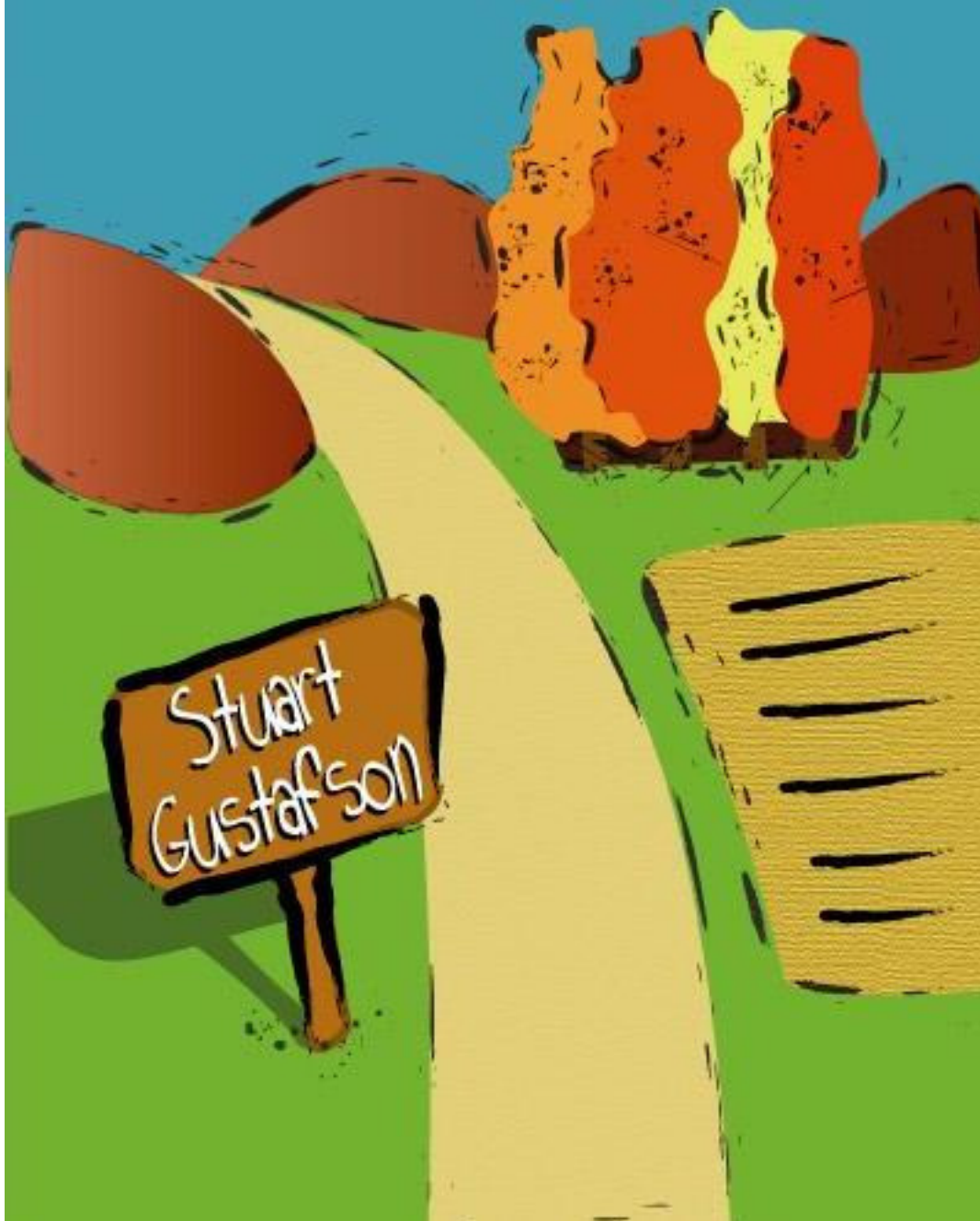


# PARABLES FOR LIFE IN THE 21ST CENTURY



## Special message from the author:

Thank you for reading *Parables for Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. I sincerely hope you find pleasure and enjoyment as you read the stories. If you like the stories and the way they are written (a la Æsop and his fables), then I invite you to visit my website [www.ParablesForLife.com](http://www.ParablesForLife.com) to see how you can contribute stories to future books in the series. The website contains all the details of book titles, submission requirements, as well as **how you will be compensated as a contributing author**. I hope you will consider writing a story (or two) for one of my future books.

Best wishes,

Stuart Gustafson

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# **Parables for Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

(Modern Parables You Can Apply in Business and in Your  
Personal Life)

by

**Stuart Gustafson**

Illustrations by  
**Woodrow W. Gustafson**

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Library of Congress Control Number 2004095673

ISBN 0-615-12629-4

Third Printing – May 2008

Cover Design by Christopher R. V. Hoover

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The First Printing of this book was printed in the U.S.A. by

Morris Publishing  
3212 East Highway 30  
Kearney, NE 68847  
1-800-650-7888

## Dedication

It is with sincere admiration and humility that I dedicate this first published work of mine to the memory of my father, Woodrow Thorwald Gustafson (September 22, 1915 – July 19, 1964).

## Acknowledgements

No piece of work, great or small, is created by only one person. There have been many people who have helped me along the way – some knew they were helping me, and some did not. While it is impossible to name everyone who has given me ideas, inspiration, and even challenges, I would certainly be remiss if I did not mention the following people.

An understanding family is the most important asset that any writer can have. My family – Darlene, Adrienne, and Woodrow – has certainly heard some of my many sayings that have become the morals in this book. They know them by heart, and I do not even have to say them if the situation arises. I want to especially thank my son Woodrow for providing the drawings that are in this book.

The professionals at Morris Publishing have given me excellent advice, while still allowing me to “control my own destiny.” I am grateful even for their existence – they have enabled self-publishing at an affordable price.

There was a student who was in a two-course MBA sequence in Finance that I instructed; his name is Doug. Doug and I have known each other for about seven years. One evening after class, Doug and I were chatting about business ventures. Doug talked about his latest one, and I talked about my book. In a short conversation, we came up with some innovative ideas on book promotions. Thanks for your help, Doug, and I certainly wish you well in your ventures!

There are many unnamed people who have listened to my ideas for this book, and who were polite enough to say, “Go ahead and publish it. I think it is a great idea.” Whether they truly believed that it was a good idea to publish this book does not matter. They continued to give me the encouragement to continue through the process of writing, editing, even self-publishing. This book is the result of all those – and many, many more – efforts.

## Foreword

When I talk to people about this book, one of the first things they ask is, “Where do you get the ideas for your parables?” The answer is that there are stories and morals and applications around us all the time. Most of us are too busy to notice them; but they are there. Let me tell you a little about the drawn-out process that I have gone through on the way to writing this book.

I began working on this book many years ago – well, at least on the material that became the book. I would hear something, or read something, that would cause me to pause and think. A lot of those great ideas were momentary thoughts that were never recorded. I finally started to write some of them down; eventually I began to organize them, and finally I put them together in a format that became this book.

Some of the morals are from sayings that we have in our family. Most families have sayings or truths that are repeated frequently. One of my [many] sayings is, “Is it better to have it and not need it, or need it and not have it?” I am sure that many of you have a similar saying that you use when your child does not want to take a coat on a mild but chilly day. “But, Mom, the sun is shining, and I don’t need my coat.” You know from previous experiences that the weather can turn downright cold immediately, and that same child will be whining because she doesn’t have her coat to keep her warm. This is the perfect place for this saying. It has become so commonplace in our household that all I have to do is start the question, “Because . . . ?” They know the answer: “Is it better to have it and not need it, or need it and not have it?” I knew I had to write a parable using this moral, but a story just would not pop into my head.

I was mowing the front grass one sunny summer day, when I told myself that I just had to think of a story that would fit with that moral. As I went back and forth down the stretches of the yard, I kept thinking, “Is it better to have it and not need it, or need it and not have it? How does that fit? What is a story we can all relate to?” I like to travel, and one of my favorite places outside the US is Paris, France. I visited there on business three times in 2000. The Eiffel Tower was still decorated from the Millennium celebrations; there was still one of the huge Ferris Wheels along the Seine River; it was just a spectacular place. All of a sudden the story idea came to me – what about a story about traveling to France, and being faced with a disappointment because of needing something (that was known about prior to the trip), but not having it? Thus was the beginning of the parable, “Parlez vous Français?” I still had to finish the mowing before I could go inside to actually begin the writing.

I love my mother dearly; she is 87, and she lives about six blocks from our house in her own condominium. She is slowing down some, but she is holding on to her independence for as long as she can. She just renewed her Driver’s License for another four years! Don’t worry – she does not drive at night, and she will not go many places on her own. As with many people of her age and generation, she talks longingly about the “old days,” and they were better than today. She talks about the Big Band orchestras, about the “clean” movies you could go to, and about the politicians whom you could trust. Invariably, these talks turn to stories about things that happened many years ago; stories I have heard dozens of times. She does not have Alzheimer’s Disease; she just prefers to relive the old memories. I am not sure if this is because my father was killed by a drunk driver when I was 16 (and she was 46), and she wants everything to be as it was back then – in the happy times. It was these repeated stories that gave me the idea for “Living Your Life Through the Rear-View Mirror.”

Those last two parables I mentioned above were developed by having a moral in mind, and then I would work to develop a story to match. This next parable was developed in a different manner – I had the story, and then I had to come up with a moral to match. My typical drive to work each morning is a fifteen minute trek that covers 4.8 miles from my house to the Hewlett-Packard site on Chinden Boulevard in Boise, Idaho. There is a four-way stoplight along that drive at the intersection of Chinden and Garrett Street that stays green for quite a while for the Chinden (East-West) traffic. One particular morning along that drive, I noticed that cars were slowing down from the posted 45 miles per hour as they approached the green light; I had to slow down in turn, of course. Then the cars went through the light, and got back up to speed. At first, I thought that was a singular phenomenon caused by someone not

knowing if he wanted to turn at the light. I then began noticing that many drivers were doing that on most days; I had to slow down almost every day as the drivers in front of me were “Slowing Down for the Green Light.” The storyline for that one was pretty simple to develop – in fact, it was handed to me by the local drivers.

So far I have told you how I developed two parables by starting with the moral, and one parable by starting with the story. The final way I have developed the parables is to begin with the application (or one of them), and then create a story or moral to go with it. That was the way this next parable was created. I have worked with talented people for at least the past twenty years; high technology organizations are built with them. What I noticed, however, was that many people were letting their talents go unused, or just be partially used. There are even times when I fit squarely within this camp myself. It is true that many of the talented (also read as “educated”) people were working very hard to advance in the workplace, to build new companies on their own, or to moonlight in other professions. But, there were not very many who were fully utilizing all the talents they possessed. Many scientists have claimed that even the most intelligent humans use only about 10% of their brain’s potential. Imagine what would happen if we were able to use even 20% -- effectively doubling our brain power? There would certainly be a lot of creative (and, hopefully productive) activities taking place. As I said a few sentences earlier, I was just as guilty as most others – probably not even near the “10% level.” I had talents that I was letting sit idle. I decide to change that a couple years’ ago. I started painting (not the outside of the house); I began working in earnest on this book, and I decided I wanted to do some teaching. Oh, yes, I was still planning on maintaining my “full-time job.” I am more busy now than I could ever imagine possible, but I am enjoying life so much more. I do not necessarily consider any of these activities I enjoy as being a “silver spoon,” but I am surely not going to end up like Winthrop in “You Rang, Sire?”

Now that you have read how some of these parables got their start, I hope you get started reading them and seeing how you might be able to use some of the applications in your life. Yesterday will always be gone, and tomorrow will always be a day away. But today is the one day that is always here, and it is the only day in which you can do anything. Do something positive today!

Stuart Gustafson  
Boise, Idaho

## Index to Story Titles

Roger and the Parakeet .....	1
Thanksgiving Dinner .....	4
Maria Julia and the Sand .....	8
Taking it with You .....	11
The Well-Dressed Junior Executive .....	15
Slowing Down for the Green Light .....	18
Run, Billie, Run .....	21
Barnyard Squabble .....	26
The Wishing Well .....	28
The Prized Jacket .....	33
Presentation to the Board of Directors .....	36
Autumn Leaves .....	39
Johnny and the Climbing Tree .....	42
Camping with the Guys .....	45
Living Your Life Through the Rear-View Mirror .....	50
Parlez vous Français? .....	53
Are You Sure this is the Way that Auto Club Recommended? .....	58
Buy Me Some Peanuts and CrackerJack .....	62
Is it a Throw-away or a Re-chargeable? .....	66
'IronMan Matt' Meets His Match .....	70
Runner Up – Again! .....	75
Stan and His Shiny Spots .....	79
The Rabbit and the Terrapin .....	82
You Rang, Sire? .....	84

## Index to Story Morals

Don't forget the basics. Roger did, and his parakeet died. ....	2
Know <i>why</i> you are doing <i>what</i> you are doing; don't do it just because "we've always done it that way." .....	5
Search for details when required, but don't overlook the obvious. ....	9
If you are going to carry "baggage" with you, make sure it is packed for where you are going, <u>not</u> for where you have been. ....	13
Don't be afraid to "size up" a situation just because it is a familiar one. It is better to re-analyze (or re-measure), and then have the proper assessment, than to just apply the previous solution without all the information. ....	16
Do not be afraid to accept success or to challenge idleness.....	18
Visualize your goal, and then go about living your life as if the goal has already been achieved. You might be surprised at what is actually possible! .....	23
Don't measure someone's contribution by what the recipient gets, but rather by what the contributor gives up. ....	26
Be careful when you wish for something. You just might actually get your wish, but it might not be what you really wanted, or the by-products might be undesirable. ....	30
Warmth and kindness can gain you more good than meanness and a cold heart. ....	34
Don't let the "delivery" cloud the meaning of the message. Another way of looking at this is that sometime it is not <u>what</u> you say, but <u>how</u> you say it. ....	37
There are usually at least two ways to accomplish a task; and one of the ways is not necessarily any "better" than another. In some cases, it is just different. ....	39
Words, just like nails, can still leave pain and scars even when they are retracted. Make sure the words you use are kind words, not mean words that hurt. ....	43
When a group (of any size) is faced with a great challenge, there will generally be more success when the groups acts as a unified team rather than individualists. ....	47
Your future is in front of you, not behind you. ....	51
Is it better to have it and not need it, or need it and not have it? .....	55
Life – both personal and business – is a journey, not a destination. Do not get too focused on <u>where</u> you are going; the pathway can be just as important (maybe even more important) as what is at the end of the path. ....	59
Don't be afraid to ask for something if the worst response you can get is a simple "No." .....	63
Your body is like a battery; it too needs to be re-charged on a regular basis. ....	67
If you want people to trust you, you must trust them first. ....	73
Life is NOT fair. Get over it, and get used to it. ....	77
A rose is a rose is a rose, but a pig will always be a pig. ....	80
Slow but steady wins the race. ....	82
Being born with a silver spoon in your mouth doesn't teach you how to feed yourself. ....	85

## Parables for Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Many of us remember some of the stories and fables that were read to us when we were little children. I certainly remember them, *Æsop's Fables*. Each one of us probably had our own favorites back then, and it is highly likely that there is still one certain fable that each of us remembers perfectly. You can probably picture the book in your mind, can still see the pictures, and you can still hear the words as the fable was being read to you.

Those fables have two outstanding qualities – they are good stories, and they provide a good moral for us to remember. Who could ever forget the story about the hare and the tortoise? It certainly is an entertaining story, but it is even more valuable in the moral it presents to us: “Slow but steady wins the race.” This moral has also been stated as “The race does not always go to the swiftest.”

So what does *The Hare and the Tortoise* have to do with business life? There can be many interpretations of this. One such interpretation is that slow and steady performance is better in the long run over erratic performance which has sharper peaks and valleys. This can apply to Fortune 500 companies, individual investors, even young entrepreneurs. There is more about this in my parable, “The Rabbit and the Terrapin.”

This book contains two dozen parables, or narrative fables, which each tell a story. The story, like the fable of old, contains a moral which is applicable in today’s business environment. Most of these parables also apply to individuals, to inter-personal relationships, to just plain living our lives. The parables are not in any particular order – you might find that you prefer to skip around, or just start at the first one and read to the end. That is your choice. The structure of this book is as follows:

- The narrative stories (written in *italic text*) are all works of fiction. Some of them may even sound like stories you have told, or you might have even heard passed down through the generations. But these are all novel creations which have no connection to any known person or event. Some places might actually exist, and there is nothing implied just because they are used in a story.
- The moral (written in **bold text**) is my own personal creation. This is what I hope you remember, and even try to apply in your own personal life or in your business life.
- The application of the story (written in upright text) is the interpretation of how you might be able to use the parable today. Some of the examples I use are drawn from my own experiences, but many are things that you, too, have probably witnessed in your workplace, or even at home.

So whether you read this book for application to your business life, your personal life, or just for casual reading, I hope you enjoy the parables. If there is a particular one that really helps you, or if you have your own idea for a parable that you would like to share with me, please email me at [stuart@stuartgustafson.com](mailto:stuart@stuartgustafson.com). Happy reading!

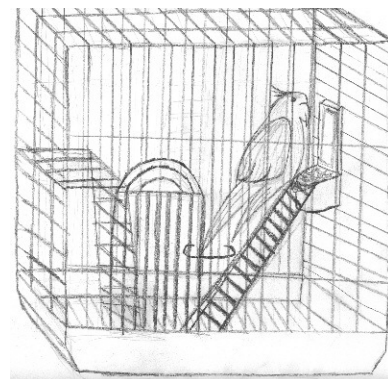
Stuart Gustafson





## Roger and the Parakeet

*Once upon a time there was a man named Roger who lived alone. In fact, Roger had lived alone most of his life. True, he had two older sisters while living at home, but they didn't share many common interests. They had the same parents, went to the same schools, even had the same Sunday School teachers; but they just didn't do very many of the same things. His sisters were always active in clubs and other organizations, while Roger tended to be more involved in individual activities, primarily homework and other scholarly projects.*



*Even when Roger left home for college, he lived alone. He didn't share his dormitory room with anyone else; Roger was used to being alone. And now, in his mid-forties, Roger still lives alone. But Roger was ready for a change in his life. He decided that a small pet would be good. He knew he couldn't have a dog, for the building superintendent wouldn't allow that. But perhaps a fish or a small bird would do.*

*One Saturday morning, Roger drove to a local pet store. He looked up the address in the telephone book, and had even called them to make sure they were open. Upon entering the store, Roger was surprised to see how many different types of birds and fishes there were in the store. The storekeeper saw the bewilderment on Roger's face, and went over to help him. After a brief dialog, Roger paid for his parakeet and was on his way home.*

*The next day after church, Roger took a different way home so that he could drive by the pet store. Seeing the "OPEN" sign in the window, Roger pulled into the parking lot and stopped in front of the pet store. Walking into the store, Roger saw the storekeeper, and said to him, "You told me that the parakeet I bought yesterday would sing and talk to me. But he just sits in his cage and does nothing."*

*The storekeeper replied, "You mean he didn't peck at his bell, and then start singing?"*

*"His bell?" Roger replied. "He doesn't have a bell in his cage."*

*"You didn't buy a bell? A bird like that needs a bell to help him get into the mood for singing. When he pecks it, he hears the tone, and then he tries to emulate that sound with his own singing. You need to get him a bell."*

*"How much is the bell?" Roger asked the storekeeper.*

*"The nice sounding bell is \$6.95," said the storekeeper. Roger bought a bell and went home.*

*The next afternoon, Roger rushed out of work so he could stop by the pet store. He was relieved to see that it was still open. In fact, the sign said that the store was open until 7:00 Monday through Friday. Roger walked up to the storekeeper, and the expression on Roger's face showed that he was more than slightly dismayed. "Well, I put that bell in his cage, but that silly parakeet still won't sing or talk to me."*

*"That's strange. You mean he walked up and down his ladder, then pecked at his bell, and he still wouldn't sing to you?" the storekeeper asked Roger.*

*"Ladder? What ladder?" Roger asked.*

*"A parakeet needs a ladder just as you might use a treadmill to get your exercise. You see, a bird will walk up and down a ladder to get the blood moving, and then he will feel like getting going for the day."*

*"How much for ladder?"*

*"Eight fifty," replied the storekeeper.*

*Roger left the store with ladder. He went home and put the ladder in the cage, right next to the bell. The next afternoon, Roger stopped again at the pet store; the fourth straight day he'd been there. Roger was really getting upset now. The storekeeper wasn't to be seen right away, but Roger found him. "That is really some dumb bird you sold me. I put the ladder in his cage, right next to the bell, and he still doesn't sing."*

*"Hmm. That's strange," began the storekeeper. "You mean he walked up and down his ladder, preened himself in front of the mirror, pecked at his bell, and he still wouldn't sing to you?"*

*"Wait a minute," said Roger. "What mirror? He did go up and down the ladder, pecked at that bell, but he doesn't have a mirror to look in."*

*"Oh my," the storekeeper sighed. "You look in the mirror every morning to see how you look, don't you? Well, the parakeet is also a very proud bird, and he needs to look into the mirror to see how he looks."*

*"How much for the mirror?"*

*"The mirrors are on special, only five dollars." The storekeeper rang up the mirror and gave it to Roger, who looked less than pleased.*

*The next day at noon, Roger was there at the pet store with a small bag in his hand. He went straight over to the storekeeper and said, "That bird you sold me died!"*

*"What," said the storekeeper. "You mean to say that parakeet you bought just last Saturday died?"*

*"Yes," said Roger. "And I even put that mirror right down near the bottom of the cage so he could look at himself. And then he died."*

*"Did he ever sing for you?" asked the storekeeper.*

*"He never sang," said Roger. "But he did finally talk."*

*"Really? What did he say," asked the storekeeper.*

*"Well," said Roger. "He did like you said he would do. He walked up and down the ladder several times. Then he went over to the mirror and seemed to puff out his chest as he saw himself there in the mirror. Then he hopped over to the bell and pecked it; and then he just fell over, rolled on his back and stuck his feet straight up in the air."*

*"But you said he talked," said the storekeeper.*

*"Oh, yes," remembered Roger. "Right before he fell over, he looked right at me and said, 'Didn't the storekeeper have any birdseed?' "*

**Moral: Don't forget the basics. Roger did, and his parakeet died.**



Can you relate to Roger? Either personally, or do you know someone like him? Roger was doing everything he thought he needed to do. Given the circumstances, he was doing pretty well. Unfortunately for the parakeet, that was not good enough.

What was Roger's one failing, at least in terms of his parakeet? Roger forgot about the basics. Instead of thinking about the parakeet's food — the most basic need for all animals — Roger was thinking more about the extra things, like having the bird sing and talk. This doesn't make Roger a bad person. In fact, every time he would inquire of the storekeeper, basically asking '*what else should I do?*,' Roger would buy what the storekeeper suggested. So it is clear that Roger had good intentions and a good heart.

Have you encountered people in business, perhaps even close associates of yours, who remind you of Roger? These are people who have good hearts, good intentions — they just seem to forget the basics at times. When they get in this mode, they are not doing "bad" intentionally. They think they are doing the right thing; they are just headed off in the wrong direction.

Think of a recent presentation you've sat in. As the presenter was showing slides, what did the slides look like? Most likely, they had fancy graphs and clip art, and they were printed in color. For many presentations, some use of graphs, clip art and color are appropriate. But there are many times when plain black bulleted text items would get the same message across without the distractions that are created with the graphs, clip art and excessive use of color.

Or what about a business paper you read? Was it clear and concise? Were its main points succinctly stated, and were they easy to find? Or did it seem more like a graduate student's paper who was being graded on volume? Too often in business, the author of a paper loses track of the point in why the paper is being written. It is not being written to impress the reading audience with your knowledge and your ability to amass a ton of supporting material; those exercises should be left in the academic world. The primary purpose of a business paper is to "sell" your ideas to the reader. These ideas might range from the implementation of new personnel policies, to the actual sale of a product your company makes. Certainly you will need some background and supporting data, but that should not be the main focus of your paper. Don't let your good ideas get lost in your own verbosity. Remember what you are trying to do, and that is to make your point. So do that, and then stop.

When you are writing a document, do you get hung up on the formatting of the document? Do you spend more time making sure it "looks right," rather than focusing on what it contains? Many people focus more on form than on content. Form is important, but as in the previous example, you need to get your point across. And that is done with content, not with form.

The point in these examples, and in the story of Roger and his unfortunate parakeet, is that you need to remember the basics. You can do additional things later on, but your foundation — whether it is in a new assignment, a product briefing presentation, or a business proposal — must be steeped in the basics of what you are trying to accomplish.

## Thanksgiving Dinner

*It was the first Thanksgiving dinner for the newlywed couple, and Margaret really wanted to please Dennis, her husband of only five months. She had proven to be quite proficient in the kitchen already, but this was to be the first major test of her culinary skills. They had invited their best friends to be their guests for Thanksgiving dinner in their apartment – John had been Dennis’s Best Man at the wedding, and Alice had been Margaret’s Maid of Honor.*

*The apartment was spotless when John and Alice arrived, carrying a bouquet of flowers for the centerpiece. Margaret had even bought a new tablecloth for the occasion. The smells emanating from the kitchen were whetting everyone’s appetite, and it was almost time for the feast to begin. The Thanksgiving meal was going to consist of Baked Ham, Sweet Potatoes, Green Beans, a Lettuce Salad and a Fruit Salad, Baked Rolls, various Condiments, and Apple Pie with Ice Cream for dessert. There would be no excuse for anyone to leave the table still being hungry.*

*“Honey, will you please help me with the ham?” Margaret called out to her husband who was in the living room with John, both of them watching a football game.*

*“I’ll be right there, Dear,” he replied as he was getting up to head into the kitchen. “It sure does smell great,” he said as he walked past his wife and gave her a kiss on the cheek. Dennis took the hot pads, opened the oven door, and removed the hot baking dish containing the ham. Placing the ham dish on the wooden cutting board, he used a large serving fork to lift the ham out of the dish, placing the ham on the serving dish. As he picked up the sharpened carving knife and started to slice the main course, Dennis noticed that one end of the ham had already been sliced off prior to cooking. “Margaret, Dear.” he began, “Why is one of the ends of the ham already cut off?”*

*“That’s the way my mother always did it, and the ham always tasted great. I wanted to make sure that the ham tasted just right for today.” Margaret was talking as if she were a seasoned chef teaching a group of young students.*

*Well, Margaret was right. The Thanksgiving meal was a success. Everything was delicious, and the two couples enjoyed each other’s company. But Dennis was still a little curious about cutting off the end of the ham. The next evening as they were having leftovers for dinner, he asked his wife, “Did you ever think it was strange to cut off the end of the ham before cooking it?”*

*“No, I didn’t,” Margaret replied. “It is just something that Mom always does when she is cooking a ham. I never gave it any other thought.”*

*Dennis gave the outward appearance of accepting this answer, but he still thought it was strange. Why would cutting off the end of a ham make it taste better? The following weekend, the young couple was invited to Margaret’s parents’ house for an afternoon cookout. It was cool outside, but the wind was calm, and there was no rain to spoil the barbecue. The steaks were done to perfection, and all the other items were just as tasty, including the delicious Idaho Bakers, special potatoes that were available at only one grocery store in town.*

*After the dinner, Dennis, Margaret, and her parents started playing a board game. Tonight’s choice was Scrabble. Dennis enjoyed this game, as he did possess a very good command of the English language. While he was waiting for Margaret to form a word, he asked her mother a*

question-type statement. “Mrs. Preston, Margaret says you cut off the end of a ham before you cook it, and I am just a little curious as to why you do it.”

“That’s easy, Dennis. My mother, Margaret’s grandmother, showed me that secret when I was learning to cook as a young girl. It really does make the ham taste good, doesn’t it?” Mrs. Preston looked proud as if she were giving away one of her great cooking secrets. “Oh, Maggy. That’s a good word, P-H-E-N-O-M. And the H is a ‘Triple Letter.’ Go ahead and pick six tiles. Good job.”

The Scrabble game continued until past eleven, when Mr. Preston declared that it was time for him to get to bed. The game was picked up and put away, and Dennis and Margaret thanked her parents one more time for the meal, and then said good night.

“You really had some great words tonight, Dear,” Dennis told his wife as they were driving back to their apartment. His statement was certainly correct, but it was probably quite likely that he was saying this just to soothe his own ego for not having won for the first time in over a year.

“Thanks, Honey. I just seemed to get the right letters to make some good combinations. How did you like the steak?”

“Oh, it was great,” Dennis answered. “Your dad sure does know how to cook on the barbecue, doesn’t he? Where did he learn to marinate the steak, and then cook it to perfection?”

“I don’t know,” Margaret said. “I think men just know how to barbecue a steak. After they ruin a few, they just figure out how to do it right.”

Dennis wondered to himself how long it would take him to be able to barbecue a steak to perfection, just like his father-in-law can do. He also wondered again how a ham could taste better just by cutting off one of its ends.

Margaret and Dennis had been invited by her grandmother to visit her, and so they all agreed upon a weekend two weeks before Christmas. When that weekend arrived, Dennis and Margaret drove the three hours to her house. Grandma Smith’s house was immaculate; the hardwood floors possessed a lustrous shine, all the brass fixtures were without fingerprints, and the windows were all spotless. Dennis could see where Margaret’s tendency toward cleanliness came from.

Dinner on Saturday evening was a delightful meal. Grandma Smith lived alone; Grandpa Smith had died five years ago. As they were enjoying the delicious rhubarb pie for dessert, Dennis asked his wife’s grandmother, “Grandma Smith, Margaret’s Mom says you taught her to cut the end off a ham before cooking it. She says that makes it taste better. Could you tell me why?”

“Oh, Dennis, my young boy,” Grandma Smith chuckled as she started to respond to her granddaughter’s husband’s silly question. “I don’t bake too many hams any more, but when I did, I would cut the end of the ham off because my baking dish was too short for the whole ham to fit inside of it.”

**Moral: Know why you are doing what you are doing; don’t do it just because “we’ve always done it that way.”**



It seems quite clear that Margaret's grandmother, Grandma Smith, had a valid reason for cutting off the end of the ham. She did it so that the ham would fit inside her baking dish. Margaret's mother, however, just copied her own mother, and cut off the end of the ham before cooking – even though her baking dish was sufficiently large to hold the whole ham. And, of course, Margaret then did what she saw in her mother's kitchen. What we see here is a learned behavior that is continued from one generation to the next. While this can be viewed by some as a good behavior, it doesn't seem to be the right behavior in this story of the ham dinner.

How many of us “cut off the end of the ham before cooking”? We might laugh at this question, but we need to understand how this question fits into our individual situations. Do we, unwittingly perhaps, continue a learned behavior when that behavior is no longer needed? Do we have ingrained habits that we adhere to even when they are not appropriate?

Today's electronic calendars and scheduling systems allow us to set our appointments far in advance, and they even allow us to set recurring appointments. For example, if you have a staff meeting every Tuesday at 2:00, you can set your calendar to include this 2:00 appointment on every Tuesday ad infinitum. Occasionally, however, you will find that you are out of town, or there might just be nothing to discuss. There are two options. One choice is that you can go ahead and have the meeting. Another choice is that you cancel the meeting.

This situation has occurred in my professional career. I was working in San Diego for a large multi-national corporation (which is probably best known for copiers), and there was a weekly meeting that I regularly attended. I showed up for the meeting one week, and there was no agenda for that day's meeting. I asked the general manager if we were going to cancel the meeting because there was no posted agenda. His reply was that we would go ahead and have the meeting because “we always have a meeting” that day. And we did; we held the meeting even though there was nothing relevant to discuss. With a response like that, it is no wonder that bureaucracy gets such a bad name!

This example is not meant to say that all learned behaviors are bad. That we know how to read, write, drive cars, etc., are all examples of learned behaviors that we certainly consider to be quite vital to our everyday lives. There are many examples in the working world where a learned behavior is critical – showing up to work on time; processing certain paperwork in its prescribed manner; treating our co-workers with respect; doing what we were trained to do as part of our job description, etc.

What we need to be mindful of, however, are those actions that do not provide a positive contribution. Does your normal business life include activities that are continued on a regular basis primarily because they are “regular activities,” “weekly meetings,” or other “learned behaviors”?

What about your home life? Do you still pre-wash the dinner dishes before loading them into the dishwasher even though this brand-new kitchen appliance contains a pre-wash cycle? Once autumn sets in and the grass is not growing as much as it does during July and August, do you still insist that the yard be mowed with the same regularity?

The point here is NOT that all routinely scheduled activities are wicked, and, therefore, should be discontinued. There are valid reasons for some normalcy in our lives, whether this is at work, or at home, or in our other outside activities. What must be recognized, however, is that it is okay to question the current value of following set routines and traditions. In fact, it might

even be the proper thing to do. There is a popular bumper sticker, which boldly states, “QUESTION AUTHORITY.” I do not condone the blind questioning or disregard of authority just for the sake of questioning or disregarding. To do so would be the same as making a regular habit of questioning regular habits – certainly its own oxymoron.

What is important is to understand why you are doing certain things that have become routine. If your regular meetings are to provide regular updates or additional information that adds some value, then these meetings are, of course, valuable to your normal course of business. If the department’s monthly off-site gathering continues to instill focus, as well engender new ideas and thoughts from the brainstorming sessions, then it certainly appears that these off-sites are a good investment that should be continued. If you still mow the grass every Saturday morning because you like your yard to be neat and conforming every weekend, there is certainly no reason to change your grass cutting habits.

Continue to do those things that add value and which are important to you. There will be enough distractions that will attempt to pull you off course, and so your regular routines may become a safe haven for you. So long as your learned behaviors are well-intentioned, positive and beneficial, then, by all means, do what another popular bumper sticker says, “Keep On Truckin’.”

## Maria Julia and the Sand

*Maria Julia Martinez lived in a tiny coastal village called La Jolla del Mar — the Jewel of the Sea. This little village was about forty kilometers southeast of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Fishing had long been the mainstay of the village, and most of its residents lived out their lives there. Although Buenos Aires was reachable from La Jolla del Mar, the metropolis had not yet exerted much influence over the lives of the everyday citizens in this small village.*

*Maria Julia had just turned seventeen, but she had been working most weekends, as well as the previous summer, to help support her large family, a family of four sisters, four brothers, two elderly aunts, and her mother and father. Her father worked on a fishing boat, but his income was rarely steady, and never enough to feed the dozen mouths in their casa. Her younger brothers were not yet old enough to do much but go to school and play soccer.*

*When Maria Julia worked, she would ride a motor scooter northwest through Buenos Aires, then follow the Rio Uruguay north until she came to the border crossing into Pysandu, Uruguay. Most mornings she had a small box strapped on to the back of the scooter, and the box would be filled with sand, clean white beach sand. Because she had crossed the border into Uruguay so many times, she knew the border guards and they knew her. They would rarely ask to see her passport, but occasionally the guard would ask what she was taking into the country. After all, even the border guards had a job they had to do. Her reply was always the same, "Only this box of sand, señor." And the border guard would wave her on through.*

*This routine continued for many months — Maria Julia would ride north through Buenos Aires, up along the Rio Uruguay, and then cross the border into Uruguay at Pysandu. One morning, there were two border guards; one of them had an important air about him. The guard who knew Maria Julia was formal in greeting her, and he insisted on knowing what she was bringing into the country. "Only this box of sand, señor." Even though this response was good enough for the regular guard, the senior man insisted on checking the sand. He had his underling remove the box from the scooter, and then pour it out onto the ground. There was nothing there, just sand. After the junior guard got as much of the sand as he could back into the box, he apologized to Maria Julia, saying that there had been reports of smuggling and there were going to be more searches. Maria Julia smiled as she said, "Si, Señor. Adios." She re-boarded the scooter and rode off.*

*A few weeks later, the same guard who had searched the box of sand along with his commandant was back on duty at the Pysandu crossing. "Buenos dias, Maria Julia," he greeted her as she approached.*

*"Buenos dias, Señor Gonzalez," she replied. She stopped the scooter to wait for him to wave her through, which was normally automatic. But this time, he didn't.*

*"Maria Julia," he started, "will you trust me?"*

*"Si, Señor Gonzalez. You know I trust you as I trust my own father."*

*"Gracias, Señorita," he responded with his face blushing. He then continued. "Maria Julia, you have been coming through this border crossing for many months now, and I just have a feeling that maybe you are not telling me everything. I promise I will not turn you into the officials, and I will never tell anyone anything that you tell me. But I do need to know. You keep*

*bringing this box of sand across the border. Is there anything else you are smuggling else into Uruguay?"*

*"Si, Señor Gonzalez. Scooters."*

**Moral: Search for details when required, but don't overlook the obvious.**



Scooters! Maria Julia was smuggling scooters into the country, and doing it right under Señor Gonzalez's nose. None of the guards thought anything about it because it was too obvious. No one would be so bold as to smuggle something right in the open. Smugglers always hide things they are trying to smuggle. That is why the box of sand was dug into. Surely anything being smuggled into the country would be hidden in the box of sand.

Much of today's business environment requires much more analysis than in previous times. This applies to both the corporate culture as well as the personal financial arena. One of the ways this thirst for analysis is quenched is by digging deeper and deeper into situations for every little bit of detail.

When the country's Gross Domestic Product is announced, every Wall Street analyst is quick with an opinion as to what that particular level of GDP means for the stock market. If the number is "too high," this number of our nation's output is sometimes seen as being bad because it might induce inflation. A low unemployment percentage should be a good indication that more Americans are working, which would then stimulate the economy. "Too low" of a number, however, and it is viewed by many as bad because people will be wanting to buy goods, which drives the prices up, thereby increasing inflation.

It seems that it is hard to have good economic information these days without its being scrutinized for the bad component of that information.

Before we place all the blame on government-reported information and its excessive analysis by financial analysts, we need to look at our own reactions in the business environment. Have you ever read a report from a subordinate, and been overly critical about some obtuse implication or remote possibility, without first recognizing and appreciating the in-your-face positive statement which is being made? Why do we feel that we cannot accept the information as it is provided, without having to microscopically analyze to the point of tedium?

When you are looking for a common stock to add to your personal financial portfolio, how much detail do you pore over before making a decision? Do you "consult with" numerous services, read dozens of reports, and run all kinds of statistical modeling programs before you can settle on "the short list" of stocks from which to choose? Or do you just get the main information, look at a few fundamentals, and then make the decision?

All of us can cite numerous examples in our own personal lives if we just thought about it. Try this experiment sometime, and see what your results are. As you are walking down a sidewalk or in the shopping mall, look strangers straight in the eyes and simply say, "Hello." What do you think the reactions are likely to be? Most strangers probably won't even know you are talking to them because they will not be looking at you. But those who are looking at you when you greet them will look away, or just ignore you. Why? Because it is not feasible to them that a total stranger would give them a pleasant greeting without expecting something in return.

What is happening in all these examples is that we are trying to dig too deep into the situation and find something else without seeing what is right in front of us. It is time, when we are presented with a new situation, a report, or some information, that we acknowledge the obvious before we go any further. By digging too deep for some hidden message or meaning, we are missing something vital.

We could be missing out on an easy stock pick, one whose fundamentals are excellent, because we went looking for too much information by which to analyze the company's potential. We could be missing out on having our own day enlightened by a stranger because we refuse to acknowledge a simple and honest greeting. We could be missing out on the key point of a business report because the proposal is just too obvious and not all that complicated.

Are you one of the people who are saying, "Not me"? Good managers, savvy investors, warm-hearted people would certainly not do that. Or would they? With today's advances in technologies and available information, we are all caught up in the turbulence of thinking that "there must be something more to it" than what is so blatantly obvious. We think there must be more because we want there to be more.

Why do we want there to be more than just the obvious? We have been ingrained with the idea that more is better. If we have more information with which to make our decisions, then we surely will be making better decisions. Right? Don't count on it.

Why else do we want there to be more? There is the notion that great decisions cannot be made without complex information. If the information we have is obvious, and quite possibly obvious to many people, then it is hard for us to accept the notion that our decision is that good of a decision. If the premise from a subordinate's report is so blatantly obvious to the reader once the report is read, we sometimes tend to discount the value of that report with such thoughts as, "Well, everyone already knows that." This can be very faulty thinking.

Is everything going to be obvious? Of course not. There will be many situations where detailed analysis is not only desirable, but is also absolutely required. What we need to be careful of is to know the difference, and to know when which course of action is appropriate.

## Taking it with You

*Robert had learned at a very early age how to get things his way. It was not that he was a manipulator; rather, he just knew how “the system” worked, and he then figured out how to make the system work for him. He was also quite successful in all his endeavors.*

*He was so successful in business that he had made several million dollars by time he reached the age of twenty-five. On his thirtieth birthday, he had a net worth in excess of twenty million dollars. But Robert did not just hoard his fortune. He had faithfully tithed to his church starting with his first real job upon graduation from college. His philanthropy extended beyond his church – he gave generously to many local and regional organizations that helped the less fortunate. Robert’s net worth grew to one hundred million dollars by his fortieth birthday; he was certainly a pillar of good business and charity in the community.*

*While he was a faithful churchgoer, Robert started thinking about “the future.” And he did not mean just a year or two out – for him the future meant eternity. Robert certainly felt that he would be going to heaven after he died; not because of all the money he gave away. He truly had faith. And it was his faith that would take him to heaven. Robert began a discussion with his minister about “the trip to heaven.”*

*“Can I take anything with me?” Robert asked his minister.*

*“What do you mean? Your body is dead by the time your spirit leaves your body,” was the matter-of-fact ministerial response.*

*Undeterred, Robert tried again. “I know that I will be physically dead, but can I take anything with me up to heaven? I have some personal items that I would like to have with me when I get in heaven.”*

*Now this was indeed a line of questioning that this minister had never heard. Was Robert really serious about taking personal possessions to heaven with him, or was he just testing the minister? Not sure how to satisfy Robert’s questions, the minister referred him to his bishop. The bishop knew Robert well, and had even played a few rounds of golf with him.*

*About a week later, Robert went to see the bishop. After about ten minutes of small talk, Robert said to the bishop, “I have a question that my minister could not answer. I was wondering if you could possibly answer it for me.”*

*Having been foretold about Robert’s visit, the bishop gestured for Robert to continue.*

*“Can I take anything to heaven with me?”*

*The bishop was ready for this question – the minister had told him about Robert’s question, and he had heard this same question a few times in his thirty years in the ministry. The bishop had a thoughtful look on his face, looked straight into Robert’s eyes, and asked, “What do you think you will need in heaven that will not already be provided for you?”*

*“Well,” Robert started, “I have some personal possessions that I would like to take with me. I have a suitcase – you know, the kind with the wheels – that I can put it all in. And I would like to take it with me.”*

*The bishop might have laughed if Robert had not been so serious. The bishop rocked back and forth a few times, closed his eyes, took a big breath, and began. “Robert, I can see that you*

*are very serious about this question. And a serious question deserves a serious answer. Normally, I would tell someone asking that question that everything you need is already up in heaven. But I know you have a strong faith, and you have been more than generous with your gifts. Let me talk to my superiors and see what they say. This is very unusual, but let me check into it. I will call you when I hear from them.”*

*The two men continued their small talk for another hour – talking about their own golf games, the local professional football team, civic activities, the mayor, etc. They could have talked for hours; this was the nature of their friendship. But the bell rang, meaning it was time for the bishop to have dinner. The men shook hands, and then embraced in a shoulder-to-shoulder hug, the kind that some men do.*

*A week later, Robert’s phone rang. It was the bishop calling. He had talked with his superiors, and they said that Robert could indeed take his personal possessions in one suitcase with him to heaven. The bishop explained that his superiors felt that Robert’s faithful generosity had earned him that special privilege.*

*Robert smiled. Once again he had figured out how to make the system work for him. He quickly, yet methodically, packed a suitcase full of solid gold bars. He stuffed in a few towels just so they wouldn’t slide around.*

*His life continued to be showered with much success and happiness. And he continued to give a handsome portion of his wealth to many worthy causes. His community was certainly blessed by his kindness and his giving.*

*It was arranged so that when he died, his special suitcase would be put inside his coffin with him. He had been assured that even though the suitcase would be inside the sealed coffin, buried under six feet of dirt, that his suitcase would accompany him to heaven.*

*Well, it happened. Robert died. There was such a huge outpouring of adoration for the man who had so selflessly helped his community. The church was overflowing with a standing room only crowd that had seldom been seen before. What a beautiful funeral it was. Only a few people thought the coffin was a little deeper than most; and the pallbearers seemed to struggle as they lifted it to carry it out to the hearse. No one but the bishop and the funeral parlor manager knew about the special suitcase in the coffin.*

*As he was going to heaven, Robert had his suitcase with him. The angels looked at him with mild but pleasant curiosity. They had never seen anyone bring a suitcase before. Robert asked around, and he finally found the gates he needed to enter through. And sure enough, St. Peter was there to greet him, just as he had been taught.*

*St. Peter, himself a little curious about the suitcase, asked Robert, “What is that you have there with you?”*

*“Oh, that.” Robert replied. “I received special permission to bring one suitcase with my personal possessions up here. You can check your records. My name is Robert.”*

*St. Peter looked in his book, and yes indeed, there was a notation by Robert’s name: ‘bringing one suitcase with him.’ Satisfied, St. Peter opened the gate for Robert to let him enter. Just as he was about to enter, St. Peter asked if he could see what were the personal possessions that he brought.*

*Robert gladly opened the suitcase and moved away the towels to display the shiny gold bars. Robert was very pleased that he had been able to beat the system that said, “You can’t take it with you.”*

*St. Peter looked at the gold bars, then at Robert, and then he quizzically asked, “Why would you want to bring pavement up here?”*

**Moral: If you are going to carry “baggage” with you, make sure it is packed for where you are going, not for where you have been.**



Remember, Robert’s faith was quite strong, but perhaps he didn’t think that the streets of heaven were actually paved with gold. Or perhaps he thought he would have some other use for his gold bars when he got there. But there he was, at St. Peter’s gate, and he has this suitcase full of “pavement” with him. For most of us mortals, this is probably difficult to picture.

But think how it might feel if you were checking in at the finest hotel you can think of – the Plaza Hotel in New York City, or the Ritz in Paris. The bellman has your luggage, and is just waiting to know your room number so he can take it upstairs. All of a sudden, the lock breaks, the suitcase springs open, and all of its contents are now on display for everyone to see. This is certainly an embarrassing situation no matter what is inside.

Think of the construction worker who has a secret love of opera; he can’t really tell his fellow workers because then he wouldn’t be a “real man.” Hogwash! He listens to opera whenever he can; in his truck to and from work, in his apartment, whenever it is on PBS. He even sings along on some of the parts that he knows; not a bad tenor voice. He has been watching the schedules for quite a while, and he is now going to see a few live performances. He has third row center seats for each show, and he is just now checking into one of the world’s top hotels.

If that had been his suitcase opening up in the middle of the hotel lobby, what do you think would have been in there? Dirty brown workboots, stained leather gloves, his metal hardhat, sturdy overalls? Of course not, why would he bring them along? Instead, you would find shiny patent leather black shoes, dress white gloves, a top hat and scarf, tuxedo slacks, etc. He would not have brought his work clothes from home. No; he would bring the clothes he would be needing for where he was going, not from where he came.

How many of us in our business lives and our personal lives carry “baggage” along with us? Do we let our memories of the past cloud our thoughts of the future? Do we allow previous reactions to what we have done affect what our actions will be as we move forward? These are not healthy habits, although it is easy to find many justifications for them.

One reason you will hear is that “history repeats itself.” Thus, the logic is that if someone acted in a certain way toward you in the past, that this person will act the same in the future. That might be true. But it does not necessarily have to be that way. Perhaps you received that reaction because of something that you did. So if you alter your behavior, isn’t it possible then that the reactions you will see could also be different? This does not mean, however, that you must be condescending in all your approaches and actions. Let’s say, for example, that you were making a presentation at a sales meeting. You were asked to present because of your recent successes in completing deals, while many of your peers were not. In talking about your successes, if you present your methods in an arrogant and superior attitude, the reaction you will most likely

receive will be undesirable. Your peers will avoid contact with you, and they will talk negatively about you.

Thus, the next time you meet with them in person, or on the phone, you will have some heavy, negative baggage encumbering you. How do you overcome it? There are many ways, and what ultimately works for one person will be different for another. You could admit that you realize that your style needs improvement, and you are sorry for how your message came across the last time. Unfortunately, this would place you in a very vulnerable position, and many people are not comfortable with that. A less vulnerable method is to present information while acknowledging the important contributions of others, including your peers. Mention one or two examples to give credence to this. While this new approach will not “clean your slate” with everyone, it will certainly give them the opportunity to start afresh with you.

Another reason we will hear on a personal nature is that someone has “treated us badly” in the past, and we are not going to let that happen again. Rather than carry a grudge around the neighborhood, in the supermarket, or even at church, try to take the upper road and be nice to that person. Maybe that person treated you badly because he thought you did something wrong – so much of grudges are built on inaccurate assumptions. Move past those assumptions and move to a “pasture of kinder thoughts and actions.” Sometimes all it takes is for someone to take the first step toward a better relationship. Do not let stubbornness stand in your way of a friendship that can nourish if given the chance. Besides, if you let those grudges continue to build up, the weight on your shoulders can get very heavy.

Carrying “baggage” with you does not have to be a bad thing. You would not want to go on a trip with an empty suitcase. Of course not. You would pack the items you think you will need on the trip. The same holds true for life – both business and personal. Make sure that the items you have “packed into your suitcase” are the items that you want to have with you. It is your choice to include or exclude certain items. Make sure that you make the right choice.

## The Well-Dressed Junior Executive

*Larry and Michael were in the same graduating class from the University, and they both had an ambitious set of interviews facing them in their senior year. As finance majors, they were both anticipating prosperous careers in top-named firms. The Career Guidance Center had provided helpful information on interviewing, and they each prepared for their interviews with more zeal than they had for last semester's examinations. As friends they did many things together, and they embarked on this "critical phase of schooling" together.*

*The first step was securing the interviews, which they did with relative ease – both were good students, and so it was not all that difficult to fill their schedules. About half of their interviews were with the same companies. Neither of them had much of a need for a suit during college, although each had one hanging in the closet. There was that occasional formal presentation in class that required wearing a suit, but that was about it. The suits were not new, and they certainly were not very stylish. One of the things Mrs. Potts at the Career Guidance Center had stressed was the importance of having a fresh new suit of clothes for interviewing.*

*One of the national department store chains had run an advertisement offering a 15% discount to graduating seniors. This was enough to entice Larry and Michael to head down there to buy their suits. As they entered the men's department, they were met by two middle-aged sales clerks who were eager to assist them. "You look like two seniors eager to start the interviewing process," one of the sales clerks said to Larry and Michael.*

*"Yes, although I am not too sure how eager we are," said Larry. "We each need a new suit, and I saw an ad you ran in the paper."*

*"Of course," the same clerk replied. "Come with me, sir, and I will get you all set up." So Larry went with the first clerk, and Michael headed over to a different section with the other clerk. "What size suit do you wear?" the clerk asked Larry.*

*"I think it was a 42 Long," Larry replied.*

*The clerk showed Larry a selection of 42 Long suits, and Larry quickly settled on the dark blue one with gray pinstripes. A new white shirt and two new ties filled out the order. Counting the fitting and ringing up the sale, Larry was done in less than fifteen minutes.*

*Michael, meanwhile, was taking much longer. He had told his clerk that he wore a 38 Regular. The clerk, however, insisted on taking some measurements "just in case." "When was the last time you wore that 38 Regular?" he asked Michael.*

*"We had our final presentations last month."*

*"And how did the suit fit?"*

*"The buttons seemed a little snug," Michael said, "so I just left the coat open without buttoning it."*

*"I think you would be more comfortable in a 40 Regular. You won't see a lot of difference in the coat length, but the extra around the waist in the pants and the coat should make them more comfortable. Let's try one of each size on to compare." The clerk selected one suit of each size for Michael to try on. The clerk seemed a little more interested in helping Michael find the "best fit" rather than just "selling him" a suit.*

*“You’re right,” Michael said upon exiting the fitting area. “The 40 is definitely more comfortable. I can bend over to tie my shoes much easier than in that 38. What style of a suit do you think looks best? I have always worn a double-breasted jacket.”*

*Michael’s clerk helped him find a suit style that was more fitting for his physique than the style he had always worn. After the fitting, the two spent another fifteen minutes just selecting two shirts and matching ties to coordinate with the suit. All in all, it took Michael almost one hour until he was done.*

*One month later, all the interviews were completed and the offer letters had been sent. Larry and Michael went to the Career Guidance Center for a review of the entire interviewing process with Mrs. Potts. Larry was a little dejected because he had received only one offer from his “number one” firms, while Michael had offers from all of his. The two men compared notes after their individual review sessions, and it appeared that there was only one real difference between the two candidates. Mrs. Potts had told Larry that, while he was a great candidate academically, the feedback she received from the interviewers was that his poorly fitting suit gave the appearance of someone who did not project a professional appearance.*

**Moral: Don’t be afraid to “size up” a situation just because it is a familiar one. It is better to re-analyze (or re-measure), and then have the proper assessment, than it is to just apply the previous solution without all the information.**



Larry had worn a 42 Long suit for his entire college career, so it seemed natural to him that that was the size he needed. Michael, on the other hand, used the guidance of a clerk to help him analyze the current situation, and he invested the time to end up with a better result – both a better-fitting suit, and more job offers.

Personally, I don’t think I ever lost a job opportunity because of the suit I wore (or didn’t wear), but the story illustrates a point that is all too common, especially among hard-driving personalities. “I’ve seen this situation before, and I know what the answer is.” How many of you have heard that statement? And how many times was it you who said it? I know I have. There is nothing inherently wrong in the logic, we just need to be careful on how we apply it.

If you are driving your car, and you see the traffic light switch from green to yellow in the intersection you are approaching, what do you do? Do you say, “That is an interesting color. I wonder what the top color is?” No! You know from experience (and training) that the switch from green to yellow will be followed by a switch from yellow to red. And a red light means STOP. So in this case, the fact that you have seen the situation before (light changing from green to yellow), and you know what the answer is (the light will soon change to red, which means you will have to stop), is acceptable.

Let’s say you are a buyer of electronic components, and the Materials Group has sent you a request to purchase one thousand of a certain item. You have purchased this same item many times in the past. You follow the process of submitting the request to several qualified vendors, and you keep track of their responses. Company A seems to be the fastest in terms of responding to the quotation request. The last three times you have asked for a quote on this item, Company A has responded with the same availability and price (in stock, twenty-five cents each). One time Company B came back with a quote of twenty-two cents, and the other two times, Company C quoted twenty-one cents. So Company B got the order one time, and Company C got it twice.

This time, once again Company A responded with “in stock, twenty-five cents.” Company B was at twenty-two cents again, and Company C was at twenty-seven. So Company B got the order. The problem this time, however, is that Company B did not have the parts in stock, and they would not arrive for another ten days. To compound the problem, the Materials Group had marked that the request was “Urgent” this time, but you had failed to notice it. The production line was shut down for ten days because you had not looked at all of the information on the materials request (“That part was never a critical shortage component before” was the excuse you gave your manager). You had ordered that part many times before, and you figured that it was needed just like before – two to three weeks would be fine. Not this time, however, and you and your company paid the price for it.

Is this an extreme example? Yes. Has it happened before? Yes. Will it happen to someone else in the future? Unfortunately, yes.

So how do you get new data to analyze the situation anew each time? And how much do you need to look at every time? Obviously, it depends on the situation at hand; but if there is the possibility (a real possibility, not a far-fetched remote possibility – such as the traffic light may stay yellow forever) that something could be different this time, then make sure you have the current information. In the case above, the components buyer should have read the entire materials request and noticed that it was an urgent request.

Have you ever bought a company’s stock because “it is a bargain at this price”? I have. That stock is still below my purchase price. Why did I think it was a bargain? The stock was trading at multiples that, in the past, signaled a buying opportunity. Therefore, it was a bargain based on old information, not on current information. Had I spent some time investigating the current fundamentals of that stock and its industry, I would have made a different investment. The underlying information had changed – my decision criteria should have also changed.

Do you make other decisions in your personal life that are based on “old information”? Do you not like someone because of something that he or she did a long time ago? Do we refuse to shop in a given store because we received bad service there once? Do we refuse to consider another person’s suggestions because a previous suggestion caused problems when it was implemented? Maybe it was the implementation that was the problem.

When you make decisions that are important to you and to others, make sure you make them with current information that allows you to make the most-informed decision. The same applies when you go to buy a new suit, whether it is at the discount suit outlet, or at a top-brand store – do not tell them what size you wear; ask them to measure you and tell you what size would best fit you.

## Slowing Down for the Green Light

*Donna had only one more week of Driver's Education, and then she could go the Department of Motor Vehicles to get her Driver's License. As her mom was taking her to the class, Donna could hardly think of anything except the freedom she would have once she got her license. As they approached the intersection at Sixth and Main, her Mom slowed down. "Are you turning, Mom?"*

*"No, I'm not," was her mom's reply as she drove through the intersection.*

*Driver's Ed class was not all that exciting that afternoon, except for Chad. When he was trying to parallel park downtown, he backed over the curb and hit a parking meter. The meter was okay, but Mr. Wheeler was not happy about the dent in the bumper. Donna's driving lesson went well. Mr. Wheeler even complimented her on her smooth stops and starts at the stoplights. "Just four more days," she thought as she waited for her mom to pick her up.*

*On the way back home, Donna told her mom about Chad's adventure. Her mom laughed. She remembered some of her own adventures when she took her lessons many, many years ago. As they approached the intersection at Sixth and Main, Donna's mom once again slowed down.*

*As she thought about it, Donna recalled that her mom would slow down at every intersection; perhaps she was just being cautious. "Mom?"*

*"Yes, Donna."*

*"You seem to slow down at every intersection even though the light is green. Are you just being extra cautious because I am still in Driver's Ed?"*

*"No, dear. I slow down because I know the green light can't stay green forever, and so I am just getting ready for it to turn red."*

**Moral: Do not be afraid to accept success or to challenge idleness.**



Sir Isaac Newton's First Law of Motion states that a body in motion (along a straight line) will tend to stay in that same line of motion unless it is acted upon by an outside force. Likewise, a body at rest will tend to stay at rest unless it is acted upon by an outside force. The property that keeps that body in motion, or at rest, is called inertia. I know you were not planning on receiving a lesson in physics when you started reading this book, but inertia plays a large role in our lives every day.

In the story above, Donna's mom felt that the light "just couldn't stay green forever." Yes, the light will, at some point, change from green to red. But while it was green, she should accept that it was green, and keep driving at a constant speed. Of course there will be times when the light will turn red before she reaches the intersection, but she should not act as if that will be every time she approaches an intersection. Those times when the light changes are when she needs to slow down; not the times when the light stays green.

How many of us are like Donna's mom – afraid (or unwilling) to accept things the way they are? This might be in our working environment, in the dynamics that seem to be there in almost every family situation (whether it is close or extended), or in an interpersonal relationship. Even



though we know what Sir Isaac Newton said about inertia, we do not think it applies to us – it must apply only to non-human objects, like apples falling from a tree. It is true that Newton was talking about objects, and not people or relationships, but we can still use his First Law of Motion as we consider human interactions.

On its own, inertia is neither good nor bad. How it affects a given situation, however, can make you think that it is “good” in one case, but “bad” in another. While this line of logic is reasonable, it is not accurate. The color red is not good or bad; in some settings, red is the right color to use (“good”). In other settings, red is clearly the wrong choice of color (“bad”).

Below are two common examples that show the application of inertia. While they are probably obvious to you, you might be asking, “So what?” The value in these examples is for you to draw your own parallels to them, and see what role inertia is playing in your life.

Example 1: A good bowler can roll the bowling ball in a straight line down the alley by not applying any spin as the ball is let go. On a smooth “true” lane, the ball will continue to roll straight until it hits a pin, finds the gutter, or reaches the back of the lane. Conversely, if you just set that same bowling ball down on a flat level surface, the ball will not move until someone or something pushes it.

Example 2: An evenly powered boat whose rudder is set “straight ahead” will continue on a straight course until there is some force that changes it. What are some of those course-altering forces? A strong current might push the boat slightly off course (good navigators account for that, however). Turning the wheel or rudder will certainly change the course direction. Another way is to apply more power on just the left-side motor or engine; while the rudder still points straight ahead, the boat will now move to the right because of the increased left power.

If your job situation is particularly rewarding, and you are really happy, you probably do not spend much time thinking about changing it. Why would you want to? You wouldn’t, of course. Newton’s First Law says, in this case, that your job situation will continue to be rewarding, and you will continue to be happy, unless something else comes along (external force) to affect it. This external force could be a downturn in the economy that impacts your company; it could be a new manager who comes in and wants to make a change; or it could even be some event outside of work in your personal life that carries over and lessens the enjoyment you get from work. But if these things don’t happen, your job situation should continue to be rewarding for you, and you should continue to be happy.

Newton’s First Law also applies in the case of an unhappy situation. If you are in a sour relationship that is not going the direction you would like, it is not going to change unless you do something about it. Here is the second part of the First Law in application (*a body at rest will tend to stay at rest unless it is acted upon by an outside force*). The same holds true for most work situations. The good jobs don’t come looking for you; you have to go look for them. In these cases, inertia will tend to keep you in the situation unless you do something that forces the change.

I know some people who play Twenty-one (“Black Jack”), and who say that inertia has a lot to do with their winning (I never hear about their losing.). Their logic is that when they are on a winning streak, they make no changes. This is when “good inertia” is working for them. But when the cards turn on them, that is when they do something to change what is then “bad inertia.” I don’t think Newton had card games in mind when he wrote his Laws of Motion, but

you do hear about a lot of athletes and coaches who wear the same shirt when they are on a winning streak, etc. They call it superstition, but if you try hard enough, you might be able to see inertia at work in their logic.

## Run, Billie, Run!

*Billie was not a very big tenth grader; in fact, he was somewhat scrawny. He did not have a lot of really close friends, just some of the same kids he had known since grade school. He was not one of the smartest students, although he usually got B's in most of his classes. Athletic? No, he wasn't all that athletic, either. But Billie did have a dream; one he pretty much kept to himself. Why tell anyone else; he would just be laughed at.*

*Billie had spent a lot of time during the previous summer watching the Summer Olympics on TV. The gymnastics were outstanding; the diving competition was really fun to watch; the underwater pictures of the swimmers were kind of neat; the rowing was okay. What Billie really liked were the Track and Field events, especially the running events. He was amazed at all the preparations that the short-distance sprinters went through before the race; a race that might last only 10 seconds! He could not imagine how the marathon runners could maintain their pace for 26 miles lasting over 2 hours. That was really something. But it was the middle distance races that Billie watched with rapt attention. As he listened to the announcers, he realized the mental strategy that went into these races. And as he watched all the heats of the 1500-meter races, he started thinking to himself what it would be like to be out there running those races. He started taping the races so he could watch them over and over again.*

*Eventually, of course, the Games were over for another quadrennial. Medals had been handed out, national anthems sung, and now the athletes were all returning to their homelands. Billie put on a pair of shorts, one of his favorite Olympic t-shirts, and his tennis shoes. "Where are you going, Billie?" asked his mom as he was headed toward the front door.*

*"I'm going out to run, Mom. I am only going around the block; I won't be far."*

*"You're going to do what?" she asked in disbelief. Billie had never done any running in his life. But she knew he had watched the Olympics a lot during the summer. 'Oh well, there are so many worse things he could be doing,' she thought to herself.*

*The screen door slammed shut as Billie took off running as he was halfway out the door. Billie could hear the crowd roaring; they were all clapping their hands; they were chanting his name – he was in the Olympics! And then he tripped on the raised crack in the sidewalk, and fell to the ground. So much for that daydreaming. His hands were bruised from stopping his fall, and his right knee was scraped and was bleeding.*

*It hurt as he got up; Billie turned around and started walking back home. So much for his thoughts about running; he couldn't even make it around the block.*

*After he got home, his mom washed up his scrapes, and noticed his bruised hands. She hugged him; Moms have a way of knowing just what to do.*

*That evening, Billie took one of his Olympic tapes off the shelf and put into the VCR and started watching it. It was just as exciting as when he had watched the race as it was run live. He knew who would win, of course, but he was watching the runners' techniques and their styles. After one of the preliminary heats, the winner was being interviewed, and he was asked about his preparation. He responded, "I visualize the race as I am going to run it. I see myself in the blocks before the starter shoots the gun. I see each turn and I know how my legs are reacting. I know how I am going to breathe and move my arms. And then finally I see myself on the victory*

*stand accepting the gold medal. Of course I have done a lot of physical preparation to get ready for the race, but it is the visualization that is key.”*

*“How has that visualization helped you?” asked the on-track announcer.*

*“Because I have trained my mind to see what I am going to do,” replied the winner, “I don’t have to do much thinking once the race begins. I have pictured the entire race, and so once it starts all I have to do is just let my body do what I have trained it to do. I have also found that I am not very tired when the race is over. It is all in the mind, telling yourself that you can do it.”*

*“That’s it!” exclaimed Billie to himself.*

*Even though his hands and knees were all banged up, Billie’s mom saw a look of happiness in Billie as he kissed her goodnight. “Don’t forget to say your prayers, Billie.”*

*“Yes, ma’am,” he replied as he skipped down the hall to his bedroom. After saying his prayers, Billie closed his door, turned off the light and got into bed. As he closed his eyes, he replayed that Olympics race in his mind. If he could visualize that race, why couldn’t he visualize himself running like that?*

*As hard as he tried, he could not create a picture of himself running. He just couldn’t. But then Billie remembered what he had heard that Olympian say, ‘It is all in the mind, telling yourself that you can do it.’ So Billie took a big breath, thought for a few seconds, and was even surprised when he heard himself start talking.*

*“I am a good runner.”*

*“I run fast.”*

*“I finish all my races.”*

*“I win first place medals.” When he said this one, Billie could see himself – at least it looked as if it was Billie – receiving a first place medal on the platform. “Yeah. It does work.” He still could not visualize himself running in a big race, but he eventually went to sleep, still repeating his new favorite phrases.*

*“I am a good runner.”*

*“I run fast.”*

*“I finish all my races.”*

*“I win first place medals.”*

*Billie did a lot of running during the rest of the summer; and he did a lot of repeating those phrases over and over in his mind. While he was running, he would sometimes find that he was actually saying them out loud.*

*School started right after Labor Day, and Billie was eager to go out for track. All the other boys laughed as they saw scrawny Billie show up for practice. One of the returning Varsity track stars said to Billie, “Hey kid, we already have a water boy. Try the Chess Club.” And then the upperclassman jogged on to the track and started running laps.*

*Even though Billie was at practice every afternoon, the coach would not let Billie join the track team. But Billie kept repeating his phrases over and over and over in his mind.*

*“I am a good runner.”*

*“I run fast.”*

*“I finish all my races.”*

*“I win first place medals.”*

*And every night when he went to bed, after saying his prayers, Billie would repeat his phrases to himself, and then try to visualize himself running. He finally was able to see himself running, and winning. And that felt good.*

*Billie showed up for track team practice every day after school even after the season began and he was still not on the team. But he would run the laps, and even run behind the runners during a practice race. He was not allowed on the track, of course, during a real track meet. He kept repeating his phrases, and visualizing the races, and he got to be a stronger runner.*

*Near the end of the season, two of the top runners had to miss a local meet because of a basketball game. The coach would have to forfeit the meet because he did not have any entrants in the 1500-meter race. Reluctantly, he asked Billie if he wanted to put on a uniform and run the race. Billie was overjoyed. He grabbed the uniform from the coach, and ran at breakneck speed to the locker room to change.*

*“I am a good runner.”*

*“I run fast.”*

*“I finish all my races.”*

*“I win first place medals.”*

*He said these out loud to himself as he was changing. As he jogged back to the track in a tracksuit that was quite baggy on him, he pictured the start of the race, and then each turn and each straightaway, and the finish. He was ready.*

*“Runners, on your mark, get set.” And then the gun signaled the start of the race.*

*“Hey punk, get out of my way,” one of the runners from the rival school said to Billie as he poked an elbow into Billie’s side. But Billie neither heard him nor felt him; his mind was in control of the race as his body did what it had been physically and mentally trained to do. Billie kept on pace and easily won – much to the shock of everyone. Everyone except Billie, of course.*

**Moral: Visualize your goal, and then go about living your life as if the goal has already been achieved. You might be surprised at what is actually possible!**



Definitize; Visualize; Actualize; Realize. I will explain these shortly, but first you need to remember those four actions, and in the correct order. It is kind of like “ready, aim, fire” for shooting a rifle – “aim, fire, ready” just doesn’t work quite as well. I find that acronyms help me remember certain things. So in this case, what you want to remember is DVAR. By itself, DVAR doesn’t really mean anything, so you will have to remember it in the context of achievement. But once you do, and once you start applying it, you will be amazed at the results. So, once again – **Definitize; Visualize; Actualize; Realize.** A natural question is, “What do they mean, and what do I do with them?” Here is how this DVAR process works.

Definitize – Write down in plain language what it is that you want to accomplish. “What you want to accomplish” could be a career goal, a personal ambition, or just a great desire. Ideas and thoughts are wonderful, but they never amount to much until they are committed to in writing. Once they are written, you can act upon them, modify them, and use them as stepping stones to greater things. This part of the process answers the question, “What is it?”

Visualize – Once you have written down what it is that you want, now you write down how it looks once you accomplish it, once you achieve it, once you get there, etc. This piece of the process is like painting a picture of the future as you want it to be. Unless you can visualize the future (as you want it to be – and this is a key point), it will be very difficult to take any actions to get you there. If you do not know what your desired goal (the future) looks like, then you will not know how to recognize it if/when you get there. This part of the process answers the question, “What will it look like?”

Actualize – Now it starts to get hard. Writing down what you want (Definitize) and then writing down how it looks (Visualize) are the easy parts. Any decent daydreamer can do those first two steps. This third step is the hardest part; this is what separates the dreamers from the doers. But this is also the most fun part of the process. Here is where you get to act out your dream. You are the script writer and the actor all at the same time. What you do to actualize your goal is to do what you see yourself doing in your visualization picture. Just like Billie ran as if he were winning races, you need to do what it is that you see yourself doing once you have accomplished what you want to do. This part of the process answers the question, “What will I be doing when I do achieve my goal?”

Realize – Once you get here, it will all seem so natural. You will ask yourself, “Is that all there is to it? I thought it would be tough to get here.” This is the reward piece. You committed your goal to writing; you wrote down what it would look like when you reached it; your actions mirrored what your actions would be when you reached your goal. Now that you have realized your goal, it is almost anti-climatic. Why? Because your behavior has not really changed. You thought that it would be quite different once you reached your goal; but that is because you thought there would be a big change. Since you have been acting in the manner of how you would act once you achieved the goal, there is no difference. Your actions do not change. It is now just a formality of recognizing the goal achievement. This part of the process is the validation of all those thoughts and dreams you had. Celebrate. You deserve it.

I have led “Visioning” exercises a few times. I would start by asking people in the room what it was that they wanted. What was their goal? Sometimes it would be hard to elicit responses at first, but eventually most people would participate. After some brainstorming, and my writing down (for all to see) their thoughts, we would try to condense all those thoughts into a few key points that they could all agree on. We had just completed the “Definitize” phase.

My next question to them was typically along this line, “Assume that you have accomplished X, Y or Z (one or more of the key points from the first phase), what does it look like now that you are there?” Here is where it can get interesting. I have heard responses like, “We all get huge bonuses.” Or, “Our team all goes on a paid vacation to Hawaii.” Some peoples’ imaginations really soar during this phase of the process. There is nothing inherently wrong with that; the key is to focus that energy into actions that help the team accomplish their goals. As I am writing down their “pictures” of how the future will look, the participants are usually starting to mentally transport themselves into that future state. This is a very critical stage, because if they cannot

picture what it will look like when they “get there,” they will not be able to perform in a manner that simulates the future. This creative phase, “Visualize,” now sets the stage for putting it all into action.

Here is where the participants are now left on their own to perform. Just because I helped them define their goals and draw the picture of them, I cannot help them get there. They must do it themselves. And they get there by doing what they would do once they have accomplished their goals. It is just like stepping into the future, and then just going about your business. Except in this case, you are going about the future’s business while you are still in the present. As I said earlier, this “Actualize” phase is the most difficult. This is the real test of how much you want to accomplish something.

Let me relate a real-life story that illustrates these points. Quite a few years ago, I was working for a really great manager, Tom. Unlike other managers who made promises that they could not keep, Tom never made any promises to me. He would reward me in ways that were available to him, but he would never hold out “a carrot” for me. I had presented Tom with several proposals over a short period of time. These proposals were about new roles for me in the organization, usually tied to a promotion or an increase in responsibility (which would, of course, lead to higher pay). In a private discussion with Tom one month, I mentioned again how I accepted the fact that he did not make any promises that he might not be able to make, but that I was a little frustrated in not knowing whether there was any merit in my thinking of being able to grow my position. In other words, was there a higher level job and more money for me? Tom’s response was as if he had read the book that I had not yet written. He told me not to worry so much about the future jobs – if one was there, it would happen. He said for me instead to think about my proposals, and what parts of them really interested me. Try them; just start doing some of the things that I said I wanted to do in a new role. If the new role were ever to be justified, then there would surely be merit in my performing some of those tasks. In that short time, Tom had taken me through the four phases of goal accomplishment. In so many words, he reminded me that I had done the “Definitize” and “Visualize” phases by writing the proposals. He then gave me implicit permission to “Actualize” them, which he said could lead to “Realize” if my actions were indeed proven to be valuable.

If you want something, you are going to have to work for it. Star athletes just don’t get there because they want to. Maybe they don’t use the DVAR process, but it can work for athletes as well as business professionals as well as family members. Just remember: **Definitize**; **Visualize**; **Actualize**; **Realize**.

P.S. I began to “Actualize” and perform the tasks of the new role I wanted. Within a few months, the value of this new role was easily seen, which meant that I was then able to “Realize” that new position. The promotion, which followed shortly, was easy for Tom to sell to top management because he had the proof of its value through my accomplishments over the previous six months.

## Barnyard Squabble

*It was shortly after noon on a hot summer day – just after the noon feeding – when the entire barnyard was full of noise. Every animal was making some sort of noise. It was nothing really unusual for the time of day, however, except for the noise over in the southeast corner of the main pigpens. This is where the swine are adjacent to the chicken coops. On this particular day, when it was quite warm, the animals were a little more testy than usual. One of the hens was boasting about how important she was. After all, she routinely laid two eggs every day, and she had been laying those two eggs a day for almost two years.*

*“You see, that is why I am the most valuable. I have consistently given the farmer two eggs a day for going on two years now.” The hen certainly looked important as she strutted about in her coop with her feathers all fluffed and preened.*

*“Hold on there, queenie,” snorted a big sow. “You might be top chicken in that coop, but you cannot compare yourself to any of us swine. Have you seen how much space the farmer gives us? You have a small caged-in space for hundreds, while there are only a dozen of us in this huge area.” The large sow snorted through her nostrils when she was done talking to the chicken.*

*“You might have more space than I do, but that is because you need it. We are able to keep our living area quite clean and orderly. Most of your pen is an awful mess. And you smell bad, too. I don’t know why the farmer keeps you.” The hen was definitely talking down to the sow, and not just because she was 3 feet higher. “You might be tolerated, but I am more valuable than you are. The farmer can have breakfast every morning because I give him two eggs every day. What do you give him every day? Nothing but a big mess to clean up.”*

*“Maybe you give the farmer two eggs every day that he can have for breakfast, but that isn’t all that he has. Have you seen his plate?” the sow asked rhetorically. “No, of course not. You are cooped up where you can’t see anything but a bunch of other chickens. You know what else is on his plate? He also has some fried potatoes and a few strips of bacon.” The sow got melancholy; her thoughts of pigs becoming bacon caused tears to flow from her eyes. “And do you know where that bacon comes from? That bacon comes from swine just like me. You might give a little so the farmer has eggs for breakfast, but we have to give our lives so he can have bacon. So, now, who do you think is more valuable?”*

**Moral: Don’t measure someone’s contribution by what the recipient gets, but rather by what the contributor gives up.**



Have you ever heard the phrase, “It is better to give than to receive”? I am sure you have. Most of us have heard it in different applications – religious, charitable, or just being good people. In the context of the story above, the hen could be viewed as a “contributory giver.” Her gift – two eggs every day – required only a contribution from her. It did not take all that she had (maybe all her eggs for that day), and she was able to produce two more eggs the very next day. The pig, on the other hand, is a “sacrificial giver.” In order for the swine to give a “gift of breakfast” required the largest gift of all – the sacrifice of life. Once that life was given up for breakfast (and many more meals, of course), there were no more gifts that the pig could give.

The pig had given all. So while the hen was boasting about how much more valuable she was because of her “two eggs a day” gift, her gift did not require as much of her as the pig’s.

We are not generally called on to make the same type of sacrificial gifts as the pig in this story – it is rather extreme. The point, however, is that many of us need to be better acceptors and acknowledgers than we currently are. We are all pretty good gift givers. We go Christmas shopping with “just the right gift” in mind. When Boss’s Day or Secretary’s Day comes about, we find an appropriate card and a small gift or some nice flowers. No, we do not have a problem in giving gifts; we do it well, even with a little sincerity at times.

But how do we do at receiving gifts? Do we show as much excitement about the gift as a two-year old does when he rips open a package? Or do we look at it, smile, and then say “Thank you”? I am not saying that we should “fake it,” just that we should accept the gift in the spirit in which it was sought out, and then given. The giver put some thought into the gift, and the receiver should put that same amount of thought back into the receipt of it. If someone you know goes out of her way to do something that she thinks is really special, make sure you acknowledge what she has done. Maybe it doesn’t rate high on your scale, but if it rates high on her scale, then it is important. Don’t diminish the value of what she has done just because you don’t see the value in it.

What about at work? The concept of gifts does not play well in most corporate environments today, but the story is still valid. Consider the case of the manager who has in his group two employees with the same level of responsibility. One of these two, Talented Tim, has more talent and experience, and is thus able to make more significant contributions than the other. The other employee, Hard-working Harry, works hard, expends 110% effort on all tasks, but is just not able to contribute as much as his co-worker. Which one is more valuable? From the overall corporate point of view, Tim’s contributions are more beneficial to the overall business than Harry’s.

Does that mean that the manager praises and rewards only Tim? No. Tim might be eligible for more monetary rewards than Harry, but the manager must recognize that Harry is giving all that he is capable of giving; Tim’s output might be only 60% - 70% of his potential. Thus, the manager must find ways to acknowledge Harry’s contributions in ways that make Harry feel good about himself as a person and as an employee.

Remember – always try to acknowledge all contributions (work efforts; actual gifts and presents; words of praise and recognition, and just plain good deeds) in the context and spirit in which they were given.

## The Wishing Well

*Jim was settling in for a quiet weekend as he turned on the radio to his favorite station, the one that played “Classic Oldies” – like the Beach Boys, Rolling Stones, Beatles; even Elvis Presley and Ricky Nelson. The song that just started was a Sam Cook hit that started, “Another Saturday night, and I ain’t got nobody.” Well, that certainly is a picture of my life, Jim said to himself. He had not had a whole lot of success in the dating arena lately. He was a nice guy; he dressed okay; had a decent job; he just wasn’t the ladies’ man that he desperately wanted to be. He was able to get a few dates, but never more than two or three with the same woman.*

*Deciding he needed to do something different, Jim picked the newspaper up to look at it again. In the “Life” section, he saw an interested ad for “The Year’s Best Antique Show and Flea Market” running all weekend at the Fairgrounds. Jim put the paper down, grabbed his jacket, wallet and keys and headed out the door. “Fairgrounds, here I come,” Jim said as he backed his car out of the driveway. Just having something to do, something that he wanted to do, seemed to make a difference in Jim’s attitude. Rather than turning on the radio, he started whistling. Jim was in a good mood!*

*Jim was overwhelmed with “all the stuff” that he saw. As he looked at table after table of antiques, he decided that most people must consider something they don’t want an antique. And a “flea market” looked to be just an organized junkyard. “Oh well,” Jim thought. “At least the people are nice, and it gives me something different to do. I might even see a cute lady or two.” He didn’t really see any ladies that caught his eye, but he did see a few items that caught his interest. There was a really nice Victrola that played real records. A little expensive, he thought, when he saw the \$1,500 price tag. The Willie Mays baseball bat seemed a bargain at \$40, but it wasn’t a real autograph.*

*Then he saw it. A bright reflection hit his eye, and seemed to follow him even as he took a few steps. It was as if there were a magnet pulling him to the table draped with a purple cloth. There it was – the object that shone the reflection into his eye. It was a dark blue bottle, or at least it looked blue. It had a wide base and then narrowed to the top. His eyes were drawn to this bottle. What was it about it? “How much for this bottle?”*

*“That’s a special blue glass that is hard to find. Ten dollars.”*

*“I’ll give you five,” Jim replied, as he then muttered under his breath, “I’m not sure why I’d even pay a buck for it.”*

*“Okay, you can have it for five,” the dealer said. He took Jim’s five, and wrapped the bottle in some newspaper and then put it into a plastic grocery bag. “Thanks. Enjoy it now,” the dealer said as he handed the bag to Jim.*

*“Yeah, have a good day,” Jim replied to the dealer as he strolled off amidst the other tables and stands. Jim looked at items as he wandered around, but he didn’t see anything that begged his attention. The smell of the hot dogs and hamburgers did catch his attention, however, and he headed over to have a bite for lunch.*

*Heading home after lunch, Jim started thinking his big purchase, all five dollars’ worth. He started to wonder if there was any particular history behind the bottle. Certainly, an old bottle like that must have some history to it. Was it ever held by anyone famous; why was it made in*

*that peculiar shape; why hadn't the seller cleaned it up before taking it to the flea market? "Hmm."*

*Jim ran warm water in the kitchen sink, and he added some dish detergent. The sink was half-filled, but almost overflowing with bubbles by time he unwrapped the paper from his new bottle. The bottle was really dirty, both inside and outside, but he finally got it clean. As he grabbed a dishtowel to begin drying, he noticed an iridescence in the bluish color. "Wow, this is really pretty. I wonder if I could find some more like this." He thought about heading back to the Fairgrounds, but he realized it was close to closing time. "Oh well." Jim starting drying his new possession, and its shine was absolutely lustrous.*

*He decided to put this beautiful bottle on his dining room table. Maybe he would buy some cut flowers at the store to put in it. All of a sudden, the bottle started wobbling. "Is it an earthquake?" thought Jim. The bottle kept wobbling, and then fell over on the table. Jim couldn't believe what he was seeing. All of a sudden, a genie started squirming and wiggling his way out of the bottle. Jim shook his head just to make sure his mind wasn't playing tricks with him. "Wow!" Jim exclaimed.*

*"Hey, don't look so surprised," the genie said to Jim. "I was beginning to think that I would never make it back out of that bottle. Man, was it ever dirty in there. Thanks for cleaning it."*

*Jim looked around to see if this was some trick. Was there a hidden camera somewhere trying to catch him?*

*"What are you looking for?" the genie asked Jim. "This is no trick. Haven't you heard of genies in a bottle before?" Jim just stood there, shocked and in a trance. "I guess you don't know the routine." The genie continued. "You saved me from being stuck inside that bottle forever, so I will grant you three wishes. You can ask me for them anytime you want. I will go back inside, but I will come back out at anytime that you need me." With a little more grace than his initial appearance, the genie disappeared back into the blue bottle.*

*"I wonder if this really works." Jim said.*

*"Yes, it does," came the muffled reply from inside the bottle.*

*"Okay, then come back out so I can make my first wish." As soon as Jim had finished his sentence, the genie was outside the bottle.*

*"Yes, master. I am ready to fulfill your first wish," the genie said as one would to his master.*

*"How about some money," Jim said, mostly to himself. "I would like \$10,000 for my first wish. Show me your stuff, genie."*

*"You don't have to get smart with me, master. Your wish is my command; here is your \$10,000." As soon as the genie finished the last sentence, there was a stack of one hundred brand new \$100 bills on the table. "You can count it if you want, master. But I guarantee it's all there."*

*Jim picked up the stack anyway, and counted it out. Sure enough, there were one hundred crisp \$100 bills. Ten Thousand dollars. "Wow!" Jim exclaimed. "How about another wish?" Jim asked.*

*"Whatever you want, master," the genie replied. "You have two wishes left."*

*“I want a brand new, shiny red Corvette convertible.”*

*“Your wish is my command, master.” The genie waved his arms, and chanted something incomprehensible. Jim looked out into his driveway, and saw a big puff of smoke. When the smoke cleared, there was his brand new, shiny red Corvette convertible. Jim ran out there to look at the car. Jim got inside the car, and he noticed that the keys were in the ignition. He started it, and noticed the odometer read 000000.0 – not even showroom cars have absolutely zero miles on them. Ten minutes later, Jim was through checking out the new car, and he went back inside.*

*“Do you like it?” the genie asked.*

*“Of course,” Jim replied. “It’s beautiful.”*

*“Of course,” the genie replied. “Oh,” he added. “Here is the ownership certificate for the car. You didn’t ask for it, but I thought you would want it.*

*Jim took the certificate, and, sure enough, his name and address were on it, showing that Jim had full title to the car. “Wow. Thanks!”*

*“You’re welcome, master. You now have one wish remaining.” The genie once again disappeared back into the bottle.*

*Jim really liked this. He just got a stack of money, plus a brand new car. It was hard for him to think of what else he would need to become irresistible to women. “Oh, genie.” And the genie came right out of the bottle. “I know I have one more wish, but I don’t know exactly what to wish for. I want to be irresistible to women, and I’ve gotten a new car plus some money. What else do I need?”*

*“I’m sorry, master. I am unable to give advice; I only grant wishes.”*

*“Okay, genie. I am ready to make my third wish.”*

*“And I am ready to grant it to you, master. But I must make sure you understand that this is your final wish, and that it is irreversible once it is granted.” The genie was starting to sound like an attorney now.*

*“Yes, I understand. My third – and final – wish is to be desired by every attractive woman who sees me; to be loved by all the women who hold me; to be irresistible whenever I am in the reach of a woman.” Jim seemed quite confident as he made his wish.*

*“Are you sure?” the genie asked him.*

*“Never more sure in my life,” was Jim’s reply.*

*“Very well, master. Your wish is my command.” You could almost hear the “Poof!” as there was a cloud of smoke as Jim disappeared, and in his place was the most beautiful diamond ring one could imagine.*

**Moral: Be careful when you wish for something. You just might actually get your wish, but it might not be what you really wanted, or the by-products might be undesirable.**



When you wish for something, is it something that you really want, or is it something that you think you want? What is the difference, you might ask. Something that you really want

should be an item, an action, or an outcome that, should it not occur, there would be a significant impact on your life. I hate to be the one to tell you, but there are only a limited number of things in your life that are that profound. You might think some things are that important, but they probably are not. Ask yourself, and be honest with your answer, “Would my life be significantly impacted if [that thing you think is so important] doesn’t happen?” I guess that the answer in most cases is “Probably not.”

So why does it matter whether you really want “it,” or just think you do? The answer here is not so much in the outcome, but rather in the energies, emotions and relationships that are brought into play during your “wishing cycle.” Let’s see what might happen through a couple examples.

Dave and Fred are junior accountants in the same department in a large multi-national company. As college chums they used to spend a lot of time together, and they shared many of the same interests. Having recently graduated from college, they still shared similar interests, although their long-term goals were different. Dave is a high-achiever who feels his value and worth is reflected in his job title. Though he is in his early twenties, Dave definitely has his sights set on achieving a very senior position within the company; possibly even CEO. Fred, on the other hand, has his focus on being a family man some day; although he would not mind receiving a few promotions along the way.

The new job posting on Monday morning was like most other job postings, except this one was in the Accounting Department. “Senior Accountant” was the job title, and the requirements seemed to be a good match for Dave’s and Fred’s current roles. They both decided to apply for the job – Dave because he really wanted the job (“I want the job, no matter what it takes”), and Fred because he wanted to “give it a try.” During the interviews, Dave told the managers why he was certainly better than Fred for the job. Dave even stopped sharing some information with Fred. Knowledge was power, and Dave was going to do everything he could to get the promotion. This even included belittling Fred’s accomplishments to some of the managers.

Fred’s interview style was more casual, open, and definitely above reproach. When asked, he told the interviewers that he thought both he and Dave would be good for the position. Fred felt he had a decent chance of getting the new job, but it certainly was not his top priority.

The announcement was made that Dave got the job. Many people congratulated him, including Fred. It was shortly after the announcement that some other employees started telling Fred how Dave talked about him before and during the interviews, and even how Dave talked down about Fred to make himself look better. Well, Dave got the job he wanted (and coveted), but he lost his best friend Fred in the process.

Gregory was a materialistic person. He needed “things” to show his status in life. He was relatively successful in business; the business plan that he had written in Business School turned into a viable business opportunity. His wife, his college sweetheart and Homecoming Queen, had started a small boutique that had grown so much that franchising it appeared to be in the near future. Life was good; Gregory and Susan were living the life that many people want to live. They had a beautiful home that served them well for entertaining; they had seven-figure life insurance policies paid for by their businesses; their six-year old daughter Cynthia showed promise as a pianist, and most of all, they were truly in love with each other.

Gregory's business was doing well, but he knew that he needed significant capital to allow it to expand to its current potential. As he boarded the plane for a three-day trip of constant business meetings, he murmured to himself, "I wish I had three million dollars cash; I could expand this business into a much more dynamic enterprise." Ah, if he only had three million dollars.

The late night phone call jarred him out of sleep – sleep that can be so hard to obtain in a strange bed in a strange hotel room in some strange city. It was his father-in-law on the phone; Susan had been killed in a freak automobile accident earlier that day. He would need to come back home. He was needed there; Cynthia desperately needed her Daddy.

As he boarding the plane, with tears in his eyes, Gregory remembered all of a sudden the face value of Susan's life insurance policy –\$3,000,000.00. A sense of shock fell over him.

I know. This last story is horrendous and totally out of line. But did it make you think? Do you see what Gregory now has to face in his life? Will he ever know if it was just some coincidence that Susan's life insurance policy was the same amount that he felt he needed? Or was it an answer to his wish? Maybe we are getting a little too close to Rod Serling and "The Twilight Zone."

The point to be made here is not that Gregory was out of line wishing for the money; the point is that he did not specify how we was to obtain the money. Obviously, if he had wished that he would get the cash he needed through venture capital funding, or through an SBA loan, then there would never be any tie between Susan's death and his wish for money. What I want you to remember is to be specific in what you wish for and how you are to get it.

So how would this apply to Dave and Fred in the first example? Dave might have wished that he would move up in his career path while maintaining his friendship with Fred. Would he have still gotten that promotion? Maybe, but he might not have been so conniving along the way.

## The Prized Jacket

*Old Mister Wind was bragging to the clouds about how strong he was; how he was more powerful than anything else in the skies. The clouds dared not disagree with him because he could blow them away with just one strong puff. One day when the skies were calm and Mister Wind was nowhere to be seen, the clouds saw kindly Mister Sun.*

*“How are you today, Mister Sun? You certainly look cheerful and bright.” The clouds were happy that Mister Wind was not around today – they did not like him as much as they did Mister Sun.*

*Mister Sun smiled at the clouds and replied, “I am feeling just wonderful today. Thank you for asking. And how are all of you clouds today?”*

*“Well, we’re kind of okay today,” the clouds answered in a not-too-convincing tone. “We really hope you are going to stay around today. We like you much more than that mean old Mister Wind. He just brags all the time about how strong he is, and we are tired of it.”*

*Mister Sun chuckled. “So he is up to his bragging again, is he? He has told me that he is much stronger than I am, but I have just ignored him. Does it really bother you that he brags so much?”*

*“Yes!” replied all the clouds in unison.*

*“Very well,” said Mister Sun. “I will talk with him”*

*The clouds smiled and cheered; they were white and puffy – happy clouds.*

*A few days later Mister Sun was high in the sky when Mister Wind appeared. The clouds started moving across the sky, not very happy that Mister Wind was blowing them around. “Hey there, Sun,” called out Mister Wind in a mean, gruff voice. “What are you doing up there looking so happy? Can’t you tell that I am here; I want things to be miserable.”*

*“I am just naturally happy, Wind,” said smiling Mister Sun. “I hear that you have been out bragging again about how strong you are.”*

*“And why not,” replied Mister Wind. “After all, I am much stronger than you.” He took a big breath and blew the clouds all the way across the sky. “Ha-ha-ha,” laughed mean old Wind.*

*“I don’t think you are stronger than I am, Wind. In fact, I am stronger than you; I just don’t go around bragging. I provide light every day so the plants can grow; so the animals can find food to eat; so the colors can be bright and beautiful.” Mister Sun was proud of what could be done thanks to the light and warmth he provided.*

*“Well, I’ll show you who is stronger,” boasted Mister Wind. Just at that time, an old man wearing a handsome jacket was walking down a path. “Let’s make a bet,” the blustery Wind said. “The first one to get that old man to take off his jacket is the strongest. Okay?”*

*Mister Sun smiled and nodded his head. The bet was on. Old Mister Wind took a breath and blew on the old man; he barely noticed it, and he kept on walking. Mister Wind took another deep breath and blew really hard at the old man; the man responded by zipping up the front of the jacket, and putting his hands in his pocket. This infuriated Mister Wind even more. He took another really big breath, brought in lots of cold air, and then blew it all with great force at the*

*old man. The man almost fell down from the strength of the wind, but he kept walking, lifting up the collar to protect his neck and ears. Finally, Mister Wind gave it one more try. He filled his mouth with freezing cold air, and then he blew and blew and blew. All it did was to make the old man hug the jacket even tighter around his shivering body. Mister Wind growled in anger, and he gave up.*

*Mister Sun just smiled. His smile and warmth took the chill off the cold air blown down on the man by Mister Wind. Mister Sun continued to smile, and his warmth also continued. The old man took his hands out of his pockets. As it was getting warmer, the birds chirped and the bees buzzed about the brightly colored flowers. Mister Sun's smile continued to grow, and the warmth grew even more and more. The clouds started returning to the sky. The old man was getting warm, and he unzipped the jacket as he walked along the way. With one more beaming smile, Mister Sun generated so much warmth that the old man was too warm to keep the jacket on. He took the jacket off and draped it over his arm as he continued on down the path.*

*Seeing that he was defeated, Mister Wind left for the day. The clouds all rejoiced because their friend Mister Sun had proven to be stronger than Mister Wind – the old man had taken off his jacket because of the warmth from Mister Sun.*

**Moral: Warmth and kindness can gain you more good than meanness and a cold heart.**



We know that not all winds are bad, and we also know that too much sun sometimes can be a bad thing. This is not a literal story; just a simple tale that shows how warmth, kindness and a big beaming smile can win out over harshness, bitterness and an evil temper. Is this a universal truth that always holds no matter what the situation or circumstances? Of course not, but my guess is that it will hold true over ninety percent of the time. Nine times out of ten is not a bad average.

I was raised in a strict military family (is there any other kind of military family?), and I had my own taste of military life for a few years after high school. Do you think Drill Sergeants use warmth and kindness to ask the young recruits if they would like to stand at attention, or if they would like to go on a five-mile hike? I don't think so! The military system is not a democratic system, nor can it afford to be. Under war conditions, when orders are given, lives can be lost if the orders are not followed. So I do not have a problem in allowing the military to fall into that other ten percent.

But most of us are not in the military. We are managers, students, homemakers, teachers, professionals, construction workers and artists. We build cars, houses, computers, airplanes and roads. We lead people, animals, orchestras and organizations. We work inside, outside, on the ground or in the air. Primarily we interact with other people. And what do we know about how most other people prefer to be treated? With kindness, or with meanness? That's a no-brainer.

We know people respond positively to kindness. Now if you are going to be deceitful and only pretend to be kind in order to get what you want – sorry, that doesn't count. Deceit and dishonesty are a universal wrong. What I am talking about is honest kindness, truly caring about the other person. One universal truth that I am sure we have all heard is the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I don't know about you, but I like to be treated with respect, dignity and forthrightness. Well, if I expect to be treated that way, what do you think the Golden Rule says about the way I should treat other people? Right. I should treat other people with the same amount of respect, dignity and forthrightness that I would want.

Okay, you say, but how do we apply this in a business environment? We know that many business organizations are hierarchical in structure, and so there is a natural order because of that structure. That is no excuse, however, for not treating your peers, subordinates or other co-workers with kindness. This can be done through simple acts like acknowledging their presence when they enter; by asking them for their opinions; by saying something nice about them the next time their names come up in a conversation.

The best managers I have seen are always finding ways to get their people involved. My manager Emily frequently asks, “Stuart, what do you think? What do you think we should do?” And she does this when there are senior managers in the meeting or on the telephone conference. The next time Emily really needs something from me, what do you think I am going to do? Anything she wants, of course! Why? Because she treats me with utmost respect for me as a person and as a professional. I would like to say that Emily does this only with me, but that is not the case. She treats each of her employees as if that person is the most important person in the organization.

I have had other managers who thought they were still in the military, and that their employees were their personal slaves. One of these managers was Bob, for whom I worked only a short time at an electronics company in San Diego. I had been at the company for six months, and it was time for me to get a raise in pay. Bob and I were in his office when he told me of the paltry increase I was to get. I told him that if that was all the company could afford, then I did not want it. I got up and started to walk out of his office. He screamed at me to “Get back in here.” I stopped, turned around, and told him, “I am not in your Navy anymore.” I switched jobs (within the company) very soon after that incident. Bob (and others like Bob) can get away with that type of behavior in certain non-military situations, but the employees who have to put up with it usually do so out of fear of not having a job if they dissent. While Bob may think his employees are loyal to him, I bet they would leave at the first chance they could get.

It isn't that hard to be kind to others. Try this simple exercise. Pick one day out of each week, and say “Hello” to everyone you meet. The reactions you will see the first time you do this will be those of suspicion and doubt. But as you continue to do this every week, you will see people start to warm up to you. Just like smiles and laughter, kindness is also contagious. Take some and spread it around. You will be surprised how good it makes you feel, and how it enables you to accomplish your goals.

## Presentation to the Board of Directors

*Jeremy was nervous as he was putting the finishing touches on his presentation to the Board of Directors. Although he knew some of them, this was his first time to be in front of the entire Board. Compounding the pressure was that he would be asking the Board for a sizable investment in a new technology. Jeremy had no concerns about the merits of his proposed project; he held a Ph.D. in the field, and he had been investigating this technology for the past two years. He was very confident in its technical success; he “thought” it could be a commercial success, but he wasn’t absolutely sure. A commercial success would mean large new markets for the company, and certainly a handsome bonus for him.*



*Shortly before the scheduled two o’clock presentation, Jeremy did a quick review of his slides. The data was all there; he was known as a qualified contributor; he was all set. He straightened his out-of-date narrow tie, buttoned the sleeves of his equally old white shirt, and put on the jacket to the old brown suit. He did not normally wear a suit and tie to work; he put it on only because he thought it was expected when you presented to the Board of Directors. He gathered all his materials and went upstairs. Promptly at two, he knocked on the door to the Boardroom. The Chairman’s aide opened the door and greeted him warmly. “Good afternoon, sir. The Board is expecting you.”*

*Entering the room reminded Jeremy of the power that was present there. The large wooden table evoked images of King Arthur, although his table was round. Portraits of the company founders, along with past Chairmen and CEOs portrayed a “Who’s Who” in business. And then there was the Board itself, eight men and four women. This group represented the leadership of six Fortune 100 companies, two universities, and the top research hospital in the nation. The cost of their suits alone went into five figures.*

*“Hello, Jeremy. Good to see you again,” was the welcoming from the Chairman of the Board. He then introduced Jeremy to each Board member. Each Board member, in turn, greeted Jeremy with either “Good to see you, Jeremy” or “Nice to meet you, Doctor.”*

*After all the introductions were completed and everyone was seated, the Chairman turned the meeting over to Jeremy. During the forty-five minute presentation, it was clear that Jeremy knew his subject material very well. He held the Board’s attention on technical content, but the business proposal lacked conviction.*

*Afterward, in closed session, a majority of the Board felt that there was a “fair chance” that Jeremy’s proposal would work. But they also felt that he was unconvincing, and that they were not comfortable investing huge sums of capital on a project that the creator could not present with enthusiasm. The Board summarized their rejection of the proposal as follows. “Technically, it might work; but we are not convinced of its financial viability.”*

*A few months later, Jeremy left the company to return to academia. He had enjoyed his professorship a while back, and he was certain that he would like it again. After all, being a tenured professor is not a bad life.*

*Back at the company, Dan took over for Jeremy. Thought not as technically gifted as Jeremy, he read through the rejected proposal and found what he thought was an outstanding*

*opportunity. Dan spoke to the Chairman about re-presenting the idea to the Board, and in doing so he used some of his marketing skills to pre-sell the Chairman on the merits of “his” proposal. The Chairman said he would put it on the agenda for the next Board meeting.*

*Dan presented the updated proposal to the Board the following month. He had refreshed the technical content with web data on the current competitive climate, and then he added a strong Marketing Plan that showed a compelling reason why the Board of Directors should grant the funding. Dan wore a Navy Blue blazer over gray slacks, a light blue shirt, and a stunning Saks Fifth Avenue tie. His tasseled loafers were so shiny that they looked almost like patent leather. He received a standing ovation from the entire Board as he concluded with a slide showing the five-year impact on sales and the company’s stock price. He took this as a sign that the Board would approve “his” project.*

*He was right; they did.*

**Moral: Don’t let the “delivery” cloud the meaning of the message. Another way of looking at this is that sometimes it is not what you say, but how you say it.**



From a technological point of view, Dan’s proposal was not any better than Jeremy’s. In fact, it was not any different, either. The basis of the project was still Jeremy’s – the same technology that he had presented to the same Board of Directors several months earlier. What was different was the way Dan presented it, and himself. He took Jeremy’s discarded idea and packaged it so the Board could see the best of both the technical and business components. The “what” of Dan’s presentation was very similar to Jeremy’s (the better Marketing Plan, notwithstanding); it was the “how” that received a complete makeover.

Should the Board have approved Jeremy’s proposal anyway? It is easy to present a convincing case for “Yes.” But for-profit corporations do not have the luxury of funding technological advances just for the sake of technology or research – that is left to pure research groups, National Science Foundation grants, etc. I believe the Board made the proper decision in each case – denial to Jeremy’s proposal, and approval to Dan’s. Their fiscal responsibility dictated their making the right decisions.

Jeremy’s story is an example of how his “delivery” (both his presentation and his appearance) clouded – in fact, it impeded – the meaning of his message (his technology advancement proposal).

How many times have you been turned down, not because of “what” you asked for, but because of “how” you asked for it? When you see a young child (I wish this occurred only in young children) ask for something in a whining tone, what is the typical reaction from that child’s parents? The phrase “stop that whining” is usually a part of their response. The parents have automatically tuned out to the child’s request once they hear the whining start. Their reaction and their answer is not to “what” the child wants, but to “how” he or she is asking for it.

My guess is that the parents would respond differently if that young child said something like the following. “Mom and Dad. I know that having a large candy bar only one hour before dinner would probably ruin my appetite for the delicious meal that is being prepared. However, I have not had one of these candy bars in the past two weeks, and I promise to attempt to eat and enjoy the entire dinner.” This is a little far-fetched, I know. But in this case, the parents would probably

be so shell-shocked by the logic in the delivery of the message, that they would forget the meaning – candy before dinner.

Let me ask the question again. How many times have you been turned down, not because of “what” you asked for, but because of “how” you asked for it? I cannot count the number of times it has happened to me, but I have resolved to not let it happen again. Here is what I did – maybe it can also help you.

I consider myself to be a reasonably intelligent person, one who uses logic in most decisions. As such, or is it because I am a Capricorn, I have always expected other people to apply the same level of logic in their decision making process. When I would ask for something (new job assignment, promotion, raise, etc.), I would apply logic that was all-too-obvious to me. The problem is that the other persons – the decision makers – would not utilize “Stuart’s logic” (how dare they not?) in reaching their decisions; and the answer would be “No.” One day, after receiving such a rejection, I was told why. My manager at that time, wiser than his youthful years, told me, “Stuart, it is not that your request is out of line; it’s your logic.” In other words, it was not the “what”; it was the “why.” He continued on. “What you are asking for makes reasonable sense. But that alone is not enough to justify it. Show me the benefit to the entire organization, and not just to you.” I re-worked my logic, developing a plan to show increased benefits to a wider circle (and not just me), and then I re-presented to him. This time his response was quite different. This time he said, “Okay, now I can see how we can all benefit from this. Now let’s work on a plan to make it happen.”

He was never against what I wanted, per se. What he was against was why I wanted it. As soon as we changed the “why,” we had a go-forward plan in place that made it happen. So now before I make a major request, I ensure that “what” I ask for does not get clouded, diluted, or rejected because of “how” I ask for it.

Some speakers have made an art form of showing that it is not always what you say, but how you say it. A popular term for these people is “spin masters” or “spin doctors”; they excel at creating the right spin for the message they are giving. The raw content of the message may be bad news, but that part gets lost in the wrapping that is put around it. I am not advocating this as a normal course of action; I just want you to know that if it can work one way, it can also work the other way. What is intended as a “good message” (Jeremy’s proposal) might get shrouded in a “bad delivery,” resulting in the perception that a “bad message” has just been delivered.

Make sure that your message has every opportunity to be heard properly. Make sure that “how” you present your message most accurately reflects “what” the message is saying.

## Autumn Leaves

*One of the advantages of living in a northern state (as opposed to most southern states) is the onset of all four seasons. We used to live in La Mesa, California, a wonderful suburb of San Diego, where the four seasons consisted of Early Spring, Spring, Kind-of-Summer, Almost Autumn. While we certainly had no complaints about the weather – it was definitely predictable – there was something a little bizarre about going Christmas shopping and seeing people wearing summer-style clothing. It just made it hard to think “Christmas” in warm weather; after all, the movies “White Christmas” and “Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street” were not set in scenes of sunshine, shorts and sandals. So the weather in Idaho is a big contrast to what we were accustomed to having; but we do enjoy it. There are advantages to both climates.*

*As winter is ending, it is such a pleasure to have that first warm weekend when you can go outside without a heavy coat. The first few bulbs pop up out of the formerly frozen ground, and the chirping of the birds in the morning helps awaken you. Not that it’s very warm yet, but it is still a nice change. The same holds true as Summer fades to Fall. The warm/hot days give way to cool evenings. And then the leaves begin to fall, and fall, and fall. The trees are really beautiful as the leaves are changing colors, but raking them seems like a never-ending chore. I have not found anything beautiful about falling leaves – they just have to be raked and bagged.*

*As an analytical person, I have noticed that there are basically two types of leaf rakers. Yes, I know some people use a leaf blower or a vacuum-type machine to pick them up. But I am talking about people who use a hand rake. The first, and more common, leaf raker is the person who rakes the entire yard at one time, making lots of small piles in no apparent order. All of the leaves are raked, and the whole yard is raked, but all the leaves are still there on the yard, in lots of little piles, still waiting to be picked up.*

*The second leaf raker is the person who mentally defines an area of the yard, usually rectangular, then rakes up those leaves into a single pile, AND then picks them up. Then a new area of the yard is defined, those leaves are raked into a single pile and then picked up. It takes this person longer to rake the leaves because he (I am picking on myself now) has to make sure that each area is thoroughly cleaned before starting on a new area. I am definitely this second type; I need to see that what I have started is completed (the pile is picked up and bagged) before I start raking a new area.*

*Before we all start throwing leaves at each other, let’s make it clear – there is no one right way to rake leaves. Even if you bend down and pick up one leaf at a time and put it in the bag, that method will eventually get all of the leaves off the yard (unless more have fallen by time you are done). I favor the second method, partly because of the completion of a sub-task (picking up the leaves that were raked), partly because I can define the shape of the area to rake, but also because I can stop at any time and still have some part of the job completed.*

**Moral: There are usually at least two ways to accomplish a task; and one of the ways is not necessarily any “better” than another. In some cases, it is just different.**



It would not come as a surprise to those who know me to hear that I am the second type of leaf raker. When the leaves start falling in late September, I take the rake, picture a rectangle, and start raking, I rake the leaves in a line until I reach the end of my imaginary rectangle, and

then I rake up that line into one single pile. I fetch the leaf bag (or a bag-lined trash can), and then pick up every one of those raked leaves and put them into the bag. If I feel like raking more, I then scope out a new rectangle, or some other geometric shape, and start raking those leaves. This process continues, with my picking up the raked leaves each time I finish an area. Some might call me compulsive, or neurotic. To me, it is just my organized way to approach the task of raking leaves.

I view my approach of raking leaves as a way of having at least some completion, should I stop before raking and picking up all of the leaves. Let's say that my side yard is 100 feet wide by 20 feet deep, and that I start at one end and start raking some rectangles, and I have raked (and picked up) 50 feet (or halfway) toward the other end when I am called in for dinner. By stopping at this point, I have completed 50% of the task. If I stop my raking for the day, I know that I am 50% done with the job (not allowing for the fact that more leaves will fall before I get back out there). In this case, I view that I have completed 100% (raked and picked up) of 50% of the job. Obviously, 100% of 50% equals 50%.

On the other hand, if I were to rake all the leaves into small piles, and then I was called in for dinner before I could pick up, I might still be 50% done with the job. It all depends on how you view it – but I would say that it would be close to 50%. So, in this case, I would have completed 50% (raked into piles) of 100% of the job. The numbers are in a different order, but the result is the same. 50% of 100% equals 50%.

Therefore, does it really matter whether you are 50% done with the job, or if you are 50% done with the job? Halfway is halfway in this case, and so there really is not much of a difference.

But what if the job is not raking leaves, but assembling widgets? Does it matter in this case if you have assembled 100% of 50% of the widgets (leaf raking method two), or if you have assembled 50% of 100% of the widgets (leaf raking method one)? Actually, in this case, it does make a difference. By assembling 100% of 50% of the widgets, you end up with completed widgets equal to half of your order. But by assembling 50% of 100% of the widgets, you have no completed ones, just all of them as work-in-progress. This is analogous to why I prefer the second leaf raking method – there is at least some part of the job completed. Again, that does not necessarily mean that it is a better method. If you cannot ship any widgets until all of them are done, you cannot ship until you are 100% done with 100% of them.

As we have seen, there can be at least two ways to accomplish a task, whether it is raking leaves, or assembling widgets. So what, you say. Well, there are other areas where this holds; even some business applications.

All finance majors, and most other business majors, know that Net Return on Assets is calculated by dividing Net Income by Average Total Assets. Thus, if a firm wants to increase its Net ROA, it could increase its Net Income or decrease its Average Total Assets. The same results can be achieved in a different manner. One method I learned in business school was called the “DuPont system of financial control.” This system says that ROA can also be expressed as a product of profit margin times asset turnover. As a reminder (for the non-finance majors), profit margin is defined as Net Income divided by Total Operating Revenue, and Asset Turnover is defined as Total Operating Revenue divided by Average Total Assets. An equation might then look something like this:  $ROA = (NI / TOR) \times (TOR / ATA)$ . By canceling the Total Operating Revenue term in each expression, we end up with  $ROA = NI / ATA$ , something we

already knew. But the value is to say that we can affect ROA by increasing profit margin or by increasing asset turnover. Competition in the retail field usually limits a company from doing both. Thus, you might see a high-end store have high margins and low turnover, while a discount store will focus on high turnover and low margins. Both stores can be successful; they just use a different approach to achieve the same result.

As you encounter your next assignment (raking leaves, assembling widgets, or increasing your firm's ROA), remember that there is probably more than one way to accomplish the task. If you have the time to thoroughly research all possible ways, then you have an advantage over most. But if you do not have that luxury, you need to understand that there can be multiple viable methods that achieve the same goal. Their paths may be different, but if they accomplish the same thing, then that is the most important thing.

Two methods might be different; but if their difference is only in their operation, and not the result, then either one is "acceptable."

## Johnny and the Climbing Tree

*Winter seemed unusually long this year, and the boys were so eager to go outside. It seemed as if there were a special voice calling out to them to come outside to play. Spring was here, but it was still a bit cool; but not cool enough to keep the boys inside. All the moms were happy to have the boys finally be able to go outside to play; having them cooped up in the house was as unnatural as keeping a wild horse locked up in a small stall.*

*Johnny was the first one to the little park down the block. The grass was not as green as it gets during the warm summer, but you could see a few patches of green coming out of the dead winter grass. Some of last autumn's leaves were still gathered in the corner where the fences came together. And, of course, there was the big old climbing tree. Johnny just loved that tree with all its big strong branches, just reaching out there to be climbed. Because he was the first one in the park, Johnny was also the first one to shinny up to the first branch, and then climb up to the second one. "Hey, guys. I'm up here," Johnny yelled to his friends as they came through the gate into the park. They looked over toward the tree and saw Johnny up on his favorite branch. The four boys raced each other over to the tree, and then they also climbed up to their favorite branches. There was no pushing or pulling each other on the tree; the boys knew someone could get hurt if they fooled around up in the branches.*

*"Who wants to climb to the top?" asked one of the other boys. There was no response; the boys instinctively knew it was too dangerous to climb that high. They did a lot of foolish things, but no one was going to do anything that foolish. The boys really liked the climbing tree; they would not do anything to damage it. One day they saw a boy from a different neighborhood climb "their" tree, and crawl all the way out to the end of one branch; so far, in fact, that the branch broke and the boy fell to the ground. He thought it was funny, and he left laughing. These boys were mad at that boy because he broke a branch off their tree.*

*Spring became summer, and school let out. The boys always liked summer; no school, warm days, and lot of time to play outside. One day Johnny was in a really bad mood. He was playing with his friends in the park, and he got really angry with them. He said mean things to them; things he had never said before to his friends. They left and went to play elsewhere. Having nobody to play with, Johnny went home. The next day, Johnny went back down to the park; the other boys were already there by time Johnny arrived. Normally, they would yell at each other in that tone that friends use to greet each other. Not today; they ignored Johnny. When Johnny went over to where they were, the other boys acted as if Johnny were not there. Johnny knew he had been wrong to say those mean things to them yesterday. "Hey, guys. I'm sorry for those mean things I said yesterday. We're still friends, right?"*

*Johnny's apology might as well been said in a windstorm where no one could hear it. The other boys continued to ignore him. "Come on, guys. I said I'm sorry." Johnny tried again.*

*And again, the other boys ignored Johnny. Johnny walked out of the park, pouting all the way home. When he got home, his dad saw him, and recognized that look on his face. "What's the matter, son? You look sad."*

*"The other boys won't play with me, dad." Johnny's voice made it sound as if he were the innocent one; that it was the other boys' fault.*

*"What do you mean they won't play with you? What's wrong?"*

*“Well, yesterday I said some mean things to them. Today I told them I was sorry, but they still wouldn’t play with me. That’s not fair.”*

*Johnny’s dad could hardly keep a straight face when he heard the “not fair” line. He felt like saying, “Life’s not fair, Johnny. Get used to it.” But he knew there would be plenty of other opportunities for that story. He wanted to inquire a little further on this one. “What kind of mean things did you say to them yesterday? And why?”*

*“I don’t know why. I just told them how stupid they were, and stuff like that. But when I saw them today, I told them I was sorry. Shouldn’t they play with me now?”*

*Seeing a golden chance to show his son another one of life’s tough lessons, Johnny’s dad said, “Come with me.” He led Johnny out to the work shed, where he grabbed a hammer and a few big nails. “Let’s go down to the park.”*

*Johnny followed his dad down the street to the park. Is he going to beat up the kids with the hammer? And what are the nails for? It is amazing what ideas run through the mind of a young boy.*

*Entering the park, Johnny saw that the other boys were gone. His dad headed over to the climbing tree, and Johnny was right with him. As they got to the tree, his dad handed him the hammer and one of the nails. “Hammer this nail into the tree,” he told Johnny. Johnny thought it was a little strange, hammering a nail into his favorite tree, but he never questioned his dad. So he hammered the nail into the tree, missing the nail on a couple swings. “Now this one,” his dad said as he handed another nail to Johnny. This continued until Johnny had hammered six nails into the tree; his climbing tree.*

*“Now take them out,” Johnny’s dad said as pointed to the nails. Taking them out was not as easy as putting them in. Johnny struggled as he pulled the nails out. It took a few minutes, but he finally got them all out. After they were all out, Johnny noticed that the tree was oozing a little where the nails had been.*

*“See that? You have taken the nails out of the tree, but the hurt is still there. You may have told your friends that you were sorry for saying mean things, but the hurt is still there with them; just as the hurt is still there with the tree. It will take more than a day for the tree to heal, and it will take more than one day for your friends to heal from what you said to them.”*

**Moral:** Words, just like nails, can still leave pain and scars even when they are retracted. Make sure the words you use are kind words, not mean words that hurt.



All young boys and girls say mean things to their friends, and they usually seem to remain friends. But it still puts a strain on their friendship, even if for just a short time. As we get older, however, the hurts from those painful words can remain for a very long time. This can be a real detriment in both our personal lives and in our professional lives. This lesson is one that we all can learn from – if we are the one who delivers those painful words, try to understand that there are other ways to say what you want to say (or as my mother, and probably yours also, said, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.”); if we are on the receiving end of the words, try to recognize that the person who said them might be under a lot of pressure, and he (or she) just blurted out the first thing that came to his/her mind (and most likely had no intention of

hurting you). Knowing all this does not necessarily make it any easier, or lessen the hurt, but it might give you some insight that can help.

In the professional world, this type of behavior is generally not accepted (and I can think of no situation where it is truly acceptable). When you say anything in the working world that is mean, unkind, untrue, hurtful or distasteful – you will notice that many things fall into more than one category – you are actually giving out an indication of your own behavior that you cannot react to a situation in a calm manner. This is another way of saying that you are “out of control” or that you have “lost your temper.” We all know people who act that way, sometimes occasionally and sometimes quite often. Here are some typical excuses. “Oh, he’s just having a bad day.” “Must be that time of the month.” [That one could get you reported to Personnel.] “He must have woken up on the wrong side of the bed today.” “You know, it’s the end-of-the-quarter push to close some deals.” “He doesn’t really mean it.”

We have all heard these excuses, and we have probably given them at least once or twice, haven’t we? That still does not alleviate the responsibility that we have to act in a decent and proper manner. The real key here is to not lash out at a person; we can say that we are not happy with a result, an action, etc. Just do not display displeasure with a person, one of your fellow human beings. On the flip side, if someone says mean things to you, do not react by retaliating. Let the person calm down, and that might mean to wait until the next day. At the right time, tell the offender that your feelings were hurt by what was said, and that you think what was meant was that the person was not happy with something that happened. What you are doing is deflecting the attack from the person (you) to a thing (action, result, etc.). And then, allow the person an out; do not back them into a corner where the only way out is to continue the attack. Think of this situation as if there were an angry stray dog in your garage. You might have every right to be mad at it, and force it into a corner and verbally attack it (why, I don’t know), but the safest thing (besides going into the house) is to give way and let it leave on its own. You don’t want the other person to just shrug it off, but allow him (or her) to explain the situation, and have a safe environment in which to apologize to you.

There is not much difference between these actions in your business life or your personal life. In either case, the lingering effects can simmer just like an abandoned campfire. There is no harm so long as the winds are calm; but we know that a strong wind can come up and fan the flames into a blazing out-of-control fire. And it all could have been prevented with just a little care and proper attention. So be careful what you say. If you want people to listen to you, use kind words. But if you do make a mistake and say some mean things, do the right thing. Apologize and make sure it does not happen again. Also, if you are the “recipient” of those harsh words, allow the other person to apologize, and then be gracious and sincere in accepting that apology.

## Camping with the Guys

*Ben was looking forward to the backpacking trip; it had been two years' since he had gone out into the woods with his friends. Because the trip was going to be for six days and five nights, the group had selected Rick to be the lead organizer. The final preparation meeting was held at Rick's apartment three days before they were to head out on the trip. Rick had already given everyone the "essentials list"; those items that each person had to take with him. Some of these items were obvious, such as pack, tent, sleeping bag, water bottle, clothing, etc. Some items were not so obvious, such as snake bite kit, compass, whistle, etc. Each person was then given a list of items to bring that were not just for him, but for everybody; three of them had lists of food items, one had a list of first aid items; one had a list of cooking utensils. Ben read his extra list and put it in his pocket. The men headed home; some to pack, and some to go shopping.*

*On the day of the hike, all of them met at Rick's apartment at the designated time. Rick did a double-check with each of them to make sure that all the necessary supplies were brought. He then asked Ben if he had what was on his list. "I'm not sure why, but, yeah, I do," Ben replied. They all got into two vehicles and Rick led the way.*

*The plan was for a two-day hike into a quiet ravine, where they would establish a base camp for the rest of the time. From the base camp there were areas to hike into the mountains, explore some caves, or just enjoy the peace of near-solitude. The small lake nearby was certain to provide some recreation as well as cooling off after a hot day of hiking. The inward trip went according to plan, and the men arrived at the targeted area around three o'clock the second afternoon.*

*Rick allowed them all to rest a bit before setting up camp. They were all warm and a little tired after the second day's hike; it was quite a bit steeper than on the first day. Plus, they were a little out of shape – after all, it was the first hike of the season for any of them. Rick knew, however, that even though the area was quiet and peaceful, there were many dangers that could happen, and they could be in trouble if they were disorganized. The main gathering area was selected, and the community items were assembled there. Each man pitched his own tent, roughly equidistant from the cooking pit, and the toilet area was established about 30 yards downwind from the tents.*

*Water from the lake was filtered into some containers for drinking water; a fire was started from fallen wood, and that night's designated cooks began preparing their meal. Camping food is not as primitive as it used to be; there are real delicacies available now. Not that tonight's meal consisted of gourmet food, but it tasted great. They all ate in silence. The sun was setting; they were tired; their stomachs were now getting full. After the dishes were cleaned and all loose items put away, the fire was doused, and they all retired for the evening. Sleep would be especially good tonight.*

*The following morning was much cooler than they thought it would be. But they all quickly warmed up as they stood around the fresh roaring fire. Breakfast followed, and these six men devoured it as if they had not eaten in weeks; camping does amazing things to your appetite. Each one talked about the things he wanted to do that day; in a way, each one was lobbying to find someone else to go with him. An unwritten but very important safety rule was that no one would go far from camp alone. With six of them, there were not many combinations of groups that had at least two people in each group – one group of six, a group of four and a group of*

two, two groups of three, and three groups of two. In all of the hikes they had done, there had never been a time when all six of them agreed to do the same thing at the same time (except break camp and leave).

Rick and one other decided to check out the west end of the ravine, and try climbing up the loose rock mountain. Ben and a friend decided to explore the caves at the far end of the lake. The other two decided to try some fishing in the lake or the nearby streams. They agreed to return to camp by four o'clock that afternoon. They all put food items in their packs, secured the camp, and headed off for their day's activity.

And this is pretty much how each day went; uneventful yet exciting. But as all good times must come to an end, thus came the time to break camp and head on out. The skies were a bit cloudy, and the tops of the trees were rocking back and forth from the winds. Rick made sure each person knew his assignment, and everything went smoothly. As they headed out, the winds picked up and it started to rain. The trees provided protection from most of the rain, and so they continued their hike – the first of two days back to the cars.

The rain continued all day, increasing in intensity hour by hour. Realizing that the rain was not going to lessen, Rick decided to stop and make camp in a secure area where they would be protected from the rain. The nearby stream posed no threat, and the overhanging mountain wall provided a perfect shelter. The six men made a more compact camp that night; much closer together because there was not a lot of space in that area. Around ten o'clock the rains came down in a torrential downpour. The winds howled, and the nearby stream became a raging river. They were still high enough to be out of danger from it.

Although each man was safe, and dry, in his own tent, no one slept very well on that last night of the trip. By daybreak, each man was out of his tent, gathered around a small fire, and amazed at the damage from the rains and the flooded river. The rain had stopped, but the stream-turned-river was still moving rapidly. Trees were uprooted, and it seemed as if they had been transported to some strange area during the middle of the night. "We had better have breakfast, and then head out of here," Rick said. "It might be a long day getting back down."

After eating, they broke camp and once again followed Rick's lead. They had not seen this stream on the hike in, so Rick knew that they could not follow it very far, or they might get lost. Crossing the river was not an easy task as it was swift and much higher than the previous night, but they all made it across. Then it became clear – they did not know where they were. The rains had removed any indications of the trails, assuming they were even near one. Their camp last night was not in a planned area, so they did not have a known location as their starting point. All they could do was head in a "downhill" direction.

After an hour, they reached an area that was definitely unfamiliar to them. They would have to go around a mountain or over it. "Either this mountain is not on the map, or we are nowhere close to where we should be," Rick told his friends. Each one studied the map, sure that he could solve the mystery; but to no avail. "Ben," Rick continued. "Do you have those envelopes you were to bring?"

"Yes, I do," Ben replied. "I had completely forgotten about them."

"Hand them out, please. Okay guys. I know this sounds silly, but an old trail guide told me this. I've never done it, though. Just read the envelope." Rick found a dry rock to sit on.

*Ben handed one envelope to each man, and he took the last one for himself. He knew that the envelopes had writing on them, because he had done the writing. Each envelope said the same thing: “You hold the key to success. You can solve the mystery.”*

*Taking the cue from seeing Rick opening his envelope, the other men then opened theirs. The tall one, Jay, took a piece of paper out of his envelope and looked at it. All it had on it was the letter “L.” Jay tried to reason what the “L” meant. He tried some rhyming in his head. “L, tell, smell, fell, well.” He didn’t come up with anything brilliant from this exercise.*

*Brian’s envelope had an “F” in it. As a systems programmer, he tried to come up with some computer logic answer. F in hexadecimal is 15. He looked at the map and tried to use 15 somehow. Nothing popped to mind.*

*Tony saw an “O” when he opened his envelope. “Perhaps O stands for Over. Maybe we should go over the mountain.” Tony was trying to be helpful.*

*“G” was what Steve saw when he pulled the slip from his envelope. The only thing he could think of was that he was Getting anGry. He needed to Get home. That was all he could think the G meant.*

*They all spent another 30 minutes thinking about their own letter, and what the outside of the envelope said. Finally, Brian asked Steve what letter he had. And then Tony, and then Jay. G, O, L and his F. “Golf. Okay what does golf mean?” Another fifteen minutes of metaphors led to nothing useful. “Hey, Ben. What’s yours? Rick?”*

*“I have T,” Ben said.*

*“E for me,” Rick replied.*

*Now that they had the six letters (after forty-five minutes), they still tried to figure it out. Each one was blurting out something, but no one else was listening. Each man was working on the solution on his own. Finally, Rick said. “Hey guys, let’s put all the letters together here on this rock. Let’s forget about golf, because I think we’ve heard all those possible combinations.” After a few minutes, somehow, the letters were put in the following order, “GOLEFT.” By adding a space after the second letter, the answer was found, “GO LEFT.” They did, and after a short while, they encountered a familiar area from their first day in, and found their cars.*

**Moral: When a group (of any size) is faced with a great challenge, there will generally be more success when the group acts as a unified team rather than as individualists.**



When Ben and Rick and the other guys started out on their camping trip, they were unified – six different people working as a single unit. Even though each one had different responsibilities during the hikes and while camping, they still knew that teamwork was essential to their enjoyment and to their safety. They were a team; but when they encountered a crisis, they resorted to individualism. It was only when they re-engaged as a team that they found the answer they needed to emerge from the crisis.

Whether we are out on a camping trip, working on a project at work, or managing the day-to-day activities at home, teamwork plays an important role in achieving goals. We are all individuals; there is no question about that. Each of us is born into this world as an individual;

there are very, very few perfectly identical twins. But we quickly learn that we cannot survive in this world if we act as a full-fledged individual (hermits and cavemen excepted).

What is it about teamwork that makes us need it, when our natural form is to be an individual? Working as a team provides things that individualism does not: feedback; different viewpoints; additional information, and companionship. Do we really need these? Let's see.

But first, let me say something else about teams and teamwork. Being part of a team does not always mean that everyone has equal peorage. A team may consist of several layers of managers as well as individual contributors. A team may be parents (or parent) and children; it might even be you and all the neighbors on the street where you live. A team is just a collection of people who are engaged in a common activity or working toward a common goal. Most people, in fact, are on many different teams at any one time.

It is true that you can have feedback about how well you are doing when you are doing something by yourself. When a golfer makes a long putt and the ball goes into the hole, he or she knows it was good putt; no one has to tell him or her. Unfortunately, for some of us that is, not all of life is like a game of golf. When we are part of a team, feedback is something we can receive or something we can give. Feedback is important to us as humans; we like (or need) to hear how we are doing. We prefer positive feedback, of course, but even feedback that is meant as corrective can be given in a positive manner ("You need to work on your typing skills just a little more, but that last letter you wrote is really outstanding!").

When you are giving feedback, try to put yourself in the other person's position, and then try to craft the feedback in the way that you would want to hear it. Even good feedback can come across negative ("Nice presentation, a little wordy though."). Many of us think that when we give feedback, it has to be elaborate and different. Sometimes, just a simple "Good job" or "Your analysis was perfect" is all that is necessary.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to conjure up different viewpoints about an idea or plan when you are the only person working on it. I remember an experience from graduate school that has had a profound change in how I work within teams. One of the first classes I had that required a semester-long team project was a course called "New Product Marketing." Our task was to come up with a product that would be introduced ten years' from that time, and then to develop a marketing strategy and plan for it. Naturally, I thought I had all the great ideas that would ever be needed. But after a couple of them were shot down due to major logic fault, I started to listen to what the other team members had to say. I soon realized [and I am very glad that I did] that there were other people in this world who have different opinions that just happen to be better than mine. Our project turned out to be a wonderful success (as determined by our project grade and course grade of "A"), and the success was due in no small part to the different viewpoints offered by the other team members.

Why do we need different viewpoints, whether it is at work or at home? Our own individual viewpoint is painted by our own experiences. This painting normally will lead us to react in a given way each time we are presented with a similar situation. Similarly, other peoples' viewpoints are determined by their experiences. And so it is the infusion of these different experiences that enrich the solution that we can achieve as a team. This is why you hear so many companies strongly advocating diversity in their workforce. Diversity is not just the inclusion of people of different color or race; diversity is the integration of people who have different experiences and who possess a collection of different ideas.

Have you ever worked on a task, but you were missing information? Coming up with missing information on your own is difficult, isn't it? This aspect of teamwork was particularly evident in the team projects during graduate school. Most projects involved some aspect of finance, data analysis, compilation of all the pieces, typing up the report, etc. No matter what piece of the project I was working on, I knew the others would be providing information that I did not have. It was a comforting feeling. When you are part of a team, you should feel comfortable in asking for someone else to get this data, or that piece of background information. You do not have to come up with all of it by yourself.

Companionship does not mean that just because you are part of a team, that you have to become life-long best friends with those people. You might want to, but that is your choice. When you are on a team, when you are a part of a group, you are not alone. That seems quite evident, but it is important in that there are others with whom you can converse. That might not sound important, but you can learn about other people, and yourself, when you have a chance to just talk. The talking doesn't have to be about the project, or about anything of great significance. Just talking is good therapy in that it allows you to clear your mind.

So the next time you are on a project with others, or when you are at home or some social event, think about how your success, and that of those around you, can be enhanced by making team decisions.

## Living Your Life Through the Rear-View Mirror

*Henry and Sally arrived at the train station ninety minutes before the scheduled departure. They knew they were going to be quite early, but this was their first train trip up the coast, and they did not want to leave anything to chance. As the taxi driver pulled up, a porter hustled over to the car to greet them with a big cheery smile. “Hello folks. What a wonderful day for a train ride,” he boomed out to them as he opened the curbside door for them. He then stepped to the rear of the taxi to help the driver get their luggage out of the trunk. “Looks like the two of you are setting out for a long trip. Are you on the Coastal Express that leaves at 6:30?”*

*“Yes, we are,” Henry answered. “Do you know where we check in?”*

*“Sure do. Just follow me,” the friendly – and helpful – porter replied as he started to push the luggage cart toward the large double doors.*

*Henry stepped back to the cab to pay the driver as Sally was re-counting the bags on the cart, just to make sure that they still had four suitcases and a hanging garment bag. The young couple followed the porter through the doors into what seemed like a huge cavern filled with a cacophony of noise. The porter weaved his way through the crowd, finally making his way to window 23. Above the window, Henry saw “Coastal Express.” He tipped the porter as the large man carefully took each suitcase (and the hanging garment bag) from his cart and place them on the scale. “Thank you, folks. You two have a wonderful trip.”*

*“Thank you for your help, sir,” Sally said as the busy man took off to go back outside to greet the next customer.*

*“We have two seats on the 6:30 train,” Henry said as he handed his ticket wallet to the man at the window.*

*The man typed a few keystrokes, and then out came two ticket stubs. The man handed them to Henry along with his ticket wallet. “You will be on track 14 over to the right. Boarding starts at 5:45. Enjoy your trip.”*

*“That was a lot faster than I thought it would be,” Sally said as they stepped away from the ticket window. “You want to look at some of the shops; we still have 35 minutes until we can board. Let’s figure out where track 14 is. Oh, there it is; right behind the clock. That will be easy to find again.” And so the two of them headed over to the array of shops that are typically found in airports and train stations.*

*They lost track of time as they were enjoying a latté in the small coffee bar. When they realized it was almost six o’clock, they grabbed their small bags and ran over to the clock. They were quite relieved to see that others were still arriving, and they were not the last ones to board. The steward helped them find their compartment, told them where the dining car was, and what time dinner was served, and then closed the door behind them.*

*After dinner, Henry and Sally went to the Observation Car to have a drink and to watch the sights as the train headed north on its two-day journey up the coast. The windows and the seats were situated so that the passengers could face forward or face backward, rather than just looking straight out to the side of the train. As it was early July, the sun was still up, and there was about a half hour until the sun would set in the ocean to the west. As they went to some*

*seats, Henry waited for Sally to sit first. She selected a seat that faced to the rear of the car, and Henry sat down beside her.*

*“Don’t you want to sit on the other side so you look up ahead?” Henry asked her.*

*“No. I like it here,” Sally replied. “I like to see where I have been. You can sit on the other side if you want to.”*

*“Are you sure?” Henry asked. When she nodded her head in assent, Henry said, “I guess it’s nice to see where you have been, but I like to see where we’re going.”*

**Moral: Your future is in front of you, not behind you.**



Neither Henry nor Sally is “more correct” than the other. The two of them just have a different way of looking at things (pardon the pun). As far as travel goes, it probably doesn’t matter which you prefer, looking ahead or looking behind. If you are the driver, that is quite a different story – you better be looking straight ahead!

But life is not always about travel and seeing the sights. Our journey through life is bound to take us many places, and in order for us to advance (get ahead, make progress, etc.), it is vital for us to be looking in front of us to find our future. This does not mean that the past is not important; it just means that the past is in the past, but our future is ahead of us, not behind us.

I have seen many widows who never seem to stop grieving over the loss of their husbands. Yes, the death of a spouse is painful. There is no denying it. But to continue to re-live that sorrow over and over again is not ever going to accomplish anything. Nothing positive, anyway. I would not want them to become blasé over their loss, it just hurts me to see them mourn year after year, as if all of that will bring the husbands back. A reasonable period of mourning, along with happy remembrances as time continues on, justifies the value that the person played in your life.

I have also seen people who lose a spouse, and then re-marry after a year or so. I think this is healthy. The widow who re-marries knows that her husband is gone, and that the rest of her life is in front of her. Her getting re-married does not diminish the love she had for her first husband, it is just that she does not want to live the rest of her life alone. In most cases, she will have more than one picture of her late husband in her house. Chances are that her new husband is himself a widower who grieved the loss of his wife, but is now ready to live the rest of his life in the future, not in the past.

This concept applies equally well in work and other professional situations. Do you know anyone who felt that he or she “got a bum deal”? I do, and you never seem to hear the end of it from him or her. If the name of the “offending” co-worker or manager is brought up, you know immediately that the discussion is going to turn into a whine session. I don’t know about you, but I want to say, “Get over it! It’s done; it’s in the past. Now focus on the future.” I hate to admit it, but it is not easy to be that brutally honest with your co-workers.

So how do you deal with that situation? You just cannot change the subject 180 degrees and pretend that the topic never surfaced. Let’s say it is Doug who feels he has been slighted, and he continuously reminds us of it. One approach is to ask Doug if he has tried to talk with “the offender.” Again, I know this is hard to do, but it is an important step. Another thing to try is to talk one-on-one with Doug in a non-threatening situation. Tell him that you are a friend, and that

you are concerned with the amount of energy that he is expending on the past. Tell him that you think it is better to focus that energy on the future. After all, it is very possible to influence the future; it is impossible to influence the past.

Remember, the rear-view mirror only tells you where you have been, not where you are going.

## Parlez vous Français?

*“They’re here!” Judy shrieked. “The tickets are here.” Judy jumped up and down as she waved the Express Mail envelope up in the air as if she were vigorously waving a flag. Her two roommates came running from the kitchen, screaming excitedly as if they had just won the lottery.*

*“Let me see them. Let me see them.” Karen was the first to reach for the envelope that held their dream-come-true vacation. “It’s really going to happen! It’s really going to happen!” Karen, in case you hadn’t noticed, spoke in doublets when she was excited.*

*Linda, the other roommate was more calm than Karen, but she, too, was happy that the tickets for their tour package to France had finally arrived. The three friends had mailed in their final payments three weeks’ ago, and it was so nerve-wracking for them to have to wait for the tickets to arrive. But they arrived, and now this long-planned trip was really going to happen.*

*“Let’s open the wine. Let’s open the wine.” That was Karen, of course, who suggested that they open the bottle of French wine they bought just for this occasion – the arrival of their tickets.*

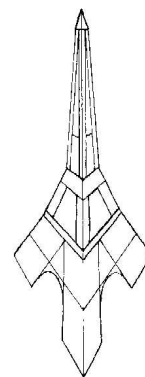
*“Okay,” said Linda as she headed to the kitchen to get the bottle of Red Bordeaux wine. She carried the bottle and the wine bottle opener to the dining room, where Karen and Judy were already sitting in anticipation. Linda put the bottle on the table, and went back to the kitchen for the glasses. Returning to the dining room, Linda clinked two of the wine glasses. “I love that sound,” she said as she set the glasses on the table.*

*“I love the pop of the cork as it comes out of the bottle,” Judy replied. “And I can’t wait to hear that sound over and over again. Did you know that the French wines make a distinctive sound when the cork is removed? It’s something about the makeup of the wine that wines from other countries do not have.” Judy’s scientific explanation was not what the other women wanted to hear right now. They just wanted to hear ‘pop.’ Judy knew her friends well, and so she knew that they wanted to taste the wine, not hear a lecture about it.*

*As the three raised and clinked their wine glasses in a toast, Linda said, “Santé!” She had been re-studying some useful French phrases, and one of the ones she remembered was how to say “Cheers!” in French. She knew that taking two years’ of French in college would come in handy someday.*

*“Santé!” replied the other two in unison. Each of them took a sip of the dark red wine. “Hmm. This is delicious,” said Karen, a little more relaxed now. “I can’t wait until we are over in Paris, sitting at an outdoor café, and having a young French waiter pouring glass after glass of this wonderful stuff for us.” Karen closed her eyes and quickly drew a picture of that scene in her mind. A smile appeared on her face.*

*“Well, let’s see what all we have in here.” Judy set her glass on the table after two small sips. She liked wine, just not too much of it. The “organizational freak” of the three, Judy slowly opened the large envelope, and removed the contents. She removed a thick rubber band that was around the packet of information. The first ticket envelope had Karen’s name on it, and she placed it directly in front of herself. Next was Linda’s, and so she placed it to the right of*



Karen's. As she took her own ticket envelope, she placed it to the left of Karen's. Next in the stack were three condensed "Highlights of Paris" packets, one for each of them. The last items were three sheets entitled, "Everything You Need to Bring With You, and What You Should Leave Behind!" Judy placed one of these in each of their piles. That was it. All those papers were the cause for their celebration.

But those papers were their tickets, their itineraries, and all the other useful information they would need, or should know, to truly enjoy their trip to France. Judy handed the respective stack to each person, and each of them went immediately to the ticket envelope. Inside each was a list of the contents, a copy of the itinerary, a payment receipt, airplane tickets, train tickets, and vouchers to present to the hotels to show that the rooms had been pre-paid. These latter items were printed in both English and in French.

Their departure date was only four weeks' away. As they sat down to decide who would do what, Judy and Karen let Linda have the assignments that required more French knowledge. While Judy and Karen had been learning a few helpful words, they intended to rely on Linda to be their translator and tour guide. As she read down the list on the "Everything You Need" sheet, Linda felt that they had everything the three of them could possibly need. They all had passports; they had copies of their current prescriptions; Judy was even taking an extra pair of reading glasses – just in case. There were a few things on the list that didn't seem applicable to them, so they were ignored.

Four weeks never went by so quickly, and the three friends were in the air and on their way to ten glorious days in France. As the plane landed in Paris, all three were giddy with excitement; doubly so for Karen.

Everything went smoothly for them. Linda was able to give directions to the taxi driver, and they got to the hotel with no problem. The vouchers were accepted at the hotel, and the three went up to their home for the next six days. During that time, they went here and there according to their planned itinerary. They visited every key attraction, ate some gourmet meals, and had just a marvelous time. Linda's favorite food were the crêpes that were sold on almost every corner – Paris's version of the New York City hot dog stands.

The six days in Paris went by swiftly, and so did the two days in Bordeaux. Rather than continuing with their group on the train to Lyon, they decided to spend their last two days where they currently were – in the region known for its wonderful red wine. The itinerary said that they would take the train from Lyon to Paris, and then they would fly out that same day. But since Judy, Karen and Linda were staying in Bordeaux, they would have to make their own arrangements to get back to Paris.

On the day before their scheduled departure from France, they got directions to the local car rental agency in Bordeaux. Hopping in a taxi, Linda once again was able to give perfect directions to the driver. Approaching the counter, Linda attempted to inquire about renting a car to drive to Paris, but it soon became apparent that the young clerk did not understand her at all. "Parlez vous Anglais?" ["Do you speak English?"]

"Oui. I mean, yes, I do speak English." The clerk spoke English very well, actually.

"Oh, merci. I mean thank you." Linda was obviously pleased that she was going to be able to converse with the young man. "I want to rent a car tomorrow to drive to Paris. Do you have a drop-off location at the airport?"

*“Yes we do. It is at Terminal One, however. You can catch the bus from there over to Terminal Two, which is the International Terminal.” He was very helpful. “I will need to see your credentials – your passport, your driver’s license, and your credit card.”*

*Linda sighed. This was going so smoothly. She placed her passport, driver’s license and credit card on the counter.*

*“Not this license,” the clerk said. “I will need to have your International Driver’s License.”*

*Linda looked shocked. “Well, this says I can drive, and my passport shows it’s me. What’s wrong with this one?”*

*“I am sorry, mademoiselle. But I cannot rent you a car without an International Driver’s License. There is a train that leaves at midnight that can take you to the airport.”*

*Dejected, the three women slowly walked out of the agency office. “I thought you said you had everything that was on the ‘Everything You Need’ sheet,” Judy said. “Do you remember if it said anything about an International Driver’s License?”*

*“It did,” Linda replied remorsefully. “But I never thought we would need one.”*

**Moral: Is it better to have it and not need it, or need it and not have it?**



Have you ever been in Linda’s situation? There is something you need, and it was available to you, but you never got it. The question, “Is it better to have it and not need it, or need it and not have it?” is one saying of mine (and there are probably many more) that my family has heard [way too] many times. To me, it is a matter of being ready for situations. Another way of looking at this is to remember the Boy Scouts motto, “Be prepared.”

Would it have taken a lot of extra effort for Linda (or Judy or Karen, for that matter) to get an International Driver’s License? No, it just takes filling out some paperwork and paying a small fee. But the impact of not having gotten the license created a dampening effect on the fun time they were having on vacation. Would they be stranded in Bordeaux? No, not that being stranded there, in itself, is such a bad thing. They could take the train; they could even fly from Bordeaux to Paris (I have actually taken that flight).

We apply the moral from this story in our lives every day without even thinking about it. How many of us have a spare tire in the trunk of our car, but yet we do not consciously think about it when we get in the car to go somewhere? After all, wouldn’t we rather have that spare tire there even if we don’t need it? I think most of us would agree that having it in the trunk is a far superior alternative to having a flat tire and needing a spare – but not having one.

Do you think every day about the cost of the life insurance policy that is in place? I certainly don’t. But I would rather have it in force even though I don’t need to use it, so that I know my family has some financial protection if/when I die.

There are some people who have a substantial supply of food on hand in case there is an emergency. The emergency could be a loss of employment and income, or it could be a disruption to the supply of food. In either case, these people would rather have that food available just in case there is a need for it. They know that the likelihood of needing it at any given time is very remote, but they want to be prepared in case it is needed.

There is a common theme running through these examples. In all of them, there is the element of having “something” just in case “it” is needed. Now if the people in the examples knew when the situation would arise when they would then need their emergency item (spare tire, life insurance policy, food), they could arrange to obtain it just before it was needed. The obvious flaw in that thinking is that we do not know when that type of an emergency situation is going to occur. Therefore, we need to be prepared in advance – just in case.

We have gallon bottles of drinking water at home – just in case it is needed, or if we want to take it on a camping trip. My wife and I came home one evening during a big storm. There were no problems at our house except we had no running water. Our water district is a private district with about 700 homes. The district operates a private well, and they occasionally lose power to one or more of the pumps. That is what happened during this storm; there was no power to the pumps, and so we had no water in our lines. But we were prepared. I simply got one of the gallon bottles of water, and we were able to wash up and brush our teeth before going to bed. By the time we got up the next morning, the water was back on. Could we have gone one evening without washing up and brushing our teeth? Sure, we could. But because we were prepared, we did not have to.

This notion of being prepared because we don’t always know when our preparedness will be needed has more application to our personal life than it does in business. Businesses, however, are not exempt from the need to be prepared. Most companies have defined succession plans in case something tragic happens to a senior executive. The succession plans allows for a defined, and thought out, orderly passing of authority and responsibility at a time when the company could be vulnerable. The U.S. Constitution and subsequent Amendments have enabled a set of succession plans in the case of death or incapacity of the United States President.

While executive succession is probably the extreme case of having it and not needing it, there are other more common business situations. Many companies like to have a cash reserve fund. The size, as well as the intended use, of this fund definitely varies from year to year within the same company, and even within an industry for a given year. Some of the reasons a company might maintain a reasonable cash reserve include: to allow for cash flow fluctuations from accounts receivables; to make acquisitions; to make investments in opportunistic Research and Development projects. While the executives know that the cash in this fund could be used for other purposes (debt payments, dividends, bonuses, raises, etc.), they know that they would not be able to quickly raise large sums of cash if it were needed. Thus, they maintain the cash reserve fund even if it is not currently needed.

Another example in business is shelf stock. I am referring to a public corporation that has stock that is authorized but not issued. Many times you will read in a company’s financial reports that the company has 250 million shares authorized, but only 175 million shares issued. How does “have it and not need it” apply here? In this case, the company would rather have the additional 75 millions shares available if and when some of it is needed, rather than having to go through the time and expense of another stock offering. These offerings come with a cost, and so it is better for a company to consolidate what it thinks will be its future needs, and have just one offering. What could be the need for that additional stock? The company could make an investment or even full acquisition of another company with stock. It could issue stock as bonuses or incentives for employees. The stock could be issued to the public to raise capital. In each of these cases, the company could go through the authorization process when the stock was

needed. But asking the shareholders to approve more stock each time it is needed is not the best way to do it.

The key to being able to “have it and not need it” is to plan ahead. While we cannot always plan ahead for every emergency and every possible need, it should not be that difficult to plan for reasonable possibilities. I have never needed my snakebite kit when I have gone hiking, but that does not mean that I am going to remove it from my pack. When you are thinking about an activity, think about the things that could happen, or could be needed. If having them and not needing them outweighs the consequences of needing them but not having them, then, by all means, make sure you have them. If Linda had used this line of reasoning, she would have applied for her International Driver’s License, and the three friends would have had a marvelous drive from Bordeaux to Paris.

## Are You Sure this is the Way that Auto Club Recommended?

*Ah, summer vacation! School is out, the weather is warm, and it is the perfect time for families to travel to theme parks, family reunions, the beaches, and other points of interest. The children would see their cousins again; the adults would have a chance to visit with their brothers and sisters, and the in-laws. There would be new friends to make, but also friends to leave behind as you headed out of town. And so it was with next-door neighbors, the Barkers and the Johnsons.*

*The Barkers were driving to the East Coast to visit both families; his lived in New Jersey, while hers lived in North Carolina. It had been two years' since the Barker children had been back there, although both sets of grandparents had visited over the Christmas holidays. The Johnsons, on the other hand, were planning on visiting Mr. Johnson's parents in Oregon; her parents were deceased. So the families were headed in opposite directions as they started out from their Kansas neighborhood. The kids said goodbye to each other, the way kids do. The adults shook hands and said "See you in a month." And so each family was headed out on a summer vacation.*

*Because of the dates that had been planned months in advance for visiting the East Coast relatives, Mr. and Mrs. Barker had prepared a detailed itinerary for each day of their journey. The front seat looked like a travel agency: maps, tour books, motel reservations, and cutout articles on places to see. There was, of course, the detailed listing of where they were planning to be each day along the trip; no detail was left undocumented. "This is going to be the best trip yet," Mr. Barker told the family as they reached the Interstate heading east. And so the trip went, everyday as planned. If it was on the schedule, they did it. If it wasn't, they didn't. Four weeks of living by the calendar; no unplanned side trips; no extra days visiting some place just because it was fun. Their arrival back home was even within thirty minutes of the scheduled "Drive into the driveway" – the last item on their itinerary.*

*About a month before school was out, Mr. Johnson had phoned his parents to tell them they would be out there "sometime in June." This was fine with the elder Johnsons; they usually didn't travel much anyway. "We'll be here," was their reply.*

*When the Johnsons started their journey west, they also had their maps and tour books, as well as some magazine articles on places to visit. They had an approximate time frame in which they wanted to arrive, but their plan was to call his parents a couple of days before they would get there. The children in the back seat were well equipped with their own entertainment packages: music, hand games, and little daily packages full of surprises. On one of the days, their bags had a license plate game. The object of this game was to write down license plates numbers from as many different states as they could. Only one child could "claim" a state's plate as they saw it. They were amazed at how many states they wrote down. The winning tally for that day was thirty-seven.*

*As they were driving along west of Denver, they saw a "Ghost Town" sign that pointed off to the left. "It's only five miles. You want to go see a ghost town?" Mr. Johnson asked. Mrs. Johnson was not as wildly excited about seeing another ghost town as were the children, but it was fine with her. After all, a vacation is supposed to be about doing different things and seeing different things. Mr. Johnson switched on his left turn signal, and they were soon headed down a gravel road toward their next adventure – a ghost town. They arrived just in time to see a*

*“gunfight” take place right there on Main Street. [It’s amazing how the gunfights always seem to take place at the same time every Saturday!] After checking out some of the abandoned buildings and mining equipment, they found The Mercantile that served huge scoops of ice cream. After about an hour, the Johnsons headed back to the highway, and resumed their trip to Oregon.*

*This is the way their entire four weeks went; well, except for the time with the senior Johnsons. But even then, the activities there were whatever they all decided to do that day. On the return trip, they took a side trip off Interstate-84 to visit the Craters of the Moon National Monument in Idaho. It was hard for the children to comprehend that this is where the U.S. astronauts prepared for walking and driving on the moon. They liked it so much, they decided to pitch their tent and spend a night there. There was just a sliver of a moon out that night, so the sky was filled with so many stars it was such an unbelievable sight. All four of the Johnsons were so glad they stopped to visit. Eventually, though, they had to get back home. They had planned to get home sometime on Friday – they pulled into the driveway late Saturday night.*

*As the Barker children and the Johnson children got together to play Sunday afternoon, they swapped stories of their vacations. “It was neat seeing my grandparents,” the Barker boy said. “But it was boring because we couldn’t do anything that wasn’t on ‘the schedule.’”*

*“We had tons of fun,” chimed in the Johnson girl. “I even got to pan for gold in Colorado. You want to see it? And we camped where the men practiced for going to the moon. We had a totally awesome time!”*

**Moral: Life – both personal and business – is a journey, not a destination. Do not get too focused on where you are going; the pathway can be just as important (maybe even more important) as what is at the end of the path.**



“Take time to stop and smell the roses.” I don’t know where this phrase comes from, or else I would give it proper attribution. But we have all heard one form of it or another many times. What it means is that as you walk along the path, just don’t use the path to go from one place to another; stop occasionally and see what is around you. There might be pretty flowers to smell, or a beautiful vista to view, or even just the outstanding sounds of nature. Use the path as a journey, not just as a way to get to a destination.

The Barkers were using their four-week “vacation” as a way to get to a destination – two of them, actually. While there is nothing inherently wrong in having a set plan for going on a trip, it seems such a waste of an opportunity to not do so much more while you are traveling. The Johnsons saw their four weeks as a constant journey. The stop at his parents’ house in Oregon was just one part of the journey. Which family do you think actually enjoyed their trip more? I know the Johnson children did.

If you think about your life here on Earth, are you going on a journey or to a destination? Given that we all do eventually die, what other destination could there be but death? Yes, there are many who believe in an afterlife, and maybe that is their destination. But what I am talking about is what happens to us while we are here as physical beings on Earth. I am not intending to get into a philosophical or a religious discussion; I just want you to think about what you are doing while your feet are here on terra firma. You can use your journey as a way to get to a destination, but it is too narrow focused to aim for a destination with nothing else in mind.

If you ask most people who work for someone else (definitely a huge proportion of the work force) if their work life is a journey or a destination, many of them will say “destination.” This is because they are working toward a goal – senior scientist, group manager, CEO, United States Senator, town mayor, District Attorney. These are all worthy positions. But they are merely the title for someone who does something. They are destinations.

What if instead of aspiring to be a senior scientist, the researcher says that she wants to be able to work with sick children and to contribute to finding a cure for their specific disease(s)? Do you see how this is now a journey for this well-intentioned highly intelligent person? Her professional life is now a journey, rather than one that seeks a destination.

How about the sharp lawyer whose goal is to become the county’s District Attorney? If his reason for becoming the DA is to be a high-profile celebrity, then this role is definitely a destination for him. But if he says that he wants to use his knowledge of the law, and the legal system, to make sure that criminals are prosecuted so that the county residents can feel safe, then his professional life is a journey.

These examples seem obvious, don’t they? It is not easy to discern whether another person’s professional life is a journey or it is seeking a destination. If you ask the senior scientist, her answer will certainly give all indications of the journey that she has set out; her role as a senior scientist is merely the result of her journey. You would probably hear a similar line from the District Attorney – “Because I have been good at fighting crime, I have been promoted,” etc., etc.

Because we cannot tell what the true motives are for other people, we must focus our energy on knowing what our own motives are. Think about this: Is what you are doing on a daily basis taking you on a journey or toward a destination? Again, there is nothing wrong with destinations, just so long as they do not become the primary focus. An aimless wanderer might have wonderful time in life, but never accomplish anything. The key is balance.

Try doing this for just one week. First, at the beginning of the week, write down the answer to the following question: “What do I want to accomplish on my work journey this week?” Make sure you look at this question, and your answer, twice a day – before work, and at midday. Second, everyday before you go to work (whether in an office or at home), ask yourself, “What am I going to do on my journey today?” If you can write down an answer, that is even better. If you have written an answer, refer to it several times a day to see if you are on track. Third, at the end of the day, review what you did during the day, and see how that compares to what you planned for your daily journey as well as the week’s journey. Finally, at the end of the week, ask yourself, “Did I accomplish what I set out as my journey for this week?”

The first time you try this, it will feel uncomfortable and strange. The more you practice it, the easier and more natural it will become. Soon, you will look forward to planning your week’s journey, and you might find that during the week you are writing down something for next week’s journey.

As you try to think about going on a journey in your personal life, you are probably saying something like, “And when do I have time to do that?” You will put up many rational and reasonable objections: taking care of the house; working 40-50 hours per week; taking the children to sports and other activities; church and other meetings; grocery shopping; clothes shopping; taking out the trash. The list never ends, does it? If we turn over the control of our life

to all the activities that we must do, we will never have or make the time to do the things we want to do.

I am a busy person by nature. Let's don't even talk about work. At home, I always have a list of at least six projects that are somewhere along the path of completion from 0% to 90%. The list would be longer but my wife knows it is fruitless for her to add any more projects. And that list does not count all the things I want to do that only I know about. If there is any one lesson in this book that I have yet to master (or at least, partially figure out), this is it! If you ever meet me in person, feel free to ask me about this one. Why? Because I need to know that someone might check on me, and therefore, I must work on it. Here is an open request for any of you readers to submit your ideas to me: What works for you in your personal life to help you make sure that your life is a journey rather than one headed toward a destination? Thanks.

## Buy Me Some Peanuts and CrackerJack

*Summertime in the small midwestern town meant different things for different people. For many farmers, it meant the time to work long days to ensure a bountiful harvest. For schoolteachers, it meant a well-deserved break from the classroom [and the students]. For most parents, it was endless days of keeping track of their children's activities. For ten-year old friends Bobby and Timmy, it was a time to pretend that they were superstar baseball players for the only team that mattered – the St. Louis Cardinals. The Cardinals were 34-28 the day that school let out, but Bobby and Timmy knew that if they were playing, the Cardinals would easily finish in first place, and would end up sweeping the World Series in four straight games. During the school year, recess and lunch were spent telling each other about the previous night's game. That is, if either one of them was able to listen to the game on the radio. Both sets of parents were strict on making sure their boy had all his schoolwork done before listening to the game. More than once, especially early in the season, each one got caught listening to the radio before his schoolwork was completed.*

*Their town had a nice American Legion baseball field. The boys had not been inside to watch many games because Mr. Wilson, the grumpy man at the gate, charged two dollars and fifty cents admission to the games. The boys didn't have that much allowance to spend. On the days when there was a game, Bobby and Timmy would hang around outside the park where they could still hear some sounds of the game. The announcer would usually say who was batting, but not all the time. They could hear, of course, the crack of the bat when there was a good base hit. And the crowd (if you could call that small gathering a crowd) would cheer hits and occasionally a good play [they were somewhat seldom]. The boos were really strong when there was an error, and there were usually four or five in each game.*

*Chasing a foul ball was futile because the bigger boys could run faster than Bobby or Timmy. But even if one of the younger boys got to the ball first, the bigger boy would take it from him. So Bobby and Timmy didn't even bother to chase them; even the ones that would bounce right to them. They would just toss it to the older boys who ran up to them.*

*"Does Mr. Wilson ever leave the ticket booth?" Timmy asked Bobby during one evening's game.*

*"I don't know. Why?"*

*"'Cause if he did, we could sneak in there real fast." Timmy said in a hushed tone, as if someone might hear them conspiring.*

*"Boy if he caught us," Bobby started, "we would really be in trouble. I hear he caught two older boys sneaking in one night, and he locked them in the bathroom for the whole weekend."*

*Timmy's eyes grew large as he listened to Bobby's story. Maybe sneaking in was not such a good idea after all. The two boys settled for just listening outside the park in their usual spot, a little grassy spot near the first base area. At least they thought it was near first base; they couldn't see in because of the tall fence that surrounded the park.*

*Bobby couldn't go with Timmy to the baseball park the next Wednesday evening; his aunts and uncles and cousins from Kansas were visiting. He liked his relatives, but he really loved going to the ball game, even if he was just listening to the sounds. He and Timmy still acted out the game as if they were in their St. Louis Cardinals uniforms. "Their team" always won the*

*game, of course, no matter how the cheers and boos and hits were going on inside the actual ball park. But he would have to miss the game that night.*

*On Thursday, Bobby and his family, including relatives, went for a drive in the country, so he did not see Timmy all day. When they did get together on Friday, Timmy was all excited. “You missed the best game on Wednesday night. There were so many hits and strikeouts!” Timmy exclaimed.*

*“Oh, Timmy, you have such an imagination. Just because I wasn’t there, you’re pretending that you were the best pitcher of all time, and the best batter, too.” Bobby knew his friend Timmy could really exaggerate a story – he’d been caught at school a few times telling fibs to his teacher.*

*“No,” replied Timmy. “I’m not making it up. I’m not talking about our pretend games. I am taking about the real game. I watched the real game.”*

*“Really?” Bobby was starting to get excited now. “Did you really sneak in when mean old Mr. Wilson wasn’t looking?”*

*“No, I didn’t sneak in.”*

*“Did you spend all your allowance to go inside?” Bobby didn’t think Timmy would do that.*

*“No. Mr. Wilson let me go in.” Timmy’s level of excitement was waning from all the questions Bobby was asking.*

*“What? He let you in?”*

*“Yes,” Timmy started to explain. “I went up to him, and just asked him if I could go in and watch the game. I told him I didn’t have any money, but that I would like to watch the game. I told him that I would be real good and not cause any trouble. And he told me I could go in if I was good. I told him ‘Thank you.’ And he then told me. ‘You know, son. Nobody has ever come up to me and just asked if they could go in. I guess maybe they were afraid of me, or what I would say.’”*

**Moral: Don’t be afraid to ask for something if the worst response you can get is a simple “No.”**



How many “Mr. Wilson’s” do you have in your life? Unless you are the most outgoing and confident person alive, you have some. You might not admit it, but they are there.

Many new salespeople are afraid to just ask for the sale. They feel that they have to give their “standard sales pitch,” even when the customers are already set to buy. They just need someone to ask them for their business. Unfortunately, customers do not wear signs on their heads that say, “I am ready to spend my money. Just ask me to buy.” That would make it a lot more convenient for sellers, but it isn’t quite that simple.

Qualifying a prospective sales lead is still a necessary step in obtaining the buying decision from the customer. How you go about doing that depends on the product and the market into which you are selling. The key strategy that is common in all fields however is to ask questions to which the customer will most likely respond, “Yes.” As you lead the customer down the path of “Yes,” it then becomes a lot easier to elicit a “Yes” response when you ask for the sale.

But just asking these questions is not the complete package. If it were that simple, every sales person would make at least 200% of his or her quota every year. You still have to listen to the customer. Listen to what the customer is actually saying; not just the words, but the meaning behind the words. Ask clarifying questions that allow you to get those “Yes” responses.

How many companies have asked you for your opinion on their products? If someone called you (assuming it was not during your dinner or quiet time) and asked if it would be okay if they took two minutes of your time to ask some questions about their products, would you say, “Yes” or “No”? Of course, many times these are sales pitches disguised as surveys, but there are plenty of honest surveys being conducted. What is the worst response you could give that caller, and still be polite? If you tell the caller, “No,” hopefully he or she will thank you, and then make the next call.

What was the worst thing that happened to that caller? You said, “No.” You might have said, “Yes,” and the survey taker would then be able to get some helpful information from you. So if you are in business, and you want to get some feedback on your products and/or services, don’t be afraid to ask people. Some of the responses might shock you. But for the most part, respondents will be honest. If you cannot take honest feedback, then you really don’t deserve to be in business.

How does this apply to employees? There are far more employees out there than there are employers or business owners. What is it that you can ask for, while the worst response you can get is a “No”? They key here is to not let the “No” response be a dead end to the question asking. For example, if you ask your manager if it might be likely for you to receive a promotion during the next twelve months, and he says, “No,” don’t just stop there. He would probably not just say, “No,” but he would also give you some reasons why not. But if he does not, you have the right to say something like, “I understand, but what is it that I need to do in order to be considered for a promotion? What can I add to my Development Plan to make me more qualified as a candidate for promotion?” This tells him that you do not just “expect a promotion for free,” but that you are interested in developing the skills that would be required of someone at that next level.

While promotions are more difficult for managers to parcel out, participation in team projects is not. The next time you hear of a project that interests you, ask your manager if you can get on that team. Again, what is the worst he could say? “No.” But, he might also say, “Gee, I didn’t know you were interested in being on a project like that.” If it is his project, he can just tell you that you are on it. If the project is “owned” by a different manager, his response might be, “I think that project would be a good fit for you. Let me talk to the sponsoring manager, and tell him that you would like to participate.”

My children learned this concept from me when they were young. It does take confidence to be able to “ask for something if the worst response you can get is a simple ‘No.’” But when my daughter was in college, her flight from Portland, Maine, to Chicago (and then she had to get on another flight to Boise) was delayed frequently due to weather. The airlines have a convenient rule that states that they are not responsible for weather delays, and, therefore, they are not required to provide you with lodging. When her flights got delayed, she would simply scan the line for ticket agents, looking for a pleasant one. She would then approach that agent with ticket in hand, along with a sad face. “Hello. I am a college student trying to get home for [Christmas/Spring Break/ Summer], and I see my flight has been delayed. I really don’t have the

money for a hotel. Is there anything you can do to help me?" She never paid for a hotel room. The airlines took care of her every time.

I remember a time when we lived in San Diego. The concert hall downtown was hosting a performance by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. I wrote a letter to its conductor (I'll omit his name so he does not get deluged with tons of requests like mine), telling him that I hoped he would enjoy his stay in San Diego, etc. I then asked him if he could send me two complimentary tickets to one of the performances. About two weeks' later, I received a package from his secretary. She said that he was thankful for my letter and well wishes, but that he would not be able to send me any tickets. However, it was his wish that I enjoy the enclosed LP recording from the orchestra that he had autographed for me. That was wonderful. I took a little time, sent a sincere letter, and spent a first-class stamp. A very possible response could have been no response at all, or even just a small note, saying, "No." Instead, I now have a cherished album that I enjoy listening to for more reasons than just the beautiful music.

Don't be afraid to ask. You might be surprised at the response you will get. Try it!

## Is it a Throw-away or a Re-chargeable?

*“How many more of these 16-hour days do you think we are going to have to work?” Fernando asked his co-worker Tom.*

*“I don’t know, man. But if we don’t get a break from these soon, I am going to die. I just can’t seem to get enough rest when I get home. I try to relax a little, but it just doesn’t seem to work.” Tom and Fernando were happy with the overtime pay, but they never had any time to spend it.*

*“I know what you mean, Tom,” Fernando replied. “If I want to take a little nap on the couch, my kids are jumping on top of me. They want to play, but I just don’t have the energy. My wife says we can use the extra money to take a nice vacation this year, but I think I will need the time to just sleep.” Not only were they working double shifts, but they also had to go in every other Saturday. They were essentially working two full months in one month’s time. Their manager assured them that this would stop soon, but the increase in orders also meant additional demands on the production line.*

*“Do you have any plans for Saturday? I was thinking that we could take the wives and kids out in the boat. We could head to the lake and do some fishing. The kids could swim, and later on we would have a barbecue right there. How does that sound?”*

*Fernando’s eyes lit up; he seemed to have some renewed energy. Tom’s suggestion of a fun Saturday really appealed to him. “That sounds great. Let me call home at break, and check with her. We’d better get back to the grind.”*

*When Tom and Fernando left work late Friday afternoon, that week seemed like a twenty-day week to them. They were exhausted, completely run down, void of any energy. Their minds tried to tell them that the next day was going to be fun and exciting, but their bodies were slow to respond.*

*“You still coming over at nine?” Tom asked.*

*“Yeah, we’ll be there. We’ve got the hot dogs and sodas, so we should be set.” Fernando’s eyes were a strong indicator of how much sleep he needed.*

*The next morning at nine o’clock sharp, Fernando and his family arrived at Tom’s house. The boat was already hitched to the truck, and the coolers sitting next to the boat. “You look pretty rested,” Tom said as his friend got out of the car.*

*“Got a good night’s rest, actually. Maybe I was looking forward to today. Looks like you’re all set to go.”*

*Tom and Fernando loaded the last items into the boat and the truck while the wives chatted and the children played tag in the yard. Twenty minutes later, they headed to the lake. Tom and his family led the way in his truck pulling the boat; Fernando and his family followed in their car.*

*They arrived at the lake right at ten. There were already a few boats out on the water, but there was still plenty of wide-open space on the beach area. The ladies headed to a picnic area and began to set up there. The floral tablecloth brightened up the drab picnic table. Fernando’s wife even brought some flowers from her garden; the table was quickly transforming into an*

*elegant dining area. The paper plates were a picnic essential. The children were already making sand castles at the shoreline.*

*“Have you had the boat out often this summer?” Fernando’s wife asked Tom’s wife.*

*“No,” she replied. “With all the hours that Tom has been working, this is the first time all year. I am thankful for the additional money, but Tom has no energy even when he has Saturday and Sunday off.”*

*“I know what you mean,” Fernando’s wife said in agreement. “When Fernando comes home, all he wants to do is lie down and sleep. He used to spend so much time with the kids, but not this year. I like the money, too. But I hope things slow down at work; he can’t keep going on like this.” It was clear that both wives agreed that their husbands were working too many hours.*

*Meanwhile, Tom and Fernando had put the boat in the water, and parked Tom’s truck in the parking lot. The two men were going to take the boat out for a quick run before coming back to get some passengers. As they both climbed into the boat, Tom apologized for the appearance of the boat. “Sorry for the dirty boat. I haven’t been out all year, so it’s gotten a little dirty.”*

*“Hey, no problem,” Fernando responded. “I am just glad that we are out here today instead of working.”*

*“Amen to that. Let’s see what she’ll do.” Tom turned the key as the boat started drifting from shore toward deeper water.*

*All they heard was a ‘click’ as he turned the key. Tom tried several times, each time getting the same result. He opened the rear compartment, checked the wiring and the battery, and then dejectedly looked at his friend. “Battery’s dead; guess I didn’t think to see if it needing charging.”*

**Moral: Your body is like a battery; it too needs to be re-charged on a regular basis.**



Tom had neglected to check the boat battery before they headed out to the lake. We all know that a seldom-used battery does not always hold its charge. Checking the battery charge was never part of Tom’s routine prior to going to the lake, but he used to take the boat out at least once a month. The regular use allowed the battery to stay charged.

Did you notice the paradox in this story? Tom’s boat battery lost its charge through non-use, while Tom and Fernando lost the charge (energy) in their bodies through excessive use. They were working too much, and their bodies were not able to re-charge back to normal energy levels. Regardless of how something loses its charge, it needs to be re-charged before it can get back to its regular operating level of energy. While a boat (or car or truck) battery can re-charge as the vehicle’s engine is running, we humans re-charge our batteries through a combination of a reduced level and a different type of energy expenditure.

Even in the story above, Tom and Fernando seemed full of energy on a Saturday morning when they would normally be dragging around with very little life. But because they were going to the lake to go boating and spend time with their families, they had a renewed sense of energy. So even though they would normally be very tired, they were able to find renewed energy on this particular Saturday due to the activities they were doing. I know people who renew their energy levels by working in their gardens. They can spend an entire day pulling weeds, trimming

bushes, and picking flowers. While they may be physically exhausted at the end of the day, they are mentally re-charged and ready for anything.

When I went to graduate school, I was working full-time in the day, and then I would go right to school after work. I would have two to four hours' of classes an evening, but I was never tired. My body was tired sometimes, but my mind was energized and ready to go because it was a different type of activity, and it was something I really liked.

While many of us can renew our mental energy through different means, we all still need to make sure that our physical bodies get the rest and revitalization that they need. A common reason I hear for not re-charging body energy is, "I don't have any time. When I get home from work, I have this to do, and that to do." They are all great excuses; but the body doesn't care about your excuses. A technique I use if I am really tired is to lie down on the sofa for thirty minutes – and only thirty minutes! If I stay there too long, I will end up sleeping too much and then not be able to get the proper rest in the evening. It is amazing how that short nap re-charges not only my mind but my body also. You should try it; I think you will find it very helpful.

The short nap technique is great for a "quick charge" on your body, but a longer break from your regular routines is also needed. Many people expend more energy on vacations than they do while they are working. There is nothing wrong with a packed week at DisneyWorld, or spending a week playing golf at six different courses, but you should also plan a resting week into your schedule during the year.

The human body works best when it can re-charge both physically and mentally at the same time. I like to go camping in locations where it is quiet, and I can just sit and relax. My mother does not understand how I can just "sit." She thinks I should be reading, or fishing, or doing something besides just sitting. I will go on a hike or read a book, or possibly even do some writing or painting. But I am also content to just sit. I find this to be an excellent way for me to rebuild the energy that has been expended. I also like fun vacations. The week that our entire family spent in Aruba was marvelous. But if I need to focus on "re-charging my batteries," I prefer to be somewhere where it is quiet and I can do what I want to do, or not do what I don't want to do.

Most companies recognize the importance of allowing, or even encouraging, their employees to re-charge – physically, mentally and professionally. Rather than enforcing strict calendar week vacation periods, many companies have a system where employees can take days off whenever they want (subject to management approval, of course). I like this method; it allows me to take a Friday off, for example, and end up with a three-day weekend. Or perhaps, I want to take advantage of a special airfare and fly on Wednesday. No problem; I can take a week off from Wednesday through Tuesday.

While this addresses the ability of the employee to re-charge mental and physical energy levels, there is another aspect that applies to employers. That aspect is to make sure that employees have the ability to re-charge themselves professionally. This may be something as simple as taking a one-day course in Teamwork Dynamics, or it may be as extensive as providing financial support for someone to go to college.

Many employees feel stuck in their current positions, but they also do not feel that they have the necessary requirements for moving to another job. Sometimes this could mean learning a new trade, completing the undergraduate degree, or just taking a refresher course on a software

application. The investment that the employer makes in that employee is usually returned to the company in terms of higher productivity, a happier employee, and a resulting increased level of customer satisfaction.

If you are an employer or a manager of employees, ask yourself if there are any employees working for you who need to have their batteries re-charged? Don't be afraid to ask them what they think they need to renew their energy levels. Just your asking them could be the start of the renewal process.

## ‘IronMan Matt’ Meets His Match

*Finished* with his normal workout routine, Matt put on two pairs of sweatpants, plus a sweatshirt over a windbreaker. You would think it was the dead of winter by the way that Matt was dressing. It was actually late June, and the afternoon temperature was eighty-six degrees. After drinking a quart of a nutritional supplement, Matt started on a slow jog to the high school football field. Even before he got there, the sweats were doing their job – he was getting warm and sweaty.

Now it was time for the stair climb. He began to jog up the football stands, and then back down, still jogging. His target was one hundred repetitions. After ten, he could tell that his body temperature was definitely increasing. “Eleven,” he said as he reached the ground, turned around, and started back up.

“Matt, is that you?” That gravelly old voice could only be one person, Coach Ralston. He had been Matt’s football coach and his track coach in high school.

Matt stopped, looked toward the goal posts, and saw Coach Ralston jogging over toward him. “That old man is still in incredible shape,” Matt said to himself. He thought Coach was old back then; he’s still coaching? “Hello, Coach,” Matt hollered as he started back down the stairs. “I thought you were going to retire, Coach. They didn’t talk you into staying, did they?” Matt greeted his old coach with genuine affection. It had been Coach Ralston who taught Matt the importance of getting in, and staying in, top physical condition.

“How the heck are you, IronMan Matt? And what are you doing in those sweat clothes? Didn’t I teach you that your entire body needs to breathe, not just your lungs?” Once a coach, always a coach.

Matt had earned the nickname ‘IronMan Matt’ after competing in several of the grueling three-sport endurance competitions. The running was easy for him, and the bicycling just took him a while to get into physical, and mental, condition. It was the swimming in choppy water that was his nemesis until he learned how to control and time his breathing. Now, ‘IronMan Matt’ is one of the top contenders every time he enters the competition.

“I’m getting ready for a competition unlike any other I have been to. This is the ‘Jungle Man Competition’ down in Belize in mid-October. I want my body to be ready for the heat and humidity down there. What are you doing here?”

“You know me, Matt. I can’t retire. What would I do? Sit around the house and watch TV? Or go play golf? You know that’s not my style. I’ve got to keep working. Who know, I might end up training a future world champion some day.” Coach was kidding with that last statement. Matt had already won two IronMan World Championship gold medals. “I am setting up for a mid-summer football camp. Tell me more about this Jungle Man Competition.”

“Well,” Matt began, “it is ten days’ of a variety of challenges in the jungles and the waters of Belize. You know how I hate bugs; I’m not looking forward to them.” Noticing that his body was cooling down, he figured he had better return to his exercising. “Sorry, Coach. I need to get started again, and warm up this body.” The men shook hands, and then Matt resumed his stair climbing. “One.” Matt started the count over again.

*The rigorous exercising paid off for Matt. When he stepped off the plane in Belize, he knew that the combination of the heat and the humidity was going to be the downfall for some of his competition. He vowed that he would not let it get to him. He was still a bit concerned about the bugs, however, but he felt he would be able to control his anxiety.*

*Unlike the other competitions he was in, the format of the Jungle Man Competition had separately timed events, head-to-head timed events, and even two timed events where the competitors were paired into two-man teams. Even though the overall event was an individual competition, the two pairs events meant that each member of the team would receive the same score for those events. This introduced an interesting twist – you had to work with one of the men you were actually competing against. The other twist on the pairs events was that both men would be disqualified if both men did not complete the entire event. A blind draw for the pairs was necessary to try to keep the maneuvering to a minimum.*

*Conserving strength, both physical and mental, was critical in this ten-day competition. Matt was not going to expend all his energy on the first event, the tree swing. Each competitor had two thirty-minute sessions of swinging from tree to tree to tree in a circular path. The goal was to complete as many cycles as possible in the thirty minutes. It sounded like an easy thing when the first event was announced, but the men quickly learned the importance of maintaining the right grip. If a man lost his grip and fell, he would have to return to the starting tree, climb up the rope ladder, and start that cycle again. Matt was in sixth place after the first event was completed. He was quite satisfied with his position. There were eighteen men behind him, and he felt that he still had 100% of his strength.*

*The first pairs event was on day four. Matt was currently in third place overall, and he felt that his body still had 100% to give. “This is my competition to win,” Matt thought to himself as he prepared for his role in the two-man canoe race. The concept of the race was simple; the execution was a lot harder. The men were each given an ax, and then each pair was blindfolded and taken to a different location; but each location was equidistant from the river. The men had to find an appropriate tree, chop it down, carve a canoe and paddles, and then paddle down the river (with rapids) to the finish line, which was sixteen miles away. Teamwork was absolutely vital in this event.*

*Matt had drawn a Canadian logger as his teammate. They appeared to be the early favorites. They were the first team to the river, but they had problems riding through the rapids. They spilled over four times, and once their canoe got away from them, and they had a really difficult time rescuing it and their own chances of staying in the competition. They finished ninth, but at least they finished. One team lost its canoe during a spill, and the canoe broke in half as it was thrown against some rocks. Unfortunately, per the rules, that team was not able to cross the finish line in their original canoe, and therefore, both men were disqualified from the rest of the competition. There was a lot of screaming between those two men, each one blaming the other for the broken canoe. The poor finish in this event moved Matt back down to fifth place overall.*

*After five more days, and one event per day, Matt had climbed back up to second place with just one event to go. Day ten was the second pairs event. The canyon climb involved climbing and traversing some extremely steep (and deep) canyon walls and crevices. The event forced the two men on a team to be separated from each other by several hundred yards. Many times, they would not even be within sight of each other. Each trail was designed so that the role of “lead person” would switch back and forth between the two men. The men did not have to finish at the*

same time, but each man would get the slower time. Once again, as in the canoe race, teamwork was crucial. This time, the added element of safety was added. Each man would have to rely on his partner to make sure that his life was not in danger. Matt's partner this time was Hank. Hank, who was currently in fifth, knew that he could not win the competition. Because he and Matt would receive the same score, Matt would finish higher than him know matter how they did in this event.

The two men struggled to develop any kind of partnering rhythm in the early parts of the climb. Matt did not know how the overall leader was doing, but he knew that he and Hank would be lucky to not finish last in the event. They finally got into synch after three hours, which coincided with their arrival at the crevice crossing. Here was the ultimate partnering test. One man had to secure the line while the other climbed down the crevice on the same side, and then climbed up the other side. It was about a twenty-minute climb down, but a forty-minute climb up. Because the men had to share gear, the second man could not start his decent until the first man was done.

The men had decided to create a rope bridge for the second man to use for crossing. This would save at least forty-five minutes instead of the second man having to climb down the crevice and then back up the other side. The peril in the alternative method was that if the second man did not catch the line thrown to him, it would fall down the canyon, and he would be stuck on that side. Thus, the team would be disqualified. Hank was the first one to climb down. As he started back up on the other side, Matt removed the line and the tie-downs as he prepared to build the rope bridge.

When he saw Hank emerge on the other side, Matt yelled at him to throw the line to him.

"No," was Hank's reply.

"Pull the line up and throw it to me, Hank. Let's make the bridge." Matt yelled back to Hank.

"No. You climb down. I am not throwing the line to you."

"Hank, we agreed to build the bridge to save time. Throw me the line. I have already removed your descent line." Matt was getting angry now as he saw time, and the championship, slipping away from him.

Eventually realizing that Hank was not going to throw the line as they had agreed, Matt began re-securing a line to descend into the crevice. He reached the middle shelf in seven minutes, and then began his ascent on the still-secured line – the one that was to have been thrown over to him. It took him thirty-five minutes to ascend the other wall. Hank was not there. He had already started on the next leg. It was a good thing he was gone – Matt was so angry he might have thrown Hank into the crevice!

The team of Hank and Matt finished in eighth place; they were twelve minutes' behind the seventh place team, and twenty three-minutes' behind the sixth place team. If they had used the rope bridge method, they would have finished sixth, a position that would have vaulted Matt into the overall lead.

"Why didn't you pull the line and throw it back over to me? I thought we agreed we would build the rope bridge? We wasted valuable time, and I lost the championship because of you. What got into you?" Matt was screaming at Hank.

*“I didn’t trust you to catch the line. If you missed it, we would be disqualified. I only needed a top five finish in this competition to keep my sponsors’ rights. If I trusted you, and you missed it, I would lose my backing.” Hank’s reasoning was obviously self-centered.*

*“You didn’t trust me?” Matt replied. “I was going to trust you with my life, but you would not trust me to catch the line? Well, you’ve got your sponsors for another year. For your sake, I hope you don’t need anyone to trust you; they’ll be fools if they do.”*

**Moral: If you want people to trust you, you must trust them first.**



Matt was ready to trust Hank [with his life!], but Hank did not trust Matt. Poor Hank. He will go through life fearful that others will not trust him, yet he will not be willing to have the initiative to trust other people first. I am neither a psychologist nor a psychiatrist; but Hank seems a little paranoid to me. In this particular story, there was some self-interest also in play. Hank’s main interest was just to finish high enough to secure his sponsorships for the coming year. Winning that last race along with Matt would not have provided him with any additional financial benefits.

Which type of person are you? Are you a “trust them first” or a “show me first” person? There are numerous examples that validate logic behind the the second choice. We hear news accounts of all kinds of scams where people lose large amounts of money, even their entire life savings. There is the occasional heart-breaking story of the child who is stolen by a “friend.” When we hear things like these stories, it is very natural to say, “Prove to me first that I can trust you.”

Hopefully you can tell that I think you should allow people to trust you by your trusting them first. Is this foolish? It might be. Just because I support trusting others first does not mean that I do not think the use of a little caution is perfectly okay. The degree of caution you should exercise depends on what is at stake.

I occasionally buy and sell items on eBay. I know people who are afraid to sell anything online because they “might get taken.” I could understand that statement if they sold something worth thousands of dollars, accepted a stranger’s personal check, and then shipped the item immediately. I might classify that as being a little too trusting. In that case, I would wait until I knew the check had cleared my bank before shipping the item. In my six years’ on eBay, I have had one person not ship the item I bought. He cheated me out of a whole seven dollars. I made a couple attempts to contact him, and then I stopped. It was not worth my spending any more time and energy for a seven dollar loss. If I sell something for a small amount, I gladly take anyone’s personal check, and then I ship the item to that person the day the check arrives. I have never had any check returned for insufficient funds, closed account, etc. I want buyers and sellers to trust me, so I extend that trust to them first.

How does this apply to the business world? Let’s first look at it in terms of a store, its customers, and the ever-present sense of being watched. Have you ever gone into a store and felt that at least two sets of eyes were constantly watching you? Whether it is through security cameras or employees following you, it is a creepy feeling. It is as if they know you are going to try to steal something from them. Basically, they do not trust you. When I encounter that situation, I leave the store right away. I do not want to spend any of my money in a store where

you are automatically assumed to be a shoplifter as soon as you enter. They don't trust me; why would I want to trust them with my business.

If you are the storeowner, there is another way to approach this. You do not need to constantly follow and watch your customers. When a customer enters the door, look at that person, and say, "Hello. Thanks for coming in. Please let me know if there is anything I can help you find." You have now made personal contact with that person. Most people don't steal from someone who has made personal contact with them. By allowing your customer to roam freely through your store, you are entrusting your merchandise to them. I think you will find that more of them can now trust you.

Another situation is when a customer wants to return an item that may or may not have been purchased there. How would you handle that situation if you were the owner or manager? For many valid reasons, there are a lot of businesses that require absolute proof of purchase prior to any return. Does that sound like a trusting environment? There are other businesses, however, that will take the item back even if it was not bought at that store or even from their company. Why would they do this? It could be just good customer relations, or that they trust you in that maybe you thought you bought it there. Here is a recent personal example. My wife had purchased a couple new outfits at Dillard's to take to our daughter's college graduation. The weather in Maine does not always cooperate; so one outfit had not been worn. She had not removed the tags just in case she did not wear it. When we returned to town, I went back to the same store with the dress to return. All I said was, "I need to return this dress." I had my Dillard's card and the sales receipt in my hand, but the clerk did not ask for the receipt, nor did she ask why I was returning the dress. All she asked for was my card. She scanned my card and the dress tag. One minute later I was walking out with a full refund and a smile from the sales clerk. She trusted me. We had purchased the dress at that store, and I had the sales receipt; but it was not necessary. That level of trust is what pulls me back to Dillard's (the quality helps, too – but that is what got me there in the first place).

A classic story is that of a customer taking a set of tires into the store. The man took the tires to the Customer Service desk, and said that there was something wrong with them. He handed the clerk a sales receipt, along with his credit card for that store. One minute later, the man left the store with a full refund on his store credit card. What is so unusual about this story? The store was Nordstroms, and they do not sell tires. It is obvious that Nordstroms trusts its customers, and they have built a faithful clientele based upon that trust.

Trust is also key in office environments. If you are a manager or supervisor over employees, do you trust your employees to make the right business decisions? If you do not trust them, how can you expect them to trust you? If you do not trust them to exercise proper business decision-making regarding expenses while on a trip for the company, do you honestly feel that they will trust you to make the right decisions regarding their professional advancement? You need to be the first to extend the hand of trust; it will be rewarded with a trusting response.

## Runner Up – Again!

*Autumn* was settling in at George Washington High School; more so, in fact, than some of the seniors who were focused only on graduation, still some eight months away. But there were many activities – as well as classes and tests – that would occur before that culmination ceremony in May.

Most of the seniors had registered for their college entrance examinations; a few had already sent in an “Early Admissions” application for the school of their choice. The football team was off to an optimistic start; they would not win the conference championship, but at least it would be a respectable season for them. The girls’ volleyball team, anchored with the 6’3” returning junior, was a cinch to be a contender for the state title again this year. The yearbook staff was already taking orders for the “Memories of your Washington Years,” even though the book would not be published until early Spring. The school year was in full swing, and it was going to be a good year.



The notice on the hallway walls said, “Senior Class Play tryouts – Wednesday and Thursday after school.” No mention was made of the name of the play; it was being kept a secret until the cast was chosen. But the rumor was that it would be a Shakespeare play. That rumor was strengthened when the auditions were done with readings from “Macbeth” and “The Taming of the Shrew.” Mr. Coutant, the crusty silver-haired drama teacher, seemed to concentrate his search for both a male lead and a female lead. Susie read her lines impeccably; she had a beautiful speaking voice that could easily transition into opera singing. Katie stumbled on a few lines, but overall she did an acceptable job of sight-reading. Felicia’s slight accent did seem a little out of place in the context of these readings, but her presence was very self-assuring. Mr. Coutant thanked these three, and all the other young ladies who tried out for the female parts. There were no particular standouts in the male readings.

“The selected cast,” Mr. Coutant started with his dramatically slow introduction, “will be posted outside my office door a week from tomorrow. At that time, I will, of course, announce the name of the play. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen; I bid you a good day.” Donning his brown beret, the worldly drama coach picked up his overstuffed satchel and headed out of the school theater.

“I don’t know why he has to take so long to make up his mind. Why does he need another week?” Chris said as he walked over to Susie. “Anyway, you’ve got the lead part. I mean, after how you knocked them dead last year in ‘Sound of Music,’ how could he not give it to you?”

“Thanks, Chris,” Susie said, as she gave her boyfriend a big hug. Kissing was prohibited on school grounds, and these two seniors had been already been caught more than once. They knew the consequences, and they did not want to endure them again. “How’s the campaign for Homecoming King? Are you a lock yet?”

“It’s hard to tell. This new kid Randy seems to be winning over a lot of the girls with his new looks and his fakey smile.” Where did he move here from, anyway?” Chris seemed a little annoyed that he was actually facing some serious competition. He seemed like a sure winner until the new kid from Dallas transferred in a month before their junior year ended.

*“I hear his family moved here from Dallas; made their money in oil and cattle. Some of the girls I’ve talked to really like his slow southern drawl.”*

*“They may like his slow talking, but I’m the starting quarterback, and he’s not even on the football team’s first string.” Chris’s cockiness was starting to show. “And, besides, nobody else is going to dance with my special queen.” He smiled his confident smile, and gave Susie a quick peck on the cheek. “I’ve gotta go meet with the guys. I’ll call you later tonight.” Chris turned, and then headed toward the back stage exit door.*

*Just as Chris was leaving, Katie was walking toward Susie. “Hey, Susie. You did a wonderful job in there. You’re going to get the lead part. I just wish he wouldn’t keep the play a secret from us.” Katie was a sincere friend; she truly meant what she said to Susie. “Do you have any idea what it is?”*

*“No idea,” Susie replied. “Old Mr. Coutant has either performed in, or put on, everything Shakespeare ever wrote. I know he wanted this year’s play to be really special.”*

*“In that case,” Katie started, “it is even more natural that you will have the leading role. I just hope I get any part. It will be such fun being in another play with you. Well, I’ve got to go study. I’ll see you tomorrow.”*

*“Yea. Bye, Katie.”*

*Friday night’s football game was a blowout over the weakest school in the league. Chris set several school records in the 73-14 rout. He threw seven touchdown passes, and he ran for one also. He was definitely the MVP of the game, and the timing could not have been better as far as he was concerned. The last day for voting for Homecoming King and Queen was next Wednesday. His strong showing should secure the title for him. Randy from Dallas played in the fourth quarter once the lead was out of reach, and his name was called on the PA system only three times. Randy was certainly no competition for Chris.*

*Chris and Susie stood outside Mr. Coutant’s door, arm in arm, as about thirty students awaited the results of the senior play tryouts. His door opened, and Mr. Coutant stepped into the hall and nonchalantly tacked a single sheet of paper on his corkboard. The paper started with “This year, the senior class will present a special rendition of William Shakespeare’s ‘Romeo and Juliet.’ Rather than presenting this masterpiece in the normal dull fashion, this year’s play will be done in a special interpretive manner.”*

*Susie and Chris skipped over the rest of the monologue, and looked for Susie’s name. It was there, but it was way down the list. As they scanned back up, they saw “Juliet, played by Felicia . . .” Susie shrieked. “That’s not fair. She can’t even talk properly. I am the best; that lead role is supposed to be mine.” Susie was unaware of the looks she was getting from the other seniors, but at this point she did not care.*

*Just then, the hallway speakers crackled. “Attention, students. We have just finished tabulating the results for this year’s Homecoming King and Queen. In a very close contest, Randy has been selected as King, and . . .” No one heard who was chosen as Queen because Chris was yelling at the top of his lungs. “What kind of idiots voted for that two-bit cowboy? I’m the star of the football team, and I should be Homecoming King!”*

*Most of the students started to walk away, distancing themselves from the two spoiled brats who were just de-throned. The other students were saying things like, “What’s with those two?” or “Gee, the stud didn’t win for a change,” or, sarcastically, “What a shame.”*

*As most of the students had left the gathering, one could hear Chris mutter, “It’s not fair. I should have won.”*

**Moral: Life is NOT fair. Get over it, and get used to it.**



Are you old enough to remember the 1970’s song that started with the words, “I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden”? I have to admit that it wasn’t one of my favorite songs back then, but I do like those words. I am sure that at some point I told my children that I would never write about them, but you also know that saying, “Never say never.”

I could not even come close to counting up the times that my wife and I heard one, or both, of our children say, “That’s not fair!” For you parents of younger children, I wish I could tell you that it is an early stage that is quickly outgrown. Sorry, but it isn’t. We would hear this dreaded phrase as a reply to many situations: she [sister] can go somewhere, but he [brother] is not given permission – “Not fair”; not allowed to go to see a certain movie – “Not fair”; clean your room before going to the shopping mall – “Not fair”; no homework, no driving – “Not fair.” I think you get the idea by now. Just about anything that was not a popular request by us was met with the standard defensive response – “Not fair.”

While many of us believe that this response is limited to children, or maybe even young adults, unfortunately that is not always true. College students, professional workers, and even senior citizens – they all have a way of reacting in a “Not fair” manner. I will admit that there are many things in this life that are not fair. But that is just the way life is, and there is absolutely nothing that we mere mortals can do about it.

My father was a career US Navy man. He served in Europe, Asia and the South Pacific in World War II; and he served in Korea during the Korean Conflict. He served his country well and admirably, retiring after 24 years’ of dedicated service. Two years’ later, he was killed by a drunk driver on a pleasant Sunday afternoon just five miles outside town. I was only sixteen at the time, and that was to be our summer to spend time together. That was not fair to me, to my mother, to my brothers, to all of my close and extended family; and certainly not to my father. But there was/is absolutely nothing that I can do about it; he is dead. I have tried to live my life as admirably as he did, but I know I have fallen short many times. The point is this: My father was dead; I had to get over the fact that it was not fair, and I just had to get on with life.

Have you ever applied for a position within your company, and you knew that you were the most qualified applicant? Everyone you talked to (and you were not going to talk to your competition) told you that it was “all but guaranteed” that you would get the job. You had the experience that was requested; you had previously worked with that team; you had the technical undergraduate degree, as well as the advanced business degree – how could they not offer you the job? And when they offer you the job, the hiring manager should probably even thank you for applying and bringing the best possible talent (you) to the team. And then the phone call comes. It is from the hiring manager, and you are told that someone else got the position for this reason or for that reason. What is your instinctive reaction? “That’s not fair! I was better qualified than him [or her]. How stupid can that manager be to not hire me? I had the education

and the previous experience that they said was critical for the job?” You might be right; it is not fair; but that was their decision. Now, get over it, get used to it, and get back to your own job.

How many common stocks have you purchased in the last five years? If you did all the “proper” research, made sure you balanced the risk levels, beta factors, etc., in your portfolios – then you were probably making a sound decision to purchase the common equity of a public company. And then what happens? With your luck (or at least with mine at times), that very same company that looked so solid reports some accounting irregularities and the stock price plunges. You, along with many other investors, scream, “That’s not fair! The company should not have hid those problems from us.” So, what can you do? You might be able to file a lawsuit, but that just costs you more money, time, and frustration. The best thing to do is just accept it as one more of life’s tough lessons. Get over it, and get used to it; buying stock in any company has some elements of risk. You are not going to be able to control or manage all of them. Is that fair? No, but that’s still the way it is.

Enough of the examples. Now that you know that life is not fair, what are you going to do about it? You have probably just done it. The first step is to acknowledge that life is not fair, and the second step is to admit that so much of life’s happenings (or happenstances) are out of your control. Because they are out of your control, the best you can do is to pull some learning out of them, and then to get on with your life. How do you do that? If the thing that is not fair is a tragic event (for example, the death of a relative or a close friend), use that tragedy as a reason to focus on the wonderful memories you have. My son, who is named after my father, reveres my father even though he never met him – my wife never met him, either. As hard as it is to say and to accept, I have probably incorporated more of my father’s philosophies and actions because of his tragic death than I might have were he still alive today. Do I wish he were still alive? Of course!

If what is not fair is that you were not selected for a promotion, but someone else was – what is your first reaction? Prior to reading this book, your reaction would have been, “That’s not fair! I am more qualified than he (or she) is.” What I want you to do now – if that happens to you – are the following three things: (1) Congratulate the person who received the promotion. Tell him/her how deserved it was, and that you are truly happy for him/her. (2) Talk to the hiring manager and ask for one or two differentiators that elevated the selected candidate. (3) Put together a plan on what you are going to do about it. What do you need to do to be selected if a similar position opens up? Is that position what you really want? Are there advantages to staying in your current position?

I was faced with doing this exact thing a while ago. I applied for a [promotional] position in a dynamic technology in our company. I was one of the two finalists; the other finalist was a person with whom I had worked a few years previously – let’s call him Jim. I had clearly done the role of this position, while Jim had not. I put together an awesome action plan; I do not know if Jim had shown one or not. All the “insiders” said I was a shoe-in over Jim. Do you think I was surprised when the phone call I received from the hiring manager was to say that “another person got the job”? My internal reaction, of course, was to consider calling them idiots, etc. After a week of thinking through it, I concluded that I was actually better off where I was – I can write; I can teach; I can spend time with my family. I am glad they picked Jim!

Life seemed not fair to me back then, but I am fine with it now.

## Stan and His Shiny Spots

*Nobody really knows how Stan got his name. After all, ferocious animals are usually referred to with more awe and reverence. But not Stan; he was a little different. While he still belonged to one of the most feared families in the jungle, Stan did not feel like all the other leopards. For one thing, his spots were not dark and bold like the other leopards'; his were pale and shiny. And for another thing, Stan was a vegetarian; he ate leaves and branches instead of other animals. Stan was okay with all of this; after all, it was not his fault that a mild-mannered animal like himself was born into a leopard family.*

*For as long as Stan could remember, he ate plants instead of meat. When his mother was trying to teach him to eat as a young cub, she tried to force him to eat meat; but he refused the meat and would nibble on leaves. His mother continued trying to teach him to eat meat, but she finally gave up. "That boy is going to starve himself. No self-respecting leopard eats leaves. I just don't know what I can do about that boy." She just knew that Stan would never survive in the jungle.*

*It came time for Stan and his siblings to leave the comfort and safety of the family den, and so it was early Spring when they wandered off to make a home of their own. The siblings would stay together as a group for one more year. After that year, they would separate as they sought mates and a place to live on their own.*

*After that year together as siblings, Stan headed South to find a mate and a new home. He went South because the vegetation was more lush than in the North. He encountered several available female leopards, but they laughed at his shiny spots. As he passed by, Stan heard one of them say, "Look at him. Those shiny spots do not indicate a strong man to me. And I even saw him eating leaves. What kind of a leopard is that?" The other females laughed as Stan continued on his way. He had been laughed at before, so this did not bother him very much.*

*One morning while he was eating some tasty green leaves that were covered with the morning dew, Stan gazed upon a young female leopard who was also enjoying the luscious leaves. Stan smiled at her, and she smiled back at Stan. It was love at first sight for these two. Her name was Sheila, and she was a delightful young lady.*

*Stan and Sheila found a den that was suitable to them, and they began their lives together starting with that day. They were never out of each other's sight. They took morning walks together, usually down by the stream, where they found some special berries to eat. In the afternoon, they would take a nap together either under a shady tree or inside their den if it was a hot day. At night, of course, they slept together curled up tightly against each other. They wanted to have a family, but they knew they should wait at least one more year.*

*One of the many things that Sheila loved about Stan was his warm and gentle ways with all the other animals. Because he was a vegetarian (and so was Sheila), the other animals soon learned that they did not have to fear Stan. Stan was not going to kill a slower animal so he could eat; Stan ate leaves and branches and berries – not other animals. Their area of the jungle became a peaceful place for all of the animals. More and more animals came to live in that area – birds who would sing all day; monkeys who swung through the trees with delight; and scores of other animals who lived together in peace and harmony.*

*An occasional lion would roam through their area looking for food. The birds and the monkeys, acting as lookouts, would let all the other animals know of the impending danger. The emergency routes were well rehearsed, so all of the animals knew where to go for a safe hiding place. Stan and Sheila always went to their den; its entrance was well hidden. No animal had ever been killed from the prowling prey.*

*One afternoon, however, while all the animals were enjoying a peaceful nap, a young male lion wandered into their area looking for food. None of the lookout monkeys and birds saw this young lion enter their area, and so panic set in when he growled and started after one of the younger animals. The lion's growl woke Stan and Sheila from their naps. Stan immediately ran toward the noise, fearing that danger had invaded their sanctity.*

*"Where are you going, Stan?" Sheila asked.*

*"I am going to find out what danger has come upon us." Stan replied*

*"But you are not a fighter, Stan. You will get hurt." Sheila was pleading with her mate to remain in the safety of their hidden den.*

*"I may not be much of a fighter, Sheila, but I am definitely not a man if I cannot protect those around me." Stan knew he had to do something. He kissed Sheila, and asked her to stay there in the den. "I love you," he said as he walked toward the opening, and then began to run to the source of the danger.*

*"I love you, too," Sheila said as Stan took off, but he did not hear her.*

*Reaching the area where the lion was ready to pounce on a frightened member of their community, Stan attacked the lion with bared claws and sharp teeth. The young lion tried to put up a fight, but realized that he was no match for Stan, and he ran away as fast as he could. Stan chased the lion for a few minutes to make sure that he knew he was not welcome in their area. That lion would never come hunting for food in this part of the jungle ever again.*

*As Stan walked back to the central area, all the birds and monkeys and other animals greeted him with cheers of praise. Sheila was there with tears of joy in her eyes, for her man had returned safely. Sheila ran to Stan, and showered him with kisses of happiness and relief. "Stan, I am so happy you are back safely. I was so afraid that you would get hurt."*

*"Sheila," Stan started in reply. "I am sorry that I worried you. My spots are shiny, and I eat leaves instead of meat, but I am still a leopard. And a leopard protects his family and his friends against all dangers."*

**Moral: A rose is a rose is a rose, but a pig will always be a pig.**



I had this moral in mind long before I came up with the narrative story. As I think back on Aesop's fables, there is one whose moral is something like, "A leopard can never change its spots." What this means is that a leopard is still a leopard even if it does not have any spots (or if the spots are shiny and the leopard eats leaves, as in this story). A similar moral is that a wolf in sheep's clothing is still a wolf. Our story here has a happier ending; in this case, the leopard is a docile animal that utilizes its innate ferocity to chase off an enemy rather than to attack and eat other animals.

How does this apply to the moral about roses and pigs, you might ask. As the cartoon character Popeye occasionally says, “I am what I am.” Stan was a leopard first and foremost. When it was critical for him to act like most other leopards, he did. A rose is a rose no matter how many thorns on the branch protect the petals. When you smell the beautiful fragrance of the rose flower, you forget about how many times you have stuck yourself on that bush’s thorns.

I expect to hear from swine lovers because of this story. One of my nephews majored in animal husbandry at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and he even lived at the swine farm. He loved pigs, and knew lots of things about raising them and feeding them. But no matter how many times you bathe a pig, it is still a pig. It might be a clean pig, but it is still a pig.

Let’s see how we can apply the idea of roses and pigs in our twenty-first century lives.

Most people are good people – they are “roses” in the context of this story. This does not mean they are perfect; we know from our own experiences that people are not perfect, just good. This is something we should keep in mind when one of these “good people” does something that hurts us unintentionally. While our initial reaction might be that of anger or emotional hurt, we should first remember that that person is a “good person” – a rose. There must have been some external influence that caused that good person to have done something hurtful. Was he or she under extreme pressure at work or at home? Was there an instinctual reaction to protect himself or herself, or his or her children? Try to dig into the reason why that good person did what he or she did. I love the roses we have planted next to our fence, but those thorns really do hurt when I reach inside the bush. I have to remember each time I get poked that the rose is a rose is a rose, no matter how much those thorns hurt.

If you see someone you know who seems to be depressed, think of the cut rose that needs some water in its vase. The rose was beautiful before it was cut from the bush, but without water it will wilt away. Just like the rose, a person or a relationship can also begin to wilt if it does not receive nourishment. So if you see a “rose” that does not look like a rose, remember that it is a rose, and maybe it just needs some form of nourishment to return it to its “blooming rose” status.

I think we all have known people who would easily fit into the “pig” category. You know the type – “You can dress them up, but you can’t take them out.” The “pig” in this case is the exact opposite of the “rose” that we just talked about. The “pig” is someone who can wear nice clothes, appear to do and say the right things, but deep inside is not someone you want to be with. This person is a cheater, or a liar, or an adulterer, etc. This is the proverbial wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Well then, what do you do when you encounter this person? The key thing is to make sure you do not descend to his or her level. You can be civil to this person, but stay on your guard because he or she probably has some hidden motive behind the rose-like exterior. If you have ever been to a county fair, you have seen pigs that have been bathed, brushed, combed, and maybe even perfumed. That pig might be the prettiest pig you have ever seen. But as soon as the fair is over, that same bathed, brushed, combed and perfumed pig is going to be wallowing in the mud. Why? Because it is a pig, and a pig will always be a pig.

## The Rabbit and the Terrapin

*I changed the name of the story, but I know you will quickly recognize it once you read “The Hare and the Tortoise,” which is quoted with permission.*

*“A HARE one day ridiculed the short feet and slow pace of the Tortoise, who replied, laughing: ‘Though you be swift as the wind, I will beat you in a race.’ The Hare, believing her assertion to be simply impossible, assented to the proposal; and they agreed that the Fox should choose the course and fix the goal. On the day appointed for the race the two started together. The Tortoise never for a moment stopped, but went on with a slow but steady pace straight to the end of the course. The Hare, trusting to his native swiftness, cared little about the race, and laying down by the wayside, fell fast asleep. At last waking up, and moving as fast as he could, he saw the Tortoise had reached the goal, and was comfortably dozing after her fatigue.*

*“Slow but steady wins the race.”*

**Moral: Slow but steady wins the race.**



How much more succinct can one be but to quote the actual moral from Æsop’s Fables? How many ways have you heard this stated? “The race does not always go to the swiftest.” “Slowly but surely.” “Slow gains over the long haul are better than sharp gains that are gone quickly.” Most of the references we have heard are directed toward financial situations, but there are other areas where our moral also holds true.

We will start with some examples, both real and fictitious, from business. Do you remember the “dot com” madness of the late 1990s? It seemed that anyone with an idea, a marketing plan, and an internet web page could raise millions of dollars in equity. The company would then go public as *namethecompany.com*. The initial investors would become instant millionaires as greedy investors would bid the stock higher and higher in anticipation of themselves making a fortune. These new companies did not even have to have a real product. A few investors made money, but many of them lost it all as the bubble burst. These companies without a viable product would eventually collapse, wiping out hundreds of millions of dollars in paper equity. Many of the investors in these companies wanted to make their money quickly, eschewing the idea of having their portfolios grow “slowly but surely.”

There are other examples of companies who did have real products, but who engaged in financial dealings and maneuverings in attempts to artificially enhance their growth and profits. While the big name companies in the headlines are not the only ones to have engaged in these activities, tens of thousands of employees and investors were severely damaged financially when Enron and WorldCom filed for bankruptcy in 2001. These were companies that just years’ earlier were considered top-rated A-1 companies. But the companies’ leaders, not content with the notion of “slow but steady wins the race,” engaged in numerous activities that, once made public, effected a total collapse. I am sure it will be many more years before the legal wranglings are put to rest.

So what does all of this have to do with an individual investor? In the late 1990s when stocks and indices were rising constantly, you could make money by buying just about any stock. My own equities portfolio experienced double-digit percentage growth year over year. Who cared

about research and analysis? There was no need to do any; it seemed that everything you bought went up. And up. But when the markets reversed course, I saw my portfolio suffer larger double-digit percentage losses for three years. The days of the quick big gains were over. It was now time for my new financial program theme: “Slow gains over the long haul are better than sharp gains that are gone quickly.” I still have some high-flyer stocks (that are actually very low flying stocks now), but they would actually cost me more to sell than what they are currently worth.

My mother has not seen this same level of decline in her net worth. She invests her money in Certificates of Deposit; and even though the interest rates have declined, she has made money while the equity markets have been declining. As a child reared in the Great Depression, she has never been comfortable with the stock markets. She had always employed the investment philosophy that “slow gains over the long haul are better than sharp gains that are gone quickly.” I am still invested in, and continue to make investments in, the equity markets, but I have adopted this “slower growth” strategy, which has enabled me to recoup some of my previous losses.

Applying the moral from “The Hare and the Tortoise” might not seem as obvious in non-financial situations, but it can still hold true. How many friends have you seen move from one company to the next in search of a job promotion? I have seen many people employ this method of moving up the career ladder. But when you look at the senior management profiles of most companies, the vast majority of those executives have been employed by the company for a long time. Yes, a few of them were hired in recently at that high level, but most of them worked their way up in the organization. Here again, we see the adage “Slowly but surely” have relevance. It might take a while to get that first promotion, and then that next one; but in the long run, it just might pay off more for you to “stick with it” at one company, rather than trying to “make it big” by moving to another.

## You Rang, Sire?

*Winthrop Aristotle Harrison IV made his celebrated entrance to the world on a sunny Monday morning in a private suite in the hospital's Harrison Maternity Wing. The outstanding birthing facility was built through a generous donation from the newest WAH's grandfather, the second Winthrop Aristotle Harrison.*

*There was nothing lacking during his three-day stay – the first three days of an opulent life. Not that a newborn would know if anything were lacking, anyway. Food, sleep, warmth – that is about all that newborns really need. The special birthing cloths were changed every hour. The cloths, made of the finest silk, were not cleaned – they were discarded. Only the newest and the absolute best were to be used for Winnie, as he would continue to be called as a youngster. The water used to clean him had to come from a freshly opened bottle of Evian. While in the hospital, his mother received a daily pedicure, manicure, and a massage. For all the special treatments being given, you would have thought this baby had been born into the most sovereign of royal families. While the Harrison family did not have any royalty in its blood lines, there certainly was a lot of money in the family. And in this area, money – especially lots of it – was much more sovereign than royalty.*

*As he was growing up, Winnie never lacked for anything. There was always at least one maid-servant and one man-servant at his complete beck and call twenty-four hours a day. He never put his toys away; there were servants for that. He went to a special kindergarten class where the teachers picked up after the five-year olds. He did eat well, even as a youngster. No Hamburger Helper or leftovers for him. The family's suite of French-trained chefs was always ready to prepare anything he wanted – anytime he wanted it. The chefs quickly learned that just because Winnie liked a particular meal one day, there was no guarantee that he would ever like it again.*

*Young Winnie grew into Winthrop, his name that would hold through his high school years. Speaking of his high school years, there was seldom an event held in which Winthrop was not “the selected one.” He was his Class President all three years; he was the Homecoming King; he was the lead actor in the class plays – the pattern was pretty strong. The Harrison name – and money – bought a lot of favors for Winthrop, even grades. He was not an excellent student, but he did graduate first in his class. Star athletes were not the only ones to receive preferred academic treatment. Most of his classmates did not object, because they (or their families) received some of the Harrison generosity in one form or another – employment, gifts, etc.*

*Following his graduation from high school, Winthrop Aristotle Harrison IV – as he now preferred to be called – attended some of the finest universities in the U.S. and abroad. The reason he attended so many is that it took his flunking out of several before he found one that would “help him along.” His family was surprised that there were actually some universities that valued academic integrity more than the Harrison money. Eventually, however, he did graduate from the university with a finance degree – he chose this field because he was set to inherit a significant amount of money when he reached age 35.*

*Winthrop (don't let him know that I did not use his full name) moved back home into the family mansion. All the maids and servants were still there, except the elderly servant who passed away a year ago. They still served him, although they had less tolerance now for his puerile antics and actions. Many of the hired help quietly expressed the opinion that they thought*

he would have “grown up” while he was away at college. Instead of growing up, he returned even more spoiled and more demanding.

*It was on a very cold winter day that Mr. Harrison – as the household staff referred to WAH III – died in a tragic airplane crash while he was on his way to a ski resort. The house was empty now except for Winthrop IV; Mrs. Harrison, his mother, had passed away from cancer a few years’ earlier. Even though he was now college-educated, Winthrop did not do much during the day. You might have thought that he would read articles on finance and investments, but he didn’t. He lounged around the house, or out by the pool, shouting orders to the staff. He was just biding his time until he inherited his fortune. Little did he know that the staff were also biding their time. Winthrop Aristotle Harrison IV was only one year away from turning 35.*

*That year went by quickly, and soon it was the day of his thirty-fifth birthday. The birthday party was the most lavish ever seen by any society columnist. Name a type of food, and it was there. Name an exotic beverage, and it was there. From the number of cases of wine, it appeared that an entire vineyard had been harvested just for this party. Movie stars, singers, politicians – they were all there. Of course, why wouldn’t they be there when they were being paid to attend the party and “have a good time.” There were staff assigned just to Winthrop; to pick up after him, to make sure he did not get sick, etc. He appeared to be having a good time – not that he would ever be able to remember any of the party. The party lasted all day and all night, with the last of the stragglers (those who had not fallen asleep somewhere on the property) leaving around 9:00 AM the next morning.*

*Winthrop was now 35, and the huge inheritance would now be his.*

*What Winthrop did not know was that, in addition to receiving his inheritance, he had to leave the family mansion because it was being given to a favorite charity of WAH III. The staff was provided for in a very generous manner – they were always treated very favorably by Mr. and Mrs. Harrison III.*

*When he was handed the “eviction notice” by the family attorney, Winthrop Aristotle Harrison IV began screaming and crying, “What am I going to do now? Where am I going to live? Who is going to take care of me?” The attorney just shook his head and muttered, “Poor rich kid; he just doesn’t have a clue.” And he didn’t.*

**Moral: Being born with a silver spoon in your mouth doesn’t teach you how to feed yourself.**



Please do not take me wrong – I have nothing against people who have a lot of money. I also do not have anything against people who do not have a lot of money. This is just a story that is used to make a point. The point is that you can have “everything,” and yet have “nothing.”

In this story, Winthrop had everything – the family name, the money, the ability to do anything he wanted. The problem is that he never did anything – he allowed others to do it for him; which means that he never learned how to do anything for himself. This, of course, easily allows a lecture that is actually not justified. So I will not give it.

Let’s start instead in looking at how this applies in our lives at work. We can certainly view this at the individual, or personal, level. Or, we can look at this on the bigger scale – the corporate entity. We haven’t had too many examples where we have looked at how these stories

apply to the actual company – they have mostly been at the individual or team levels at work, or they have applied to our situation at home.

The moral in this story does not apply verbatim to a company, per se; but there is a linkage that we can develop. The reason I say it does not apply verbatim to a company is that I do not know of any companies that have started Day One with their “silver spoon.” They may have had a promising future, such as Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard did when they started their company in that one-car garage in Palo Alto. But Bill and Dave certainly had no guarantees that their venture would be a success. When a young college student signed a contract to write a software package for a disk operating system, no one would have said that William Gates III had a “silver spoon” given to him! These men worked hard, and success eventually came to them.

Where a company can fall into trouble – what I might call the “Silver Spoon Syndrome” – is when it starts to believe that it has some special “right” to market share; to profit ratios; to some business aspect that everyone else has to work hard to achieve. I have heard this referred to in some companies as a “God-given right.” I am sorry; I believe in God, but I do not believe that anyone’s definition of God feels that a certain company has some special privilege to a business advantage that every other company has to work hard to attain. Or tell me – am I missing something here?

Here is what I mean about a company having a silver spoon and not knowing how to feed itself. Pick any company – or one business or organization within a company – that is really the epitome of that “type” of a business. The company is well-positioned to make a quantum leap to the next level of business success – it has the “technology,” the infrastructure, the capitalization. It has everything except for the knowledge and the ability (or possibly just the desire) to execute on the precise business plan necessary to capitalize on the situation. It had the silver spoon, but it did not know how to feed itself. That is what I mean. If the company knew what to do to capitalize on its market position, then it would be able to take advantage of the current situation – and possibly make its position even stronger and more formidable! Does that make sense? The tragedy here is that this company never had to struggle before – it had the “silver spoon” – and so it did not know how to react when a new situation arose (“could not feed itself”).

Now consider the other companies in the same field. They don’t have the natural (or gained) advantage that this other company has. It is, however, this distinct disadvantage that becomes a very strong advantage because these other companies know what it is like to work hard to gain market share, to gain brand recognition, to gain customer loyalty. It was never just given to them (they did not have the silver spoon), and so they had to work extremely hard to get it (they did know how to feed themselves).

This also applies to individuals in so many walks of life. How many times have you gone to, or watched, a sporting event because the “best in the game” was participating? There can be nothing more disappointing to a sports fan than to watch this highly talented person give only a 50% effort. Now, it might be that his 50% effort is still better than others’ 100% efforts, but that is not the point. The point is that the one with all the talent is taking his talent for granted (“silver spoon”) without utilizing his full potential. Think how much more he could do if he worked as hard as the lesser-talented players. He could probably set himself so far above all the competition that they would all be fighting for a second place position, granting first place to the super star.

Let’s don’t just assume it is “the other guy” who fits the description of the moral. What about ourselves? What about you? What about me? Is there something in our lives where we have a

“silver spoon,” but we do not know how to feed ourselves? I don’t just mean the people who are born into a family of tremendous wealth. I am talking about the numerous opportunities that each of us have been given – how many of those opportunities did we take advantage of, and how of them did we waste? I would be too embarrassed to keep score, and to report on it. I know that I have had so many opportunities to do things, and I have wasted them. These have ranged from educational opportunities, to friendships, to the chance to tell someone “I’m sorry” for something I had done. The “silver spoon” was there, and I did not know how to use it.

So what have I done about it, and what can you do about it? The first thing is to acknowledge that you cannot do everything that comes to you. The “other first thing” is to learn to recognize what a “silver spoon” is when it does arrive. There is no easy formula, or set of procedures, to do this. It just takes practice.

I recently had the opportunity to begin a professional affiliation with the University of Phoenix. I just happened to become aware of their need for additional instructors in mathematics. I seized upon the opportunity, and I “went for it” with 110% effort. I have always enjoyed teaching (teaching GMAT preparation courses, filling in for my mentor professor when he could not attend class, helping young students with math – they called me “Mr. Math Man”). So what was my “silver spoon”? I possessed a desired combination – a mathematics degree and an MBA, combined with the strong desire to teach adult learners, while maintaining my full-time job. I enjoy the teaching primarily as I see the students begin their understanding of how “it fits together,” and as they realize that math does not have to be scary.

What you do with your “silver spoon” is up to you. You can allow it to just set there and gather dust (or tarnish), or you can take it off the shelf and use it. Once you start to use it, I think you will be surprised how easy it was, and how many more opportunities you have just waiting for you.

## About the Author

Born in Southern California, Stuart Gustafson was raised in a military family. That means that the family moved just about every two years while he was young. This did allow him to enjoy many new experiences and friends during his formative years. He lived in places such as Santa Paula, CA (where he was born); Orange, TX; back to Santa Paula; Lakewood, CA; Guam, Marianas Islands; back to Lakewood, and El Centro, CA (where he graduated from high school). He received his undergraduate degree in Mathematics from San Diego State University, and he has his MBA from the University of San Diego.

Stuart's wide background of work experience started in the retail field in sales, management trainee program, and then into management, both at the department level for the JC Penney Company, and then at the store level for a local seafood retailer/wholesaler. He left the retail industry to apply his education in computer programming where he worked for Rohr Industries, CALMA (a CAD/CAM subsidiary of GE), and Xerox. He moved into program management at Xerox while getting his MBA. He tinkered with the idea of starting his own company (his MBA focus was entrepreneurship), but he opted instead to move to Boise, Idaho, to take a position with Hewlett-Packard Company. While there, his roles were in Software Quality, Marketing, and printing services. He recently retired from HP so he could spend more time with his 90-year old Mom, and to focus more time on writing.

Stuart has been on the faculty of the University of Phoenix, where he taught courses in mathematics and in finance. He has also taught mathematics at a small private academy in Boise, ID, where he shares teaching time with his daughter. Stuart is the chairman of his church Administrative Board, and he is also on the Board of Directors for United Cerebral Palsy-Idaho.

Besides work and writing, Stuart enjoys painting (primarily with acrylics), listening to music (classical or rock 'n roll), and traveling. He sings tenor in the church choir, and he has come to realize, much to his chagrin, that he will never be able to sing the tenor solos in Handel's "Messiah." Painting what appeals to him at the moment, he enjoys the creative outlet when the brush is in his hand.

Stuart has been married to Darlene Smith for thirty-three years. Darlene has her B.S. in Accounting from San Diego State University, and she especially enjoys being able to do volunteer work. Residing in Boise, Idaho, Stuart and Darlene have two children, a daughter and a son.

