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Journey of discovery: From Esquire editor to meditation teacher

[Jennifer Gollan](#)

AFTER STEERING Esquire magazine through a remarkable turnaround in the 1980s, Phillip Moffitt could have packed it in. Instead, the Belvedere resident devoted himself to helping countless professionals, ranging from psychologists to entrepreneurs, find spiritual awareness.

"It is your relationship to the way your life is unfolding - your personal and professional life - that matters, says Moffitt, 59. "I am not telling people who come to see me to change their lives, but to change the way they relate to it."

Simply put, he encourages the stressed business set to live in the moment instead of obsessing with their goals.

"As you free yourself from measuring how well you are doing based on outcomes, your life becomes about how well you are living the intentions of your life, and your intentions are based on your values," he says from his home office.

Moffitt's message draws on the seemingly paradoxical phases of his life: From age 22 to 40 he was the hard-charging chief executive officer at Esquire magazine, then he moved to Belvedere and founded the Life Balance Institute, a nonprofit organization that studies spiritual awareness and organizational leadership.



"I love being out in nature; it is such a great place for that," Moffitt says of Marin. "I find so many like-minded people with shared values here."

Born and raised by parents of modest means in east Tennessee, Moffitt earned an undergraduate degree in political science and psychology, and a master's in economics from the University

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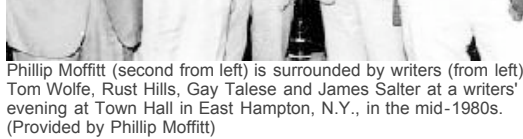
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of Tennessee. In 1968, he co-founded a campus magazine that grew into the 13-30 Corp., named for the age group it hoped to reach with magazines distributed at universities throughout the country. That venture provided part of the capital to buy Esquire magazine with a group of investors in 1979. Moffitt turned around the magazine by attracting top writers, focusing on the baby boomers and creating a "deep connection" to readers. The magazine went from losing \$500,000 a month to a readership of 750,000 by the time Hearst Corp. bought it in 1987. When he felt that he had fulfilled his obligation to his investors, Moffitt seized on the opportunity to pursue spiritual happiness through raju yoga and vipassana meditation, which he had long practiced.

"I could have become one the media kingpins, but that didn't interest me," he says. "It was clear to me that what was most important was the inner meaning of life; an inner experience in the way that we respond to life."

What began as informal counseling of friends grew into the Life Balance Institute, where he now counsels about five professionals at any one time.

Moffitt says he helps his clients assess the condition of their lives and identify their goals with various exercises. He often suggests that they adopt a routine of meditation or prayer.

When he is not counseling professionals, Moffitt travels three to four months of the year to various retreat centers around the country. Eight years ago, Moffitt joined Woodacre's Spirit Rock Meditation Center as a meditation teacher.

"One of the great advantages in the life work is that people who are quite successful are used to having their way," Moffitt says. "It has allowed me to guide them through areas of high resistance because I have credibility."

Jack Kornfield, who works alongside Moffitt as a meditation teacher at the Spirit Rock Meditation Center, says Moffitt's wide-ranging professional and life experience lends credence to his consultations with clients.

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"Phillip is able to empathize with people from a very wide range of perspectives and circumstances, people who are very poor or people with terrible family situations to CEOs of corporations," Kornfield says. "He has a tremendous range of life experiences, so he is very understanding of people from very different circumstances. He really draws on that as a teacher."

Kornfield added that despite a difficult upbringing, Moffitt has triumphed over his circumstances.

"His upbringing was quite difficult and family life was difficult," Kornfield says. "He had to figure out a way to

survive and make something good of his life. Like others who have come through difficulty, there is a natural impulse to recognize that when others are facing difficulty that this can be transformed.

"Phillip listens really well; he has a very powerful intuition," Kornfield says. "So when people talk to Phillip, he is listening and he understands them in an intuitive way. Therefore he is able to understand and meet them in ways that are very helpful."

Moffitt writes the "Dharma Wisdom" column for Yoga Journal, and he is writing a book about Dharma, a Buddhist tenet that involves finding peace within one's self.

He also teaches a free meditation class at the Yoga Center of Marin in Corte Madera each Sunday night.

Arlette Cohen of San Rafael says Moffitt's meditation class has strongly influenced the way she handles various challenges.

"He gives you stuff that you can hold in your hand and apply to your life and make the

quality of your life better," she says. "It helps clarify your own values, which helps you find how you want to behave in life.

"He doesn't tell you what to think, he puts experiences out there and says, 'Explore this and see what is true for yourself.'"

George Leonard, a Mill Valley resident and Moffitt's longtime friend, praised Moffitt for his vision.

"I enjoyed working with him," says Leonard, who has written 12 books and was a contributing editor at Esquire magazine in the 1980s. "He was bold. He would say, 'Why don't you do a special section on fitness?' It was very, very successful. But I never got the feeling he was driving for money; he was driving to say something. ... He wanted to have good journalism.

"From being a leading entrepreneur, he has come to be a spiritual person. He is often at the cutting edge of things. He has great intuition about people and social movements."

Leonard added that despite Moffitt's success, he lives a private life.

"He lives quietly," he says. "He thinks very deeply and he cares about people and things that are going on."

Moffitt says he is divorced and does not have children; he declined discuss his family, however.

Asked about the future and his goals, Moffitt demurred.

"I am someone who still works really long hours," Moffitt says. "It turns out I am just a person who really enjoys working.

"I don't particularly thing about the future," he says. "I am not trying to get somewhere. There is sort of a spaciousness about the future. I love teaching the Dharma. I want to meet each moment of life as it comes."

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