the Nobel Peace Prize—he won the Nobel Prize in Literature. As author of the four-volume *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* and the six-volume *The Second World War*—as well as many other published books and hundreds of speeches—Churchill was heralded “for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values.” He was celebrated for the captivating splendor of his words—but perhaps even more than that, for the inspiring example he set as a broad, multidimensional human being, committed to living a very full life.

Of course, none of us can match Winston Churchill. Yet in shaping our lives, each of us does have a choice: greater breadth or greater depth. In today's world, there are intensifying pressures on us to choose depth, because the world is increasingly obsessed with the power of narrow specialist expertise. But if we always shape our lives that way, then we all too easily become “one-trick ponies,” defined and directed by the limited parameters of our one trick—and perhaps we lose something of what makes us special and distinctive as individuals. If all of us make that same choice, then we find ourselves living in a “one-trick pony world”—and in a society much less equipped to tackle the complex, multidimensional challenges that now confront us. More of us are experts, but few of us have the coping skills to succeed in our ever-changing, more complex, and diverse society.

If, instead, we resist the siren call of ever greater specialization, if at least sometimes we move in the direction of breadth, diversity, and life outside the comfort zone, then we open up all sorts of possibilities. People who take this broader approach to their life and career—and there are more than a few of them—are following what I call the *Mosaic Principle*.

The word “mosaic” derives originally from the Greek word *mouseios*, “belonging to the Muses”—hence its artistic application. Most mosaics are composed of small, flat, roughly square pieces of stone or glass of different colors, known as tesserae; but some, especially floor mosaics, can be composed of rounded pieces of stone and are called “pebble mosaics.” In truth, any collection of small, textured, or colorful items will produce an image of eclectic breadth and diversity—but when one steps back, the visual impression is of a multifaceted unity.

As an art form, the mosaic has a long history, going back to Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC. As a metaphorical concept, the mosaic has an almost

equally durable heritage—as the defining image for a multicultural society: ethnic groups, languages, and cultures that can coexist without losing or abandoning their own individual character.

This book defines the mosaic as an organizing concept not just for society but for each of us as individuals. The essence of the Mosaic Principle is that we can each build a remarkable life and career of eclectic breadth and diversity—rather like assembling small pieces of material and placing them together to create a unified whole. When we follow this principle, we too can experience the pleasure and fulfilment of a full, well-rounded adaptable life.

When we follow the Mosaic Principle, we have more options in our career and more choices in our life. We see things through a wider lens and are better able to understand the big picture, the forest as well as the trees. We are also better equipped to adapt and apply whatever specialist skills we may have accumulated to be a more effective expert in our field, wherever that may be. When we choose this path, we are more likely to become truly *broad-minded*—tolerant, empathetic, and understanding of differences in perspective and points of view.

This is partly a matter of personality type—each of us may have an intrinsic propensity for greater breadth or depth. But mostly it's a matter of personal choice—each of us determines, by the choices we make, whether to shape our life in the direction of greater breadth or greater depth—whether to follow the Mosaic Principle and to what degree. Over the course of our lives, we can decide just to swim in our lane or to use the whole pool; to do more of the same or to change things up from time to time; to define ourselves narrowly or to bring our whole self to our life and work.

Because we have considerable discretion over how deep or how broad we become, it is important to consider why this matters and what to do about it.

That's what this book is about. So whom is this book for? Well, as they say at the start of a circus performance, it is “for children of all ages.” Whatever your current stage of life, you have important choices to make about how you build (or in some cases, rebuild) your life and career.

If you're in the early stages—at school or college or just starting your professional career—then you have an almost unlimited set of choices, at least in theory. But the temptation to focus on a narrow specialism will already be there—reinforced by well-intentioned counsel from mentors and peers. That early path toward a deep but narrow life may already seem difficult to reverse, lest you lose your foot on the ladder. This book will give you both the courage and capability to build the foundations for a broader life—and at minimum, to go broad before you go too deep.

If you're in the middle of your life and career, you may feel that your path is now set and your destination determined—you may already feel imprisoned in the golden cage of your accumulated experience and expertise. But if you are looking for something more and different, I hope you will find here both the tools and inspiration to broaden your life and career, through steps small and large.

If you're at the peak of your career, perhaps with others looking to you for leadership and direction, this book will suggest how you can get the most out of yourself and those around you—how you can retain and nurture a broad-minded approach to leadership, rich with nuance and perspective.

And if your formal career is over or soon will be, I hope you will draw from these pages a sense of further opportunity to broaden your life, capturing in every sense the scope and potential offered by “active retirement”—and proving that with time “we do get better at living.”

Indeed, each of us has the opportunity to build a broader life, whatever stage we have reached—but the task of doing so is up to us. This book shows why it matters—to each of us as individuals and to our society. And it explores, in practical, real-life terms, how to do it—by applying a set of skills that will enable personal and professional fulfillment. If you apply the Mosaic Principle, you too can have a remarkable life and career.