

If you only have a minute: Rooted and Unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. What happens when we take ourselves off of autopilot and connect with our center before diving in?

Superficial Autopilot or Conscious Authentic Intention?

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

Living life on autopilot is an easy trap to fall into. But, even as a young girl, Yvonne Higgins Leach felt connected on many levels. She was often the first one up in the morning, walking outside in nature, perhaps with a dog or cat as a companion. “That,” she recalls, “set my course for life – finding that quiet time no matter how crazy life gets.” And, it could get pretty crazy with an active household of 6 kids and two working parents. The ability to connect with something deeper stayed with her, also later when she became a communications manager for Boeing.

Yvonne graduated from college with an English degree and into a recession. Finding a job was tough so she decided to pursue a graduate degree in poetry. The message at that time was, “Get an education – that’s the first thing. Then you can get something you really care about.” Her parents encouraged her to pursue something she loved, and poetry had helped her make sense of her experiences from a very young age.

Although Yvonne didn’t know what she would do with that degree, potential employers saw she could write and she landed a job with a small company. After having her first child, she took a break and then interviewed with Boeing. Even though it’s a big company and she landed a big job, she received great training there and found people who helped her discover how she could connect with the vision and add value in her role. “People need to feel included,” she says, “and [Boeing] hit all of those pillars for me.”

Yvonne kept a checklist in her head about ways to include other people, even when their role didn’t seem that important or they didn’t have a high enough rank. “But,” she realized, “why not include the executive assistant in a strategy meeting so she understands the work we’re doing and what we’re trying to accomplish? If you include people, they feel significant, listened to, and heard. Build on their strengths. When there are gaps, work on the performance plan together.”

Then came a huge challenge. She was leading media relations for the 787 Dreamliner rollout, bringing the new airplane to market, a plane that was predicted to change the aviation industry. The world and the stakeholders were watching as the date for the rollout came and went. There were 7 program delays and she was in charge of communications. At the 4th or 5th delay, the media were getting frustrated – Boeing was losing their trust. “I believed in this airplane,” she says, “and I had to speak for the airplane and give [the media] the big picture or I wasn’t going to make it through this situation.”

She could have gone on autopilot and played the blame game but instead, Yvonne grounded herself using a connectedness practice she had learned as a young person. She built in 5 minutes each morning for a pause, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath, acknowledging that she didn’t have the answers

for the day and asking for the strength to do what was necessary to keep her grounded through the experience. She learned that “without effort, I am more than I am.”

Once she felt more deeply connected, she first acknowledged the media’s frustration and asked for guidance. She realized she needed to be creative. She held a media call featuring Boeing executives which opened the lines of communication and eased a lot of the tension, “...even if we couldn’t answer half of the questions. But, we were communicating,” she remembers.

Another opportunity to connect more deeply instead of staying on the autopilot of superficial thinking was around her retirement from Boeing. She could have worked until her planned retirement age but instead made a huge decision when her first book of poetry was published – a book she had worked on her whole life. She knew it needed PR and marketing and more attention than she could give if she continued working. She retired early. It was one of the best decisions she could have made. She launched the book and it did well.

More doors opened.

“I’ve always loved animals,” she says. “My friend was volunteering at the Humane Society...that speaks to me.” She decided to give it a try and her work there is now an important part of her life.

“The same thing with education. I’ve just felt so fortunate to be born when I was. I hit the sweet spot for being a woman in America, getting an education...all the women who plowed the road before me. Then my friend left Boeing and started a nonprofit [in education] that matched for me. I knew I could contribute there. And that’s how the breadcrumbs work for me.”

What if you connected more deeply to what is truly important to you? Then, how would you feel called to serve? Like Yvonne, you may find out you are bigger than you are.

“Every day is an opportunity and every conversation is an opportunity to connect.” Yvonne Higgins Leach
