

# The Stepping Stone

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**SOCIETY OF  
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**LEADERSHIP &  
DEVELOPMENT  
SECTION**



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# The Stepping Stone

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WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

# A Counterproposal

By John West Hadley

Here is our 10th entry in the “*What Would You Do?*” series.<sup>1</sup> Write to me at [SteppingStone@JHACareers.com](mailto:SteppingStone@JHACareers.com) to tell me what you would do. In the November issue, I’ll compile the responses received (preserving your anonymity, of course), along with what actually happened in the real-life situation.

Help me craft future case studies. Write to me about your own challenging, surprising or nightmarish situations involving business, leadership, management, or any of the topic areas covered by *The Stepping Stone*, and what lessons you learned from them. I’ll collaborate with you on turning your situation into a simple case study, being careful to ensure no one is identifiable. And share your own thoughts (pro and con) on the series as a whole at [SteppingStone@JHACareers.com](mailto:SteppingStone@JHACareers.com).

## A COUNTERPROPOSAL

Susan enjoys her boss and her job at Century Life, but feels stuck. She is a career ASA, the only one at her small company. She hasn’t received a promotion for several years, while of course all of the FSA-track members of the actuarial department have been steadily moving up. Her immediate boss (Alex, who runs the actuarial department) has always been very supportive, but she doesn’t

feel that the chief actuary (Alex’s boss, Thomas) values her for a higher-level role.

Susan gets a job offer from another company in the area, and decides to accept it. When she goes to Alex to turn in her resignation, he asks her about the job. As they talk, he tells her that he would normally be quick to congratulate her and wish her well, but he doesn’t get the sense that she’s excited about this move.

They discuss her current and potential future situation for an hour and a half, and Susan shares her concerns. At the end, Alex tells Susan that it feels to him like this isn’t the right move for her, but that he will respect whatever decision she decides to make. He tells her he will talk to Thomas about a promotion if she decides to stay.

If you were Susan, what would you do? ■

### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Past issues in the series have considered whether to demote or fire a difficult employee, performance reviews and their aftermath, interview challenges from both sides of the desk, evaluating job offers, a difficult product decision, and how to build connections with the home office. To catch up on the entire series, which started in May 2013, check out back issues of *The Stepping Stone* on the Management and Personal Development (M&PD) website at [www.soa.org/mpd](http://www.soa.org/mpd).



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# A Leadership Question

By Sophia Dao

Is it better to be feared or loved? Machiavelli asked this centuries ago and came to a conclusion that “it is much safer to be feared than loved.”<sup>1</sup> No modern leaders would publicly agree with Machiavelli, but we all know of leaders who, through their actions, buy into this philosophy.

Let's consider Machiavelli's reasoning. His first premise is that people are “ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous. ...” His second premise is that people “have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails.”

Given the above two premises, Machiavelli concludes that people love “according to their own will” and fear “according to that of the prince.” Thus, a wise prince, or leader, “should establish himself on that which is in his own control and not in that of others.”

Let's check the first premise, which asserts that people are cowards and would betray you to save their own behind. This

is a statement of opinion, not of fact. Nevertheless, if you really believe this, you are entitled to your opinion.

Let's check the second premise, which states that fear trumps love when it comes to expected outcome of human behaviors. This is, in fact, psychologically sound, since it is well-established that people are more responsive to pain than to pleasure.

If you accept the above premises, is it logical to conclude that it's better to be feared than loved? I think so. That's why it's not surprising that many leaders in the past adopted this militaristic style of leaderships.

However, modern leaders need to consider another premise, which is that people can choose their leaders. Political leaders can get voted out of office (unless they are dictators). Business leaders can lose their best employees to competitors if they don't treat them well. The Machiavellian conclusion is no longer valid in light of this new reality. The Machiavellian leadership style no longer works.

So, is it better to be loved, then? Not always. When I was a new manager, I tried really hard to be liked by my staff. When



someone didn't seem to like me, I asked myself: “What am I doing wrong?” This seemingly innocent question became a destructive force that eroded my confidence and effectiveness as a manager, until someone told me to snap out of it and accept the fact that there will always be someone who doesn't like me. I still think that self-reflection is a good habit for leaders to have, but self-blaming, and the obsession with being liked, can be destructive.

I believe that it's better to be respected. In business, love is a luxury—but respect is a necessity. Respect is inspired by competence, personal character, and a strong work ethic. Those are traits that make good leaders—things that last. Love, on the other hand, is inconsistent and subjective, which shouldn't be relied upon as a foundation on which to build an organization.

As human beings, we all want to be loved, and we sometimes fantasize being feared. In a professional setting, however, we should work on gaining the respect of our employees and colleagues. Everything else is just a luxury or a fantasy. ■

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Ann Arbor: J.W. Edwards, Inc., 2006), pages 76–78.



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WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

# Responses to “Does Substance Trump Style?”

By John West Hadley

In the May issue of *The Stepping Stone*, I posed the question “*What would you do?*” to the management situation below. Here are your responses, and the real-life conclusion of the situation. I have lightly edited the responses for clarity and space. Send your own ideas for situations to pose in upcoming issues to [SteppingStone@JHACareers.com](mailto:SteppingStone@JHACareers.com).

## DOES SUBSTANCE TRUMP STYLE?

Joan is an actuary who finds any new assignment extremely stressful. She’s terrified of missing deadlines, and the uncertainty makes her very grumpy. As a result, even though she generally does a terrific job, people complain about working with her. In fact, in the five years she has been at Bingham Life, they have on three separate occasions begun the paperwork that would lead to firing her. Each time she has agreed to a corrective action plan, followed through, and has been reinstated.

Bill is the nicest actuary, who everyone loves to work with, but is incompetent. He never asks questions, and simply proceeds with his work in whatever way he has interpreted the assignment in the first place, of-

ten making mistakes and rarely meeting deadlines.

Bingham goes through a reorganization, and both Bill and Joan are moved to new units. The head of the operation warns their new managers of their shortcomings. One month later, both managers come to see him:

- Joan’s new manager tells the head that he needs to fire Joan because no one in his area can work with her.

- Bill’s new manager tells the head she can’t believe he gave Bill up, because he is so good and everyone loves him.

What would you do as either the operation head or the new managers?

*Several respondents felt Joan was more of a problem than Bill:*

### Actuary 1

I find that technical incompetence is easier to fix than character flaws. So, I’d consider Bill easier to deal with than Joan. With Bill, I can train him to be a better actuary. I can communicate with him regularly to make sure he understands his assignments and meets deadlines. If he still can’t perform competently, then I’d probably move him to a less critical role or advise him to move on. Given that he’s a nice guy, I ex-

pect to be able to build an open, honest relationship with him.

As for Joan, I wouldn’t fire her just yet. I’d find out the root of her issues. Perhaps she’s not in the right role. If deadlines stress her out, she can work on projects that have “soft” deadlines. If she doesn’t like uncertainty, then she can work on routine tasks. If nothing works, and her attitude affects other team members, then letting her go would be the right thing to do.

### Actuary 2

As Joan is in a new department, it may be best to put her under review for a couple of months before initiating the paperwork to fire her. However, based on prior behavior, it is unlikely that her interactions with others will improve. As this would now be the fourth time in five years that a manager has want-

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ed to fire her, and she persists in recurring behaviors that cannot be corrected via an action plan, it would make sense for the operations head to fire her.

Bill, too, has only been in the new role for a short time. He may not yet have had the opportunity to miss that many deadlines or make repeated mistakes, as he did in his prior roles. As a manager knowing Bill’s prior behaviors, I would pay close attention to his work style to see if any of his past behaviors reappear before making any decisions. Perhaps Bill’s new department is truly a fit for him, and he will be engaged and have a more proactive work style going forward.

### Actuary 3

If I am the operations head, and the manager wants to fire Joan, I won’t try to argue—being able to get along is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being successful. If she’s been around that long, she should have learned by now how to manage herself, which includes stress level, attitude, etc. If you’re not capable of that, then you may need to find a different role where you can be more successful.

### OTHER NOTABLE COMMENTS

Joan clearly does not work well with anyone if three people already want to fire her and now another one does.

Multiple managers want Joan to be fired—sounds like she should be fired.

If I have to choose one or the other to work with, I’d choose Bill.

Neither was properly coached and expectations weren’t properly set in advance.

*While one felt Bill was clearly more of a problem:*

### Actuary 4

I prefer substance over style. There’s really nothing you can do to fix incompetence. But you can always provide training and support to help Joan better handle stress.

*Some felt it largely came down to faulty management:*

### Actuary 5

A quote by Dr. Henry Cloud: “Remember, when you select someone, talent doesn’t equal character. Their character will ultimately determine whether their talent is usable.”

I believe style has a strong correlation to character and attitude. A person who can’t communicate well or get along with people doesn’t really catch anyone’s attention.

Both people showed talent and potential since they both got hired. Who do you want leading you? The one you like or the jerk that goes it alone?

What actually jumped out to me first was the lack of proper coaching for both employees. Neither was properly coached and expectations weren’t properly set in advance.

Ultimately, skills are easy to teach but character is a whole different ballgame.

### Actuary 6

Put Joan on another performance plan. She does good work and has responded in the past. The new manager was warned, and if they want her next issue along these lines to be fire-able make it a longer-term condition of the performance plan instead of having them always end with her emerging from it.

It could be that Bill’s new gig is one that matches what he thinks should be done so that his shortcomings are minimized. If I thought this was unlikely, I would start to question the new manager as not competent enough to see Bill’s shortcomings.

*Two gave suggestions for what the head of the operation should tell the two managers:*

### Actuary 7

To Joan’s new manager:

- You know, I did mention that she’s been a constant problem, and it wasn’t really fair to pass her along to you. Someone who has had an improvement plan three times for basically the same issue is going to fall into their old habits under stress.
- That said, the main issue is how she works with others—are there any projects that she can more or less get done independently? It is pretty expensive to have to try to find a hire at that level, and if there were a way to structure the work so that the number



of contacts are low, it may work.

- If not, I apologize for just passing the buck.

To Bill's new manager:

- That's great! We had problems with Bill in our team not due to his personality, but due to the amount of supervision he needed to get the job done. I'm glad that he's a good fit for your team.
- ... you do have somebody else review his work, right?

### Actuary 8

I might give Bill's manager my opinion, or might not, depending on our relationship. There's nothing wrong with saying "Yes, everybody liked him here too, but we had a few problems (cite specific examples to give new manager an idea what to look for), so I'm glad he's gone. I'd keep an eye on (mention performance measures—quality, deadlines, whatever), but if he's solved those problems, he's certainly a nice guy with a great attitude, so I'm glad to hear it's working out."

Now it's no longer my problem.

*And one respondent advocated patience:*

It doesn't seem like anything needs to be done for Bill—he's now in a team where his manager thinks he's great. Either the manager hasn't noticed yet, or he's in a role that suits him better than the old one.

It sounds like time for yet another sit-down with Joan to see how she can fit into the new team. Don't fire her a

month into the new job—the corrective plans must have shown some improvement in the past, try another one for the new team. This should be a last chance though—people get away with being obnoxious when they're irreplaceable, and she isn't anymore, so if she can't sort it out now she should be shown the door.

### WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

Joan reacts positively to coaching, but probably hasn't received consistent coaching. What likely happens is that she reacts positively to coaching, and her managers then feel like they are doing her a favor by letting up. It isn't a favor to her or anyone else.

Joan knows that she is not always a people-friendly person and she needs the reminder about how to behave better. At the next yearly review, her new manager gave her a negative review, telling her honestly how she needed to change. The result was that she made the changes requested. She gained confidence from the frank feedback and offered to help others working on similar projects.

It's questionable whether she should ever play a leadership role, but not everyone needs to be a leader. Even as actuaries, we need workhorses and Joan is a workhorse. A workhorse job sitting in the corner without stressful deadlines might work fine. But is there such a thing?

Bill's manager left the company, leaving Bill reporting to yet another person. He was thrilled when Bill met his quarterly

deadlines for the first time in three years, assuming this was due to his superior leadership. However, the week after the deadlines, it was discovered that all of the numbers reported were wrong. Bill's newest manager then required that all numbers be peer-reviewed before leaving the area.

Bill does not respond well to coaching, but is so very nice that if he gets through one quarter without mistakes, everyone assumes the problem is solved and they stop checking. Everyone always believes that he is on the road to redemption, even though he has only had one quarter with deadlines met and one quarter mistake free—not the same quarter.

It is safe to say that both employees are treading on iffy ground, but both are believed by their current managers to be on the path to redemption. ■



John Hadley is a career counselor who works with job seekers frustrated with their search, and professionals

struggling to increase their visibility and influence. He can be reached at [John@JHACareers.com](mailto:John@JHACareers.com) or 908.725.2437. Find his free *Career Tips* newsletter and other resources at [www.JHACareers.com](http://www.JHACareers.com).

# Chaucer on Choosing Advisers

By Mary Pat Campbell

In a regular week, I commute over 700 miles by car; when I'm teaching evening classes, over 800 miles. As you can imagine, this means I have a lot of uninterrupted time as I cruise along I-84, and I have been choosing very long audiobooks to pass the time away. Often I pick works with which I am very well-acquainted, but sometimes I'm surprised by something I thought I knew well.

Specifically: *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer.

I got an excellent unabridged audiobook<sup>1</sup> version of *The Canterbury Tales*, based on my favorite modern English translation.<sup>2</sup> Usually when I read *The Canterbury Tales*, I do a “greatest hits” version, reading only those stories I find the most entertaining. But on a long car trip, with the audiobook being one, long, uninterrupted presentation (other than switching CDs, which rarely came at a break between tales), I had no choice but to listen to everything as it went by.

Most of the tales I skip in reading tend to be tedious, given the medieval approach to many things. The Parson's “Tale” that ends *The Canter-*

*bury Tales* is a very long sermon on the nature of sin. There are actually many amusing parts of that sermon, such as the complaints on lascivious clothing (the men's tights are too tight!), but it's not much of a tale.

And the tale I am about to convey, the Tale of Melibee, is of this unending medieval nature. In all its unending glory, it's quite a bore.

But there is a good deal of wise advice in the Tale of Melibee. It would make a very good PowerPoint presentation on choosing advisers.

## THE CONTEXT OF CANTERBURY

While Chaucer is often considered the “Father of English Literature,”<sup>3</sup> he worked in multiple languages. He was a man of the 14th century, dying as the century ended in 1400. The primary literary languages in England at the time were French and Latin; Chaucer knew both (as well as other European languages) very well. Chaucer was known for translating popular Latin and French works into the English of the time—Middle English, the English of the post-Norman Invasion period, having heavy French influences.



Many of the original sources of *The Canterbury Tales* came from non-English origins, and the genius of Chaucer was not so much the invention of the stories, but the characterization of the pilgrims to Canterbury as well as how he told the tales.

As John Dryden wrote in the 17th century:<sup>4</sup>

He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his Canterbury Tales the various manners and humours (as we now call them) of the whole English nation, in his age. Not a single character has escaped him.

The point was that pilgrimages to Canterbury were popular at the time of Chaucer's writing, with people of all different stages of life making the trek

for various purposes. The Parson and his brother, the Plowman, are of humble station; the Wife of Bath is exceedingly rich but of middling station even so; the clerical class has its own hierarchies with the Monk and the Prioress being at the height, and the Pardoner and the Summoner being very shady functionaries.

One of the main modes of entertainment at the time was storytelling (just as video is one of ours). The host of the pilgrimage, an innkeeper named Harry Bailer, proposes a tale-telling contest, which *The Canterbury Tales* is supposed to represent. The person of highest social station, the Knight, starts the tales off with a heightened classical era story.

Chaucer sets himself as a fictional pilgrim, and he even gets a chance to tell multiple tales ... because his first one found little



favor. After the fictional Chaucer starts by telling an awful doggerel verse called the Tale of Sir Thopas, the host Harry Bailey interrupts him and tells Chaucer his verse, literally, “is nat worth a toord.”<sup>5</sup>

At this point, the fictional Chaucer tells the prose Tale of Melibee, which is based on a French work based on a Latin original (how very medieval). It ran for over 1,000 lines in the original manuscript ... much longer than the original sources.

## MELIBEE AND A CALL TO WAR

The Chaucerian version of the Tale of Melibee is a story of a rich and powerful man whose wife and daughter were attacked by three of Melibee’s enemies.<sup>6</sup> Melibee’s wife is beaten, and his daughter has several very serious wounds. Melibee calls a counsel of men to advise whether he is to go to war.

The bulk of this 1,000-line-plus “tale” is the arguments for and against, much of which take a heavily medieval Christian flavor. But the most interesting parts are on **how** to pick advisers and **how** to take advice.

In the first counsel, these are the advisers and what they say (my summaries):

- Surgeons: We don’t know about war, but we know about healing people and will immediately see to your daughter’s wounds.
- Physicians: As illnesses are cured by essences opposed, men should cure wrongs via war.

But the most interesting parts are on **how** to pick advisers and **how** to take advice.

- Secret enemies: Oh, mighty Melibee, you are so powerful, you should bring your might down on your enemies.
- Wise advocates: War is very serious, and an error in choosing would be very dangerous. The most immediate action should be to protect yourself and your own, building up your defense, but taking time before deciding to go to war. Please give us time to give you better advice.
- Young men: WAR! WAR! WAR!
- Old wise men: These people calling for war do not have any experience of it, and do not realize how serious it is. Once war begins, it may last such a long time that children not yet born will die in the cause. Before choosing to begin, you must take your time.

The old man acting as a representative continues his counsels by giving reasons, but he is interrupted by multiple parties, and he realizes nobody opposed to his perspective is listening. As he sees his continuing argumentation only annoys his listeners, he sits down and stops talking.

Finally, the public counsel is followed up by private conversations, in which Melibee hears from people who give advice in private opposite from that they gave in public.

## THE CONTEXT OF CHAUCER

We may know Chaucer best in his literary role now, but during his lifetime, he had many more roles. He had been in the English government since a youngster, starting out as page in the household of the Countess of Ulster in 1357. By adulthood, he had connections to the highest people in the court, including three successive English kings. Chaucer had great experience with war himself, as well as giving counsel, specifically with regard to the aptly named Hundred Years War. As that war did not end until over 50 years after Chaucer’s death, he definitely understood that a war begun may not end for generations.

Chaucer held many important government positions, including comptroller for customs at the Port of London. He had been clerk of King’s works—in charge of infrastructure projects, such as the repair of Westminster Palace, an important undertaking for the time.

So while many know Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales* for its

sexual farces and fart jokes, as well as a representation of medieval English society, Chaucer well understood how to give and judge counsel in official matters. This may explain why his Tale of Melibee is so much longer than his original sources.

## CHOOSING ONE’S ADVISERS

Back to the Tale of Melibee: After the initial fits, and Melibee’s obvious desire to go to war, one gets an extended dispute between Melibee and his wife, Prudence.

I am definitely not detailing the whole exchange—with references to biblical and classical authorities, as well as Melibee stating he cannot possibly take advice from a lowly woman—but here is the heart of Prudence’s advice:

- It is not foolish to change a decision if you determine circumstances are different from what you originally thought. [Think sunk costs!]
- Do not ask for advice while angry, as you will not judge the quality of advice well.
- If you have made a decision internally, and ask for counsel, do not let it be apparent what advice you want, because people will naturally change their advice to meet your preference as opposed to giving you new information and advice. Be open to other perspectives or just don’t ask for advice.
- Ask for advice from people you trust. Do not seek advice

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

from people you know to be your enemies.

- Stay away from advice of the foolish, inexperienced, flatterers, and people who say something different in private than in public.
- Don't ask for advice from servants—they may fear you more than give you useful advice.

Prudence then goes on to evaluate the advice Melibee had received in his original counsels. Unsurprisingly, she backs the old wise man who had been forced to sit down and be silent.

Ultimately, Prudence convinces her husband to take her own advice, and she brokers a peace between the two sides. It ends on a high Christian note, with Melibee forgiving his enemies, but only after they have shown they are repentant, willing to pay for their wrongs. And they live happily ever after!

#### CHAUCER'S RELEVANCE CENTURIES LATER

Chaucer has been dead for more than 600 years. What can we learn from his advice that is useful in our working lives today?

Even though it can be rough going through such a long and medieval tale, with multiple references to Cicero, Job, Jesus and Ovid (to name the most prominent), we can still use this advice, even if we're not going to war. I have boiled it down to two main principles:

Don't ask for advice if you have already decided and are only looking for confirmation.

1. In asking advice, one needs to be in a proper emotional frame of mind. If one is too emotionally charged (in the case of Melibee, he was too angry), one may ignore unwanted advice and not rationally weigh that which would be valuable. Don't ask for advice if you have already decided and are only looking for confirmation.
2. Judge well those who give you advice. There are many reasons people may give you poor advice, and you need to be aware when judging the advice. Make sure those giving advice share your goals and have enough knowledge and experience to give you useful advice.

I was not expecting a master class in seeking and taking advice when I set out for work on the day I ran into this tale, which not only do I usually skip, but many compilers of *The Canterbury Tales* simply replace with a summary.

While I am not able to converse with my fellow pilgrims on I-84 between New York and Hartford, telling them what I have learned in my travels, I hope you, my fellow actuarial pilgrims, have gotten something useful out of Chaucer as well.

ASIDE: The Tale of Melibee is tedious. I listened to it only due to my insane commute.

If you want my “Best Hits of The Canterbury Tales” list it is:

- The Prologue
- The Miller's Tale
- The Sailor's Tale
- The Wife of Bath's Prologue & Tale (shorter than the prologue, I think)
- The Pardoner's Tale
- The Franklin's Tale.

To quote my own review of *The Canterbury Tales*:<sup>7</sup>

Chaucer is so great, not because he comes up with original stories, or even original characters—but that he has selected well to show the variety of God's plenty, and gives each a fair shake. For all that Chaucer “retracts” his naughty stories at the end of the book, they are still in the book.

The naughty stories are the most fun, I will say. ■

#### ENDNOTES

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# Manage Tension to Create Influence

By John West Hadley

It's interesting how different audiences receive the same message.

I presented on "The Influential Conversation" at the New Jersey Risk and Insurance Management Society (RIMS) in October, and got a terrific response (rated 4.7 out of 5 in all nine rating categories). I've also received a good response from a diverse set of audiences over the past year and a half.

Then I presented the topic to a large group of job seekers in Princeton, and it was clear from the tenor of the questions that there were several people struggling with a core concept for building influence: tension management.

Tension management is critical to every discussion where you are trying to have influence, and it is often overlooked or downplayed.

In a nutshell, the basic concept is that there are two primary types of tension: relationship tension and buying tension. As the candidate in a job interview, you want to lower relationship tension, and raise buying tension. For details, see the article I wrote for the February 2011 issue of *The Stepping Stone*: "Managing Tension in the Interview."<sup>1</sup>

While it seemed like most understood raising the buying tension, they struggled with the concept of reducing relationship tension.

I think the reason was:

- This critical concept doesn't get much press, so most haven't thought about it.
- Many candidates are so stressed about just giving good answers to questions that it is too much for them to think about managing the interviewer's psychology.
- Many approach the interview giving the other party all of the power, and are hesitant to attempt to level the playing field.
- Some need a deeper frame of reference to truly "get it."

So here's my attempt to address that last point.

Think about what happens when you first meet someone. You don't know Bill, and your focus is on trying to find out about him and establish some common ground. What level of conversation are you likely to have at that stage? Is there a lot of trust and a basis for deep conversation?

And if this is an interview, don't you think Bill (the hiring manager) is also feeling significant tension? He's got to decide if you are someone he wants to work with every day, and his success and professional reputation depend on good hiring decisions.

Once you and Bill get to know and like each other, the conversation moves to an entirely different level. Now there is a basis for trust, and you both are likely to open up much more. At this stage whatever statements you make are going to be seen in the light of that trust, and will have much more power and influence.

Isn't this where you want any influential conversation to be? Shouldn't your goal be to get there as soon as possible?

Here is another way to look at this: Imagine you have joined in on a conversation at a Society of Actuaries networking reception, with a group of actuaries you don't know well. Your discussions with them are likely to be fairly superficial and guarded as you feel your way through to the common ground where you can get comfortable.

On the other hand, when you are with people you already know well (and like), you are going to be much more open, and willing to share your deeper self. Your focus is going to be on the conversation, not the relationship.

So to have a truly influential conversation, you want the relationship side of the equation

to be completely comfortable, so that it's not even a question. You don't want either of you to even have to think about whether you can work together effectively, will enjoy seeing each other in the office, and will make a great team. You want this relationship "tension" to be so low that there is no issue at all.

I'm interested in your own thoughts:

Does this concept make sense to you?

What other thoughts do you have on how to express it?

Where else would you apply it?

Send your answers to [SteppingStone@JHACareers.com](mailto:SteppingStone@JHACareers.com). ■

## ENDNOTE

<sup>2</sup> Available online at [www.JHACareers.com/ArticlesSearch.htm](http://www.JHACareers.com/ArticlesSearch.htm).



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# Busy! So Busy! Crazy Busy!

By Kelly Hennigan

*“If you live in America in the 21st century you’ve probably had to listen to a lot of people tell you how busy they are. It’s become the default response when you ask anyone how they’re doing: ‘Busy!’ ‘So busy.’ ‘Crazy busy.’ ... And the stock response is a kind of congratulation: ‘That’s a good problem to have,’ or ‘Better than the opposite.’”*

—Tim Kreider, essayist and cartoonist

Most of us have been on both sides of the above conversation a number of times. It may be in the workplace with a colleague in the hallway between meetings, or perhaps it is an exchange with a long-lost friend whom you bump into at the grocery store. In any case, at some point in our lives, we all have likely fallen into what Tim Krieder calls “The Busy Trap” in his synonymous 2012 *New York Times* article. But, the question is, are we really as busy as we think we are? Let’s examine some myths related to busyness and productivity.

## MYTH 1: BUSYNESS = PRODUCTIVITY

*“Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must*

*be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. Seeming to do is not doing.”*

—Thomas Edison, inventor

Consider the term “busy” vs. “productive.” How do you categorize the majority of your day-to-day activities? Busyness is often self-imposed and related to work assignments, volunteer activities, and other social or personal commitments that we have put upon ourselves. These days, even children of the busy bees fall into the “Busy Trap” as they too are encouraged to spend any spare moment in academic, sports-related, arts-

based, or other extracurricular activities.

It is obvious that many of these compulsions more likely fall into the “busy” category than the “productive” category. The following suggestions can assist with managing the busyness to allow you to strive toward greater productivity:

- Cultivate the ability to say “no.”
- Create time buffers, so that you avoid the hectic feeling of being rushed.
- Focus in on the priority items.

It is easy to get congested with items that are lower down on the priority list. When you start to feel worried or overwhelmed, take it as a sign to refocus and consider rebalancing your priorities. It may even help to concentrate on only the priorities—rather than the entire list of to-dos—and in doing so, repeat to yourself, “I’m

not that busy!” Then, create a “capture list” of all the other miscellaneous ideas and work that you have not yet had the opportunity to prioritize so that they are documented and not rattling around in your head as a distraction.

Consider setting aside time each week to contemplate your professional and personal busyness level. What occurred that was worthwhile? What was a colossal waste of time? How can you better strive for less busyness and more productivity going forward?

According to Kreider, “Busyness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness; obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day.”

## MYTH 2: TECHNOLOGY = PRODUCTIVITY

*“Technology can be our best friend, and technology can also be the*



*biggest party pooper of our lives. It interrupts our own story, interrupts our ability to have a thought or a daydream, to imagine something wonderful, because we're too busy bridging the walk from the cafeteria back to the office on the cell phone."*

—Stephen Spielberg, filmmaker

Technology has given us a crutch to allow us to think we are busier (and perhaps even more important) than we actually are. Our phones are continuously going off with beeps and buzzes from those who are trying to reach us, and we have myriad alarms set on our Outlook and iCal calendars to remind us of all the upcoming events. We thus are continuously checking our technological devices to ensure we don't miss a text message or email, or neglect to update our status on whichever social media site happens to be en vogue.

As such, technology can be a continuous distraction, causing us to become unfocused, and resulting in our brains darting off in any number of different directions. If we are able to take the time to focus, and get away from the technological distractions, that will ultimately enable us to strive toward more meaningful work and a quality work product.

Consider the following staggering results from a Tecmark survey of 2,000 smartphone owners about their tech habits:

- Average owners use their phones for 3 hours and 16 minutes a day.

- Many of us pick up our phones more than 1,500 times each week.
- The average user checks personal emails and Facebook before getting out of bed.
- Almost 4 in 10 users admitted to feeling lost without their devices.

In order to rise above the busyness to achieve ultimate productivity, it is essential to take an occasional break from technology. Doing so will enable us to reach a more productive state and also prime our mindset for creativity and innovation. In the words of author Harper Lee in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "There are just some kind of men who're so busy worrying about the next world they've never learned to live in this one."

### MYTH 3: BUSY = BETTER

*"Never be so busy as not to think of others."*

—Mother Teresa, missionary

Despite what I have written, there are times when we are truly busy and all of our work and personal obligations collide to create the perfect storm of busyness. However, overuse of the "I'm too busy" line is a common excuse to avoid interaction with others. If you find yourself using this alibi, you may want to reflect on the validity of your response. Are you truly too busy, or are you instead just not interested?

For example, rather than brushing off a co-worker by saying "I'm too busy," perhaps instead try, "That is not on

Technology has given us a crutch to allow us to think we are busier (and perhaps even more important) than we actually are.

my priority list right now, but I expect it will be next week and we can talk then." Similarly, with a friend you could say, "My schedule is limited right now, but how about if we each skip the gym one day this week and meet up for tennis?" Both of these responses will allow a more symbiotic relationship to be maintained. The recipient feels considered and valuable to the coexistence of the relationship—particularly as those who are on the receiving end of an "I'm too busy" line may realize where they fall on the deliverer's priority list, thus ultimately damaging the relationship.

Falling into the "Busy Trap" can result in further isolation on a personal level as well, due to becoming more and more self-absorbed with our busyness. The continued excuse of busyness promulgates feelings of remoteness and inaccessibility. Socrates said, "Beware the barrenness of a busy life," as relatives or friends might revert to the "we knew you were busy and didn't want to bother you" justification.

In summary, consider the above three myths and the following takeaways to avoid falling into the "Busy Trap":

- Weigh the busyness vs. productivity of your daily activities.

- Contemplate the interruptions of and reliance on technology. Is technology contributing to your busyness and stifling your creativity?

- Reflect on your professional and personal relationships and the "busyness" excuse.

Author Jane Austen stated, "Life seems such a quick succession of busy nothings." I think that most of us would agree that we would prefer a life of productive somethings to busy nothings. ■



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# Under-demeciated?

By Chad Carden

There are times when writers, including those writing movie scripts, take poetic license and invent a word to make a point. “Under-demeciated” is just such a word.

As far as I know, the word was invented for the movie “Bed-time Stories,” starring Adam Sandler, who uses it to describe to his niece and nephew how he feels about his job and how his boss neglects showing him gratitude or appreciation.

A few of you reading this article might be able to relate. And if you can, then you don’t have to take a huge leap to get to the next question.

What are some of the main reasons you think people might quit their job? Is it the pay? Do they start to dislike the company? Can they no longer tolerate the work environment? Or maybe they don’t see how they fit in?

These are all valid reasons for quitting a job, but none of them is the primary reason. The U.S. Department of Labor recently conducted a survey of 10,000 employees at Fortune 1000 companies, and the survey said ... the No. 1 reason why people quit their job is **lack of appreciation!** Severe under-demeciation if you would ask Mr. Sandler.

The American Management Association estimates the low-end cost of replacing an employee is 30 percent of his or her salary, while other research estimates 150 percent of salary to replace a manager or person in a leadership position.

These statistics are financially staggering, but unfortunately issues regarding appreciation are not the top priority of most companies or organizations. Maybe they should be!

If you are a person of influence in your company, what kind of environment do you want to create? Is making your employees feel appreciated a top priority? If you are showing gratitude, how? Does what you are doing make sense and is it effective?

Here are some ideas for making your team feel appreciated:

- Don’t be afraid to stop and have some fun. This will let them know that you are human, and make them feel more connected to you. Movies, field trips, company picnics—they will appreciate you for these periodic occasions!
- Take the time to know how each person likes to be recognized. Just ask. They will appreciate your attention to detail!



- Empower your employees! Give them the autonomy of decision-making within their position; this is why you hired them! Make them feel like they are the experts at what they do; this will instill more confidence in them and in you as their leader!
- Periodically take the pulse of your team. Use a quick survey and create questions that will do two things for you: 1) give you some information about how they feel about their job; and 2) give you some insight on any issues or obstacles of which you were unaware.
- Pay attention to those who are working late, going the extra mile, or showing an extra dedication to the job.

Here’s a link to more ideas from *Forbes* magazine:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kevininkruse/2013/03/01/25-low-cost-ways-to-reward-employees/>

Employees who feel appreciated are an integral part of a positive, effective, and efficiently produc-

tive work culture! Some of the most notable companies like Orbitz, Scottrade and Nokia have mastered creating a culture of appreciation for their employees!

Breaking down the old school mentality that discourages warm, fuzzy types of tactics is a challenge for many companies in the corporate world. Maybe you can find a way to make it rain gumballs (also from “Bed-time Stories”).

The bottom line is: Happy employees are productive employees! ■



Chad Carden has been consulting, coaching, and speaking with companies to improve their No. 1 asset—their

people—for 14 years. He is an accomplished author of two books. Chad’s work has been translated in over 10 languages, and has also been featured in many media outlets.

# Making a Case for Servant Leadership

By Marcel Schwantes

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The term “servant leadership” might prompt a negative reaction from some insurance carrier leaders who think the philosophy is too soft for a corporate setting. But millennials entering the workforce seek companies with leaders who empower their employees, suggests executive coach Marcel Schwantes. Here he lists 10 characteristics of servant leaders.*

**T**he question is one I have heard countless times over the years in my capacity as an executive coach: “What would you say are the traits that make a great leader?”

It’s not exactly a question that can be answered while standing in line at Starbucks.

And it’s certainly a question that deserves exploration. But first, let’s acknowledge that the topic of leadership is as wide and deep as the Grand Canyon. We need to narrow it down to a proven framework that practically works. I have one: servant leadership.

Now, before you roll your eyes and grumble “that’s too soft for my corporate setting,” let me expand on what I feel is the best leadership philosophy in the world based on more than 40 years of research.

In framing this approach and winning your hearts, I hope to ultimately make a case for developing your leadership teams. But first, let me give you some really good news:

- The timeless principles of servant leadership have proven to meet the tough challenges facing those in leadership positions today, wherever your level on the org chart happens to be.
- There are proven methods, tools and resources avail-

able on how to operate like a servant leader not only in philosophy—or head knowledge—but in behavior and actions as well. (Ask me about that and I’ll be happy to share some ideas and solutions straight out of our methodology.)

- The final piece of good news is that the skills of servant leadership can be learned and applied by most people who have the will and intent to change, grow and improve. It’s no longer, “Oh, I don’t have the natural gifts of a leader,” or “I’m not a people person,” or “I’m not extraverted enough,” or “I think with my left brain.” I often hear these excuses.

The reality is everyone can learn and apply the principles of servant leadership.

If you’re keeping up with the trends, what we are finding is that organizations around the world are changing their attitudes toward leadership, people and relationships. Leadership has been written and talked about for decades, with great authors defining it in different ways, calling it different things. In the end, most of these folks have been talking about the same things—the simple truth that leadership and life are about people and relationships. Consequently, servant leadership has emerged over the last 20 or 30 years on a grand scale in some of the most admired and successful companies on the planet.

And if you remember your ninth grade history books, history tells us that during the Industrial Revolution right on up

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16



till the first half of last century, most organizations treated workers as tools or “cogs in a machine.” Workers supported those at the top of the hierarchy, who had all the control and power.

In that world of manufacturing, those early autocratic approaches worked. Leaders at the top understood market conditions and made decisions based on information that was not necessarily important to those lower-level employees on the factory assembly line, who had specific functions within the organization.

But as we entered the information age and competition became global, things changed. New forms of leadership began to emerge and take hold. We entered a new era.

Usher in a new generation of millennials who are entering the workforce, seeking more autonomy, purpose and meaning in their daily work—they are social and experiential creatures, have you heard?—and we are finding that traditional leadership no longer works. We have entered the relationship era, so collaborative leadership is now the future of business.

This is great news for servant leadership.

So, finishing up our history lesson, toward the end of the Industrial Revolution in the 20th century, there was a major shift in leadership research because of one man—Robert Greenleaf. A spectacled AT&T management trainer and tireless leadership researcher and author for more than 40 years,

he was the first to coin the term “servant leadership” in the corporate setting and is known as the founder of the modern servant leadership movement.

His most important work was published in 1970, a legendary essay titled “The Servant as Leader.” He writes, “The servant leader is servant first. ... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.”

In his research, Greenleaf realized that the organizations that thrived had leaders who acted more as supportive coaches and served the needs of both employees and organizations. As he once put it: “The organization exists for the person as much as the person exists for the organization.”

This was not a popular idea at the time. It may not even be so today.

In his essays, Greenleaf discussed the need for a better approach to leadership, one in which serving others—including employees, customers and others—was to be the highest priority of an organization. He stressed that servant leadership emphasizes a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community and the sharing of power in decision-making. These were unheard-of ideas during that time.

Greenleaf always claimed that although he was informed by his Christian ethic, servant leadership was for people of all faiths and all institutions, secular and religious.

Today, scores of colleges and universities include servant leadership in their curricula, and hundreds, if not thousands, of successful companies embrace and practice servant leadership, including some that have made *Fortune* magazine’s list of “100 Best Companies to Work For”<sup>1</sup> for the last five years. Here is a short list of companies that have been identified as servant leadership companies.

- SAS Institute, a software firm, was No. 1 on the list in 2011. Last year it ranked No. 2, and this year, No. 5.
- Wegmans Food Market was No. 3 in 2011 and No. 7 in 2015.
- Zappos.com, the online retailer, was No. 11 in 2012 and has been on the list consistently every year.
- Nugget Market was No. 8 in 2011 and No. 26 in 2015.
- REI, the outdoor equipment retailer, has cracked the top 10 over the years and remained in the top 100 in 2015.

In fact, one-third of the top 35 companies on 2014’s *Fortune* list practice servant leadership, according to my research. Most of these are household names: Marriott, Federal Express, Southwest Airlines, AFLAC, Starbucks, Men’s Wearhouse, Nestle, ServiceMaster, United Parcel Service and General Electric.

After some years of carefully combing over Greenleaf’s original writings, Larry Spears—a leadership thought leader and

prolific author—studied everything that Greenleaf put out and identified a set of 10 characteristics that he views as being central to the development of servant leaders.

Spears found that these elements (listed below) include the capability to transform an organization. But what thought leaders in servant leadership note is that it takes a lot of work and time and hard conversations. It means inspiring stakeholders, empowering employees, establishing foundational changes and motivating people throughout an organization to want to be of service to others. Everybody has to be on the same page.

As I go over these elements, consider where you may be in your own journey as a leader. While I may be presenting theory to give you the full framework for servant leadership, these are characteristics you can apply today in your work as manager or executive to transform your culture.

**1. Listening:** Listening leads the list because it is a crucial yet frequently absent trait in leaders who are self-oriented rather than devoted to service.

Greenleaf wrote that “a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first.” He said, “True listening builds strength in other people.”

Practically speaking, he’s talking about leaders who listen to understand. Servant leaders respond by listening first, and they listen



before they speak, as they speak, and after they speak.

2. **Empathy:** Empathy is really an extension of listening. A servant leader attempts to understand and empathize with others—to put oneself in the other person’s shoes.

This means listening without judgment. And empathetic leaders consider workers not only as employees but also as people who need respect and appreciation for their personal development. This generates a competitive advantage.

3. **Healing:** What Spears meant by “healing” is that leaders recognize the opportunity to help make whole those with whom they come in contact. A servant leader tries to help people solve their problems and conflicts in relationships, because he/she wants to develop the skills of each individual. This leads to the formation of a business culture in which the working environment is characterized by dynamic, fun engagement and no fear of failure.

4. **Awareness:** Servant leaders also have a strong sense of what is going on around them. They are always looking for cues from their opinions and decisions. They know what’s going on and will rarely be fooled.

They’re also very self-aware. The works of Greenleaf and Spears, in fact, focus more on self-awareness (presence of mind) than external

A servant leader tries to help people solve their problems and conflicts in relationships, because he/she wants to develop the skills of each individual.

awareness. You cannot have what they describe as the tenets of awareness without having self-awareness.

5. **Persuasion:** Servant leaders do not take advantage of their power and status by coercing compliance. Instead, servant leaders try to convince and use influence. They are effective at building consensus within groups.

6. **Conceptualization:** This is the ability to look at a problem by thinking beyond the day-to-day realities. Greenleaf said that the servant leader can conceive solutions to problems that do not currently exist.

Servant leaders see beyond the limits of the operating business today and focus on long-term operating goals.

7. **Foresight:** Foresight is the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation. It means understanding the lessons from the past, the realities of the present and the likely consequence of a decision for the future.

8. **Stewardship:** This is a commitment to serving the needs of others and also of the organization and its mission as a whole. Greenleaf’s view of all institutions was one in which CEOs, staff

and stakeholders all play significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society.

9. **Commitment to the growth of people:** This is a demonstrated appreciation and open encouragement of others and their growth. The servant leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything in his/her power to nurture the personal and professional growth of employees and colleagues.

In practice, this can include things like having a budget for personal and professional development, taking a personal interest in ideas and suggestions from everyone, encouraging worker involvement in decision-making, and even helping a laid-off employee find another position.

10. **Building community:** Servant leaders should seek to identify some means for building community among those they work with. They are what I call compassionate collaborators. They show appreciation and praise employees often for their contributions. They have a personal interest in the ideas of others and want to involve workers in decision-making.

Armed with this list, you can now reflect on whether—and how—you may have modeled some of these approaches in the last 24 hours. Take a moment. How have you been a servant leader based on the brief descriptions given?

Now imagine if we could think this way moving forward in life and in our work. What if this became our motto? How would this change our role as leaders of our workforces, or even at home as spouses or parents?

*This is the introduction to a six-part series on Servant Leadership as the premier leadership philosophy suggested by the author, and modeled in “Best Places to Work” companies across the country. These skills that executives can learn to position themselves among the ranks of the best leaders will appear in monthly articles on the Carrier Management website. ■*

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> <http://fortune.com/best-companies/>.



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to help leaders influence change, build high-trust cultures and achieve optimal organizational health. Reach him at [info@coachmarcel.com](mailto:info@coachmarcel.com) or visit [www.leadershipfromthecore.com](http://www.leadershipfromthecore.com) for more information.

# Is It Time to Make Yourself Uncomfortable?

By Darcy Eikenberg

**A**fter 15 years in the same house, I recently packed up and moved.

I'm no stranger to change. And while I know intellectually this change will be good, the bottom line is that this change made me uncomfortable, more than I've been in a long time.

And it's exactly what I needed.

## WHY MAKE YOURSELF UNCOMFORTABLE?

When I started looking at making such a major change, one question kept playing over and over in my head:

### WHY?

As in:

- *Why would you put yourself through this?*
- *Why spend your time, money, energy, resources, sanity?*
- *Why isn't what you have now enough?*
- *Why do you think making a change will be any better than what you have now?*

If you've ever faced any uncertainty in your work and life, I bet you've asked yourself the same questions.

As I took a hard look at my own "whys," I realized there were three answers that come up any and every time I decide to make myself uncomfortable. Here they are:

### 1. Because the reward is worth the pain.

Most of the time, we only change when we're forced to. We're practiced at sticking to the known and safe, and our brains are built to keep it that way.

But as the old saying goes, "a ship in the harbor is safe, but that's not what ships are for."<sup>1</sup> To get different results, we need to give up some safety.

For me, I wanted to be closer to my family at this stage of my life and theirs. I wanted to live in a beautiful area of the country instead of somewhere that had been chosen for me due to work many years ago.

I've worked hard to envision the end state—a rewarding picture—and not get caught up in the day-to-day pain of the change.

What's the reward that's worth changing to you?

Create a clear picture of it and you'll ease the path to change.

### 2. Because the process forces you to grow.

Have you ever thought about what happens to a seed, on its way toward being a flower?

First, it has to crack open its shell, which might be hard and dry so as to protect it between growing seasons. It has to push up through the ground, stretch its roots out to search for water, and fight off storms, squirrels, bugs, and any other thing in its environment that might like to nibble at its success.

That can't be comfortable.

But the persistent seeds, the well-tended ones, survive and thrive. The process of being uncomfortable is just the natural one they must go through to grow. Discomfort is where the growth happens.

And it's the same way with us. Any major transition makes you think differently, try new things, and learn lots. There's a reason we refer to growth and innovation as "breaking new ground."

### 3. Because courage needs practice.

A while ago, I asked my blog readers about what was happening in their lives at work. I wanted to know what was working, and what wasn't.

One idea surprised me: They longed for courage around their career and life decisions—courage to make bold choices; courage to speak up; courage to create their own footprints rather than walking in others'.

Like any muscle, courage takes practice. Repetition. Stretching. And so making a big decision like I did when I decided to move is definitely target practice for courage enhancement.

Why might it be time for you to make yourself uncomfortable today? No matter how it turns out, you'll be sure to learn, grow, and become more confident about your courage to change in the future. ■

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> First credited to John A. Shedd, from his 1928 volume, *Salt from My Attic*.



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# STIRring Things Up

By Kyle Nobbe

I recently ended a chapter of my life by earning my FSA. With the hopes of starting the next chapter with a bit more excitement, I decided to look for opportunities abroad. In the summer of 2014, I applied for a three-month overseas position offered by my current employer. I was approved, and in the beginning of December my assignment was underway.

The position was generated via the “Short Term International Rotation” (STIR) program. The purpose of STIR is to give employees a unique experience to live and work in a foreign environment. The result is a win-win: Participants experience professional and personal development, and my company deepens its connection and exposure between offices with regard to people and processes.

I currently work in the U.S. mortality markets area of a global life reinsurance company. My STIR assignment took place in Sydney for two months and then one month in Hong Kong. In both locations I had a pricing role in a department that supports the Asian markets. I was eager for this position for too many reasons to list, but in the big picture it boils down to:

1. I was looking for a little adventure (and a touch of pushing me out of my comfort zone).
2. I wanted to learn about products in one of the largest insurance markets in the world.
3. I *needed* to develop a global perspective.

Point 3 is valuable beyond measure, especially for someone like me who has never lived outside the state of Missouri. Obtaining a global perspective is a necessity because I believe it is a characteristic that all leaders should possess.

## MY GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE AND MONKEYS

My experience hiking near the Kowloon Reservoir, commonly known as Monkey Hill, in Hong Kong is a great metaphor for my global experience:

- Some things we correctly expect on our own.
- Some things we are told of in advance.
- And then there is everything else of which we have no idea or control over.

Before this hiking experience, I expected to see monkeys since thousands call this reservoir home. I was warned by a colleague not to bring any grocery bags as the wild monkeys might associate that with food and potentially get aggressive; in the worst case, scratch me or my wife with their un-manicured nails. However, there will always be surprises, especially

when traveling in a different part of the world.

On a Saturday afternoon my wife and I began our hike, and it probably took one hour just to find a monkey asleep in a tree. We were let down a bit, but then as our hike was coming to an end we came across five monkeys plus some babies. We were very excited! My wife pulled out her phone to take a short video. As it turns out, wild monkeys do not like to be stared at (thanks for the warning), which I found out the hard way.

When we stopped walking to start filming, I made eye contact with the alpha-male for too long. To establish its dominance, the monkey swung out of the tree and jumped toward us—hissing, showing us its teeth, and flailing its arms. My wife screamed and ran behind me while I tried to appear

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calm, but my heart was beating through my chest. The monkey stopped its charge no more than 10 feet from us. I learned my lesson by experience.

Of course most Australians and Chinese do not hiss and flail their arms when they are offended or feel the need to express their dominance. My point is that you cannot get a true global perspective by reading articles, hearing stories, or watching a film. Without actually being a part of the environment, you will struggle to get a true understanding of how a culture interacts and functions.

#### LEADERS WITH A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

When working for a global company, it is very important that different offices and markets synergize and synchronize with each other. Leaders of a global company must understand how to make this happen, which requires a global perspective.

My point is that you cannot get a true global perspective by reading articles, hearing stories, or watching a film.

Identifying and acknowledging the similarities and differences between cultures can help a company create its global brand and work environment. The effect of doing so produces a company culture that allows associates from around the world to feel like they are all on the same team working toward the same goal. Leaders who know how to avoid the hissing monkeys will create a successful, efficient operation with all teams conquering the same hike.

Without the leadership to make this possible, employees will not adequately understand the entire value each department possesses. They may feel disconnected from headquarters

and operations, which can lead to isolation or a lack of appreciation.

This same concept can apply to leaders with a smaller scale such as a local office or a small department because we live in such a globalized world with cultural diversity. Although my company is comprised of many different cultures, the Hong Kong and Sydney offices were both very similar to our U.S. headquarters environment with regard to being client-focused. This has been instilled in every office throughout my company due to effective leadership at every level.

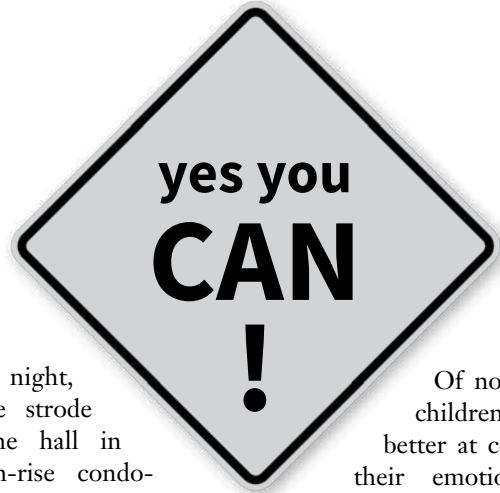
In summary, I improved my ability to lead in the future by combining my cultural knowledge of the locations I worked in with the technical aspects of my day-to-day job. I feel confident about stretching my comfort and my experience to a new level. My company has created a great program for associates like me to professionally and personally grow to their potential, so I encourage anyone with similar opportunities to do the same ... and don't stare at the monkeys. ■



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# Use Your Name, Change Your Brain

By Doreen Stern, Ph.D.



**H**ow regularly do you call yourself an idiot? Once a month? Once a week? Once a day?

Five years ago Dr. Ethan Kross heard himself scolding himself like that after he ran a red light in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Because Kross is a psychologist, he noticed something else, too: *He heard himself using his own name when he rebuked himself.*

“Ethan, you idiot,” he’d said.

He wondered why he had used his own name when talking to himself.

A few months later, Kross heard future Hall of Fame basketball player LeBron James use his own name when he was interviewed on TV about his decision to leave the Miami Heat for the Cleveland Cavaliers.

“One thing I didn’t want to do was make an emotional decision,” James told the interviewer. “I want to do what is best for *LeBron James*, and to do what makes *LeBron James* happy.”<sup>1</sup>

As others rolled their eyes at James’ unusual wording, Kross noticed the famous basketball player had used his own name in talking about himself, similar to Kross’ experience when he’d

shot through the red light in his hometown.

Then Kross heard similar phraseology from Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, when she explained her decision to resist the Taliban’s ban on girls being educated in Pakistan.

“If the Taliban comes, what would you do, *Malala*?” she’d asked herself. She shared this with Jon Stewart when she appeared on “The Daily Show.”

“*Malala*, just take a shoe and hit him,” she told Stewart she’d said to herself.<sup>2</sup>

These observations propelled Kross, director of the University of Michigan’s Self-Control and Emotion Lab, to conduct a series of studies to investigate the effects associated with using our own names when talking to ourselves (versus using “I” in our self-talk). Other studies considered the effects associated with self-talk.<sup>3</sup>

## DO ALL OF US TALK TO OURSELVES?

Before going forward, let me get this out in the fresh air: We *all* talk to ourselves. Sure, most of us are not as obvious as my 80-something neighbor

was last night, when he strode down the hall in my high-rise condominium building. At first, hearing his voice, I assumed he was wearing a Bluetooth headset. However, as I drew closer I noticed no such device. I also observed that once he saw me, the man stopped talking and started humming instead.

Likewise, most of us don’t talk to ourselves as audibly as 2- to 7-year-olds, who use “private speech” to guide themselves, regulate their behavior, and develop early literacy skills.<sup>4</sup> As early as the 1920s, Drs. Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky identified the role of private speech in increasing problem-solving in young children and also in goal attainment.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, young children use private speech to help them regulate their emotions. On that score, Dr. Laura Berk discovered that one way children control their emotions and soothe themselves is by mimicking their parents’ comforting speech. Picture a child calming himself or herself down by repeating bedtime phrases, like “Sleep-tight, don’t let the bed-bugs bite,” or by singing lullabies to themselves.

Of note, young children who are better at controlling their emotions have shown an increase in the amount of private speech they use.<sup>6</sup>

Private speech starts to decrease when children start school, and researchers have found that preschool-aged children are *least* likely to use it in the presence of a teacher.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps children become just as self-conscious as my neighbor did last night when he became aware that I could hear him talking to himself.

Nonetheless, the ability to talk to ourselves is integral to human consciousness.<sup>8</sup> It’s one of the most important characteristics that separate us from other species. It makes us who we are.

## NEW WAYS OF TALKING TO OURSELVES

Just as we can learn French, Spanish or Chinese in our 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s and beyond, we can change our self-talk. Recent articles in *Psychology Today*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and *The Wall Street Journal* have described how “*the right words can free us from our fears and make us wise about ourselves as we often are about others.*”<sup>9</sup>

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## USE YOUR NAME, CHANGE YOUR BRAIN

Think of the times you've given friends and relatives excellent advice, wishing you could be equally objective about yourself.

Recent research from Michigan's Self-Control and Emotion Lab has found that using our names to address ourselves (using third person rather than first), allows us to gain the psychological distance we more often apply to others.

Using your name when you talk to yourself encourages detachment, thus enabling self-control.

"It would be a good idea, Hildregard," you might say to yourself, "to finish the project you're working on before having that glass of wine."

That way, you become a wise friend, rather than a nattering nag.

## HELP RATHER THAN HARM

The most effective self-talk helps you perform at a higher level. Young children can be overheard in a preschool class repeating advice they've re-

ceived from their parents and/or teachers about how they might solve a 30-piece puzzle: "Put all the pieces with the same color into a pile," they might say. Or "put all the pieces with a straight edge into a pile."

"Then spread out the pieces in each pile. Pick up one piece at a time and hold it next to the other pieces in the pile. That way, you can find one that will slide into the one in your hand."

"After the two pieces slide together, keep matching puzzle pieces. Have fun, Hildregard, and remember it will ALL work out."

## TAKE-AWAY

You have a strong ally inside yourself. You can re-energize your work and personal life by mobilizing your wise inner self to support you. Use your given name when talking to yourself. Also rehearse how to complete projects in your self-talk, rather than scolding yourself for not doing things as well or as fast as you would like.

You'll be surprised that projects will become easier to complete, you'll enjoy working on them more, and your results are likely to improve dramatically. ■

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> [www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201505/the-voice-reason](http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201505/the-voice-reason).
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> [http://selfcontrol.psych.lsa.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/KrossJ\\_Pers\\_Soc\\_Psychol-2014Self-talk\\_as\\_a\\_regulatory\\_mechanism\\_How\\_you\\_do\\_it\\_matters.pdf](http://selfcontrol.psych.lsa.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/KrossJ_Pers_Soc_Psychol-2014Self-talk_as_a_regulatory_mechanism_How_you_do_it_matters.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private\\_speech](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_speech).
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consciousness>.
- <sup>9</sup> [www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201505/the-voice-reason](http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201505/the-voice-reason).



Dr. Doreen Stern is a writer, motivational speaker and success coach in Hartford, Conn. Her dream is to

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# LEADERSHIP— What Inspires YOU?

The Management and Personal Development (MPD) Section Council wants you to share your story for a leadership inspiration contest!

Tell us in 250 to 500 words what inspires you to be a better actuarial leader. Share your thoughts around any of the following categories: an inspiring leadership quote, book/song, admirable leader/personal mentor, defining moment/event in your career, or any other leadership inspiration.

Selected submissions will be featured in *The Stepping Stone* and on the MPD Section Web page. These articles will serve our membership as a resource for leadership experiences, advice and success stories that will inspire others. We look forward to reading and sharing your articles!

Prizes will be awarded as follows, and the MPD Section Council leadership will select the winning entries:

- The best overall submission receives a single grand prize, a \$250 Amazon gift card.
- Additionally, the best submission per each of the five categories above will be awarded a \$50 Amazon gift card.
- Also, the first 10 qualifying submissions will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Please email your entry to Sue Martz at [smartz@soa.org](mailto:smartz@soa.org) by Monday, Aug. 31, 2015. The MPD Section will announce the contest winners during the MPD Breakfast at the October 2015 SOA Annual Meeting & Exhibit.

## THE FINE PRINT

Contest will run between July 15 and Aug. 31, 2015. You must be an MPD Section member to enter. If you are not a member, visit the MPD Section membership page at [www.soa.org](http://www.soa.org) to join.

Each individual may submit an unlimited number of entries, but can only win one prize.

The subject of the submission should be related to leadership.

All submissions must include your name and telephone number, and those in the first three categories should include, when relevant:

- The full title and name of the book's or quote's author
- The publisher, edition and page count of the book
- The title and artist of the song
- The name of the leader being profiled.



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