In Search of Harmony: Becoming Your Own Hero at Work

Chapter 7

The Organization as a Garden

And God created the Organization and gave it dominion over man.

—Unknown

The season when to come, and when to go,
To sing, or cease to sing, we never know.
—Alexander Pope

While digging in the dirt of my life, I found many similarities between gardens and organizations. Many days, we work our way through little manure piles hoping that a tulip will come up in the middle of one. Bloom! Bloom! This metaphor certainly gives new meaning to "tiptoe through the tulips." My hope is that you now are at least more adept at understanding what it is you are tiptoeing through or stepping in. Don't feel too bad about the stuff on your shoe because that good rich soil is needed for optimal growth.

No one has enough interpersonal and organizational skills.

Is it coincidental that it all started in *The* Garden? The metaphor of the organization as a garden helps reframe work in a different light, with a different image and utility. Retreating to the garden is

an archetype of the American dream, to return to the Garden of Eden where there is no danger, no need, no suffering. But, there is no *growth* in the garden the Garden of Eden, either. Our goal is to create a conscious Eden whereby we may think about the organization as a place of growth and enlightenment instead of a place of death and oppression. This fundamental change of consciousness profoundly alters what we believe and do at work.

Increasing the chances of a bountiful harvest of tulip blossoms and becoming adept at tiptoeing through them requires a masterful application of good gardening principles.

The Garden	The Workplace
Appropriate soil is essential to growth.	You need similar personal/company values.
Always try to be outstanding in your field.	Follow your soul's destiny
You reap what you sow.	Law of the Hog, mutuality.
Deadheading makes plants branch out.	Healing journey makes heroes.
We've all got our own rows to hoe.	Know your bliss.
Some problems are perennial.	Chaos is normal.
Everything blooms in its season.	Change is not a choice.
You can't predict the harvest.	It's the environment!
You can always count on weeds.	You can't make organizations safe.
Some plants survive no matter what.	Your values carry you through.
You can only bloom where you're planted.	Answer the call, get on path.
You need room to grow.	Leadership is an art.
Tender plants need special care.	Vulnerability/kindness matter.
Harmony is difficult but worth the effort.	Forgive and move toward the middle.
Light is everything.	Love.

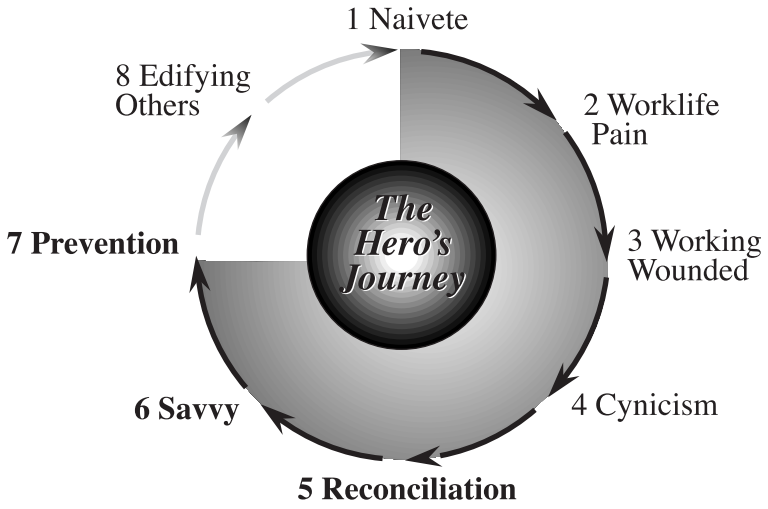
The difference between a plant and a fungus is light. Let the light in and you bear flowers instead of spores.

What if we could view ourselves approximating a Master Gardener's view of the Garden Scene? Seeing all of the gardeners from an infinite viewpoint, we would observe gardens at different levels of growth and care. All gardens and their masters are waxing and waning under positive and negative aspects of nature. For a select few, there are few weeds to pull; they have been good stewards, never letting the weeds go to seed only to come back stronger the next season. For a few

more, the garden is overgrown from neglect. Noxious weeds and painful thistles choke out tiny sprouts of beauty, leading one to believe there are no flowers in the garden at all.

For most, gardens are neither perfect nor horrible, but exhibit both brilliant beauty and abundant morning glory. Moving toward Master Gardener status, we till and toil our way through the seasons, sometimes feeling like victims, sometimes like heroes. There is always the threat of enmity in the garden; there are always new things to learn, more things to know to work our way to wisdom.

To complete the initiation stage of the hero's journey, we focus on developing interpersonal skills, learning career management strategies, practicing the spiritual quality of mercy, and developing resiliency strategies for managing stress and preventing despair. In so doing, we become wiser, more able to prevent adversity and abuse. We find more harmony.



The delicate art of blooming upside down must become second nature for us to become savvy and to avoid difficulty. Wise and savvy people are *unconsciously competent.* We learned in previous chapters *change is not a choice,* yet changing the way we interact with our co-workers is immensely challenging because our mental models or perspectives are not just something we *have* but something we *are.* We *are* our mental models. To every situation at work we bring the sum total of our life experience, a personal history of cherished beliefs and assumptions inextricably woven into the fabric of who we are.

Because "*the eye cannot see the eye"* and the very personal nature of the reconciliation process, these deeply ingrained assumptions are confronted best in a safe group setting where personal examination and experimentation are consistently and continually practiced. Getting to the *roots* of many of our problems at work is unlikely. What other antidotes may we use to deal with our problems? In addition to adjusting to constant demands for change in an environment that is prone to put a band-aid on a cancer, we come to terms with the principle that

Risk is not a choice, either.

Savvy workers force themselves out of their comfort zones, incrementally, bit by bit, gradually increasing confidence in an unending world of uncertainty. They stop living in the past, quit reliving painful disappointments and injuries, and *do something*, in spite of the fear of the unknown. They take the leap of faith required to get on and stay on the hero path. To do otherwise, they keep recycling through the same mistakes until they learn the lessons they need to learn. Eleanor Roosevelt said, "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face . . . . You must do the thing you cannot do."

"Doing the thing you cannot do" at work threatens us to our core because we put our livelihood on the line. If we fail, the consequences can be catastrophic because we are so dependent upon our jobs to feel secure. To become our own heroes, we leave the beaten track, take the road to creativity, and make living with the unknown a way of life.

Taking physical, intellectual, financial, and interpersonal risks is essential to survival at work. We are all soldiers now, and we've had no training for this new war. These risks require us to confront radical new information about our political systems, power dynamics, personal philosophies, technological innovation, and even our physical well-being at work. We need to question, observe, associate, and predict. We become divergent thinkers, fanning out in all directions to scan many relevant facts, then zero in on the details most likely to result in a correct and moral solution to the problem. Instead of being paralyzed by alternatives, we concentrate on small wins, having the courage to look fear in the face a minute longer. We do what we can do in small ways, increasing our ability to take risks a little at a time. As *savvy* workers we take risks often in areas where we can afford to lose a little; we seldom take risks when a failure would be catastrophic—unless the soul is on the line. Then we must always take risks.

Taking risks involves believing the impossible. In *Through the Looking Glass,* Alice lamented, "There's no use trying . . . One *can't* believe impossible things." To which the Queen replied, "I daresay you haven't had much practice . . . When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

What keeps you from believing the impossible? Is it

- Fear of failure?
- Catastrophic thinking?
- Need for attachment and support?
- Lack of trust?
- A preoccupation with order and tradition?
- Overspecialization?
- Dependence upon external rewards versus internal satisfaction?
- Lack of understanding or power to influence others?
- Perfectionism?

Fear of failure. None of us like to fail. And the more we fail, the more we don't like it. Also, the older we get, the more we want security. In *Self-Renewal,* John Gardener said,

> By middle age most of us carry in our head a tremendous catalogue of things we have no intention of trying again because we tried them once and failed . . . We pay a heavy price for our fear of failure. It is a powerful obstacle to growth. It assures the progressive narrowing of the personality and prevents exploration and experimentation. There is no learning without some difficulty and fumbling. If you want to keep on learning, you must keep on risking failure—all your life. It's as simple as that.[1]

Catastrophic thinking. Believing that the worst that *can* happen *will* happen is a handy weapon of self-deception, ever-present to blow good ideas, career opportunities, potential relationships, and personal peace out of the water. Some of these beliefs about human behavior are brought about through incessant navel-gazing, spending an inordinate amount of time playing "ain't it awful". We rarely seem to move past this stage whereby we focus instead on the *benefits* derived from things gone wrong. To become our own heroes, learning to focus on the *value added* makes the cycle complete. Indulging in negative fantasies justifies our lack of courage to behave morally, sensibly, and creatively. We continue to view ourselves as victims, trapped by our own fear to try something different or to move outside our comfort zone.

What if we assume that the *best* can also happen? Instead, what if we force ourselves into a new realm of compassion instead of enmity? We retrain our habitual focus upon the *light* instead of the *darkness*. What do we have to lose? I am not suggesting that we stick our heads in the sand in the midst of truly evil circumstances. It is important to recognize and be repulsed by evil—to get away from it as quickly and completely as possible. We should get away from evil because it is dangerous. Most of us simply do not understand evil well enough to deal with it very effectively. But, since we now cannot get away from the evils brought into our lives by terrorist acts and unexpected corporate betrayal, escaping evil must be replaced with *transcending* evil. We learn to *prevail* in spite of it.

Need for attachment and support. When we peel away the layers of the facade of our true selves, we are all so very much alike. We long for love. We avoid risks because (1) we have an inborn *need for attachment* and support from those we trust, and (2) we fear that our support will be withdrawn through some violation of that trust. Taking risks threatens our basic need to *belong*, to be *accepted*, to be *validated*. For even the most apparently unfeeling, each of knows the pain and turmoil of losing our jobs, losing treasured relationships, and especially losing our dreams. We have an inborn fear of separation and will do almost anything to maintain an attachment to the people and things we care about. Professor Jerry Harvey writes that it was this desire for attachment that led Adolph Eichmann to carry out orders with which he might not have agreed. In examining Eichmann's life, Harvey believes that Eichmann, like many of us, was terrified by loneliness and perhaps followed in blind obedience to maintain the support of his colleagues. [2]

Without exception, in every organization in which I have worked or consulted, this need for attachment and fear of separation is a primary motive for a betrayal of personal integrity. Remember Tolstoy's observation:

In hard times, people act unlike themselves.

In adversity we discover personal attributes—both positive and negative—not seen before. The caution is to beware of excusing the use of totalitarian behavior with the justification "Special circumstances require extraordinary measures."

Lack of trust. People need to feel *reasonably* safe to take risks. They must believe implicitly that someone is cooperatively motivated to their good. Nothing dries up creative action more than low trust. Instinctively, we all know that. Most of us just will not risk much of anything when we are too concerned about protecting ourselves from hurt. The sad part about trust is that once it is betrayed it is very difficult to rebuild. This is why it is so important never to betray trust. Trust is one of the highest forms of human motivation. Few other things are more significant as predictors of satisfaction at work. Ironically, despite overwhelming evidence of fear and uncertainty experienced within organizations, we know very little about the bases of trust, how to break the cycle of distrust and fear, nor do we understand the personal power developed by being trustworthy. (More about developing trust will be discussed later in this chapter.)

A preoccupation with order and tradition. Long-established or inherited ways of thinking or acting promote the notion that there is "one best way" of doing things. Technology changes so rapidly that this mind set is suicide for today's workers. People who get ahead will be innovators, comfortable with the responsibility to challenge the traditions of the past. *A Creative mess is better than tidy idleness.* Yet, many firms try to quash any semblance of anything new from their employees because of a preoccupation with order and tradition. Behaving as if there is one right way stifles the childlike qualities we need to be open to new ideas. Research shows that by the age of five, 90 percent of the children measure "high creativity." By the age of seven, the figure dropped to 10 percent, and by adulthood it is only 2 percent![3]

Russell's Story

Graduating with a masters degree in electrical engineering with 4.0 grade point average, Russell was highly sought after because of his outstanding performance. Even though his profession often demanded long hours on the job, he felt he could obtain a job where he could also have time for his family. In his interviews, he explained his wishes with his prospective employers.

Russell joined a top-ranked engineering consulting group. All of the engineers had masters' or Ph.D degrees. From the beginning, the company exerted extreme pressure on him to work overtime, despite serious personal health problems which occurred unexpectedly for him and his family. The firm's insensitivity to his problems was discouraging as they continued to pressure him into working nights and weekends.

But, the greatest blow was to his ability to do leading edge work, to use the knowledge which he worked so hard to obtain. After working months on an important project, one of the principals verbally destroyed his report, severely criticizing his style and content. When Russell attempted to explain his rationale, he was told, "Be quiet. Do not challenge us. We have always done things this way here. Your job is to be obedient, to do what we say without discussion."

This brilliant, promising employee had joined a white-collar sweatshop. Management's preoccupation with standard operating procedures (many of them obsolete and outdated), obedience to authority, and the traditions of the past crushed his pride. Stripped of his motivation and creativity, he joined the ranks of the walking wounded. Ironically, the company promoted themselves as the leaders in the industry.

Overspecialization. While pursuing a special line of work or discipline can be helpful in times of growth and high job mobility, downsizing and restructuring trends increase the probability of having to take a job in another field or discipline. Overspecialized employees often lack the flexibility to try something new or different when the need arises. When you know only one thing or your knowledge base is narrow, it is easy to be opted out of opportunities that meet the changing demands of the company. If you choose a highly specialized field of work, it is important to choose one where the demand is high now as well as in the future. Then it's an advantage. You must also be willing to go where the job is.

Any job is only as good as the job in your back pocket.

Cultivating a broad-based generalist orientation and a mind set to keep personal options open can enhance personal confidence, employment viability, and the freedom to dare to try something different when the need arises. Because in the workplaces of this century, the need will surely arise.

Dependence upon external rewards versus internal satisfaction. If money were no object would you be doing what you are doing in your job today? Being overly dependent upon external gratification, such as fame, power, and success (often defined by others), keeps us slaves to jobs we hate and situations that are life-taking instead of life-giving. We are rendered masters of the status quo, unable to move out of our comfort zone to more risky and perhaps more fulfilling opportunities for fear of losing the gods we have created for ourselves. When we truly live and work from that which satisfies within, we are free men and women, open to follow the hero within, wherever the journey takes us.

Lack of understanding or power to influence others. Despite the volumes written about power and influence, it is naive to believe we have all the skills we need to do well at work. Believing otherwise is a set-up for failure. Continual focus upon improving skills is critical to survival. For

this reason, much of the remainder of this book deals with these issues. But, in the context of risk-taking, three points are extremely helpful:

1. *Refine the art of proposal making.* The world is waiting for someone to gather data about a problem, analyze the findings, and find several alternative solutions to the problem. Choose one you think will work and make a proposal for action to someone who has an interest in solving the problem. People *love* it when someone takes the initiative and gives them something to react to.

2. *Go for small wins.* Propose a test of the idea in a small part of the company or unit where a failure would not create a catastrophe. Engineer success of the pilot project by paying extreme (I don't mean fanatical) attention to every detail. Promote your success to people who have an interest in the problem on a larger scale. Make room for them on the bandwagon of success. Share the credit, give them the limelight, let them champion the project to those above them who have an interest in seeing the problem solved on a larger scale. Get the idea? You must be willing to let other people toot their own horn. Ego kills more good ideas than almost anything else. So does inappropriately tooting your own horn.

One more time: *an important key to power and influence is humility.*

I'm reminded of an important lesson learned about the value of humility. I made a proposal to a top executive of a fast-growing entrepreneurial software company to consult with them about some of the consequences of their rapid growth. In assertiveness training, I had been taught not be afraid to speak up, to toot my own horn, to paint pretty pictures of my unique talents and abilities. Having a great deal of "survivors pride" about what I had accomplished thus far, I recounted my virtues using the word "expert" in describing my knowledge, experience, and commitment to help the company solve their problems. I felt the executive recoil at the word, stating, "I don't believe you should use that word here in our company. It's O.K. for someone else to call you an expert, but, you should never call yourself one." My face flushed with embarrassment, confused about this little rock in the road that was fast becoming a boulder. In the words of Francis Bacon, "The less people speak of their greatness, the more others think of it." Margaret Thatcher echoes the point: "Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't."

3. *Admit mistakes and apologize; reveal what we conceal.* I can think of nothing that reconciles relationships more quickly and completely than telling the truth. We are starved for the truth in the workplace, perhaps because we see and hear so little of it. We are so adept at defensive

routines that hide problems instead of solving them that they eventually wreak personal and organizational havoc. These defensive tactics become so standardized that people at all levels of the organization cannot tolerate straight talk.

To illustrate this point, Harvard Professor Chris Argyris recommends an exercise to increase personal awareness of our "skilled incompetence"—an exercise by which we may learn to recognize the difference between what we reveal and what we hide from others. Using the example below,

1. In one paragraph describe a key problem as you see it.
2. In addressing the problem, assume you could talk to whoever you wish. Describe, in a paragraph or so, the strategy you would use in this meeting.
3. Next, split your page into two columns. On the right-hand side, write how you would begin the meeting: what you would actually *say*. Then write what you believe the other(s) would say. Then write your response to their response. Continue writing this scenario for two or so double-spaced typewritten pages.
4. In the left-hand column write any of your ideas or feelings that you would *not* communicate for whatever reason.[4]

Write your problem here:

What you would think, but *not* say	**What you would say**

Left-hand column responses are usually loaded with blame. Until we can create a climate in which people will share what they are withholding in their left-hand hidden columns, real problems cannot be solved. Imagine this concealment as little "thought bubbles" over our own or our co-workers' heads, rich with truth that will set us free but keep us bound up in confusion and uncertainty. The "great skill of knowing how to conceal one's skill" precludes the honest dialogue essential to our welfare and success. Accepting personal responsibility for a problem quickly takes the wind out of indignation by touching the fine chords of our own human *frailty.*

Jerry Harvey reminds us of the apocryphal story of a Japan Air Lines pilot who landed his DC-8 jet—with ninety-six passengers and eleven crew member aboard—two and a half miles out in the San Francisco Bay! He landed it so well there was only minor structural damage to the plane and all the passengers were rescued without incident. Shortly afterward, the National Transportation Safety Board, airline executives, and national media converged to assign blame for the mishap. Everyone was loaded for bear, except the pilot, Captain Asoh, who seemed unaffected by the incident. Harvey completes the story:

> Captain Asoh was the hearing's first witness. The eyes and ears of the world were focused upon him—including those of private citizens, angry passengers, representatives of pilots association, lawyers, newspaper reporters, and representatives of a variety of governments and all persons present leaned forward and braced for the conflagration that it seemed would inevitably follow. Asoh took the stand, and—as the story goes—the investigator in charge opened the hearing with the penetrating question: "Captain Asoh, in your own words, can you tell us how you managed to land that DC-8 Stretch Jet two and a half miles out in San Francisco Bay in perfect compass line with the runway?"
>
> Asoh's reply was, "As you Americans say, Asoh [expletive deleted]up!"
>
> According to the story recounted by my pilot friend, with those words, the hearing was concluded. All had been said that could be said, and nothing more of consequence could be added. Only "details" remained to be clarified. [5]

Asoh's humorous, candid response to an obviously absurd situation is a truly elegant (though crude) reminder not to take ourselves so seriously that we fail to seize the opportunity to be forthright with those with whom we work. Contrary to popular belief that organizational forgiveness is not possible, the National Transportation Safety Board and Japan Air Lines assured Harvey that Captain Asoh continued to fly until his retirement.

Perfectionism. I'm not one who believes perfectionism is a dirty word, although it is often used as veiled resentment toward people who have high standards. (Next time someone calls you a perfectionist, reply, "You bet!") The notion of craftsmanship is slowly disappearing from our repertoire of descriptors for excellence and also for feeling healthy, acceptable pride in our accomplishments. Most often the term "perfectionist" means that the element of caring for self or others is not balanced with the task at hand. In other words, the "craftsman" is acting unkindly to herself or others.

Workers who have high standards will often avoid taking risks because of the natural tendency to push themselves or others too hard or in an unseemly manner. (Fear of failure also plays a large part.) Creative, productive work demands intense efforts that can easily pull us over the edge of charitable behavior. The test is not to lower our standards of craftsmanship, but to increase our ability to be kind and patient with ourselves and others who make mistakes along the way. The challenge is to recognize when our personal pride and haughtiness makes perfectionism a dirty word. Good people who have been burned by this a few times often give up, refusing to take the risk of involvement in excellence. Once again, our own pride keeps us from the hero path, the path of adventure which leads us to victory instead of victimhood at work.

In *Kitchen Table Wisdom,* Rachael Remens recounts another example of perfectionism gone amok. The story illustrates how letting others see our vulnerability draws others out to be their best.

> A successful, attractive woman spent a great deal of time on her appearance to the point that no one ever saw her without her makeup and without being beautifully coiffed. This included her husband. For many years, she arose early every morning to put her face on, fix her hair, and get dressed before her husband opened his eyes. After her husband's death, she met a man whom she loved and wished to marry, but complained there was no chemistry in the relationship. In fact, he would not even kiss her without permission. She described him as "perfect" in every other way.
>
> On one occasion just prior to their marriage, her fiance invited her to a party to meet many of his professional associates. She wanted to look just perfect for this important event and went shopping at one of San Francisco's finest department stores to buy her ensemble. She found the perfect fuchsia dress and decided to wear the dress to another floor to select a matching pair of shoes, leaving her purse and other clothing in the dressing room. She found the perfect color of shoes, and suddenly the earth literally began to move beneath her feet. The building shook violently, the lights went out, and she and a sales clerk carefully inched their way down the darkened stairway into the street below. The city was in chaos, broken glass everywhere. Here she stood, decked out to the nines in four-inch stilettoes with no money and the phone lines dead. Never having been the type of person to ever ask for help, she wasn't going to start now.

> The woman started walking toward home in her spike heels, walking more than eight hours until she reached her home. Standing in her bloody bare feet, hair a mess, sweating and exhausted, she realized she had no keys and knocked on her own front door. Her fiance opened the door, saw her standing there, grabbed her without a word and started kissing her tearstained dirty face. He made passionate love to her right there on the floor. Shocked and amazed by this new side of him never shown before, she asked for an explanation. He replied, "I was always afraid of smearing your lipstick."

Dr. Remen concludes, "It is hard to trust someone with your vulnerability unless you can see in them a matching vulnerability and know that you will not be judged. In some basic way it is our imperfections and even our pain that draws others close to us."[6]

We don't need to worry about knowing everything to be an effective employee. Admitting the limits of our rationality and skills—admitting that we often cannot see what we need and want to see, or do what we need and want to do takes the pressure of perfectionism to a different realm. We all have blind spots or weaknesses that could use a little tune up.

My Mama had the most useful saying, "Gag at a gnat and swallow a camel!" Translation: It is ironic that we spend an inordinate amount of time on things of little consequence and too little on the things of real importance. Oh, how we strive to figure each other out! The debate about why people do the things they do runs the gamut of our rationality and patience. Our compulsion to *analyze* others (often in order to control them) instead of to *serve* them takes us down dark and shady lanes that often run in circles.

One theory says to understand why people do the things they do we must understand the critical events in our childhood: to improve our interpersonal abilities, we must *understand the past.* Others argue that we do what we do because of conditioning—thinking doesn't matter so much— to improve our interpersonal relationships we must *reward positive behavior and punish negative behavior.* Another theory of motivation says in order to improve we must be clear about our values: *values move us to action.* Others believe our motivation is largely determined by our *genes.* As Miss Janie, my elementary school principal, used to say, "You just can't change a tabby cat into a black cat."

The truth of the matter is there is relevance in all of these theories. We *glean* from these and other beliefs and assumptions, building our skills precept upon precept in an ongoing process. We do not attach our lives to any one of them as absolute. What we do attach ourselves to is a fundamental principle of interpersonal effectiveness—*where* to begin our focus and work.

Work on self first, relationship second.[7]

The first rule of interpersonal problem-solving is self-inquiry. Self-inquiry means taking a step back to objectively assess our attitudes and actions. We work on ourselves first, not to conjure up inordinate shame about our inadequacies, but to take *appropriate* responsibility, to first forgive *ourselves*, to make course corrections, and repair the damage to the relationship. The best that we can do *is* good enough. Grace fills in the deficits. When others see that we are willing to look inward first, the adversarial dynamic automatically changes. Specifically, ask:

- In what way am helping to create the problems?
- Am I saying it is somebody else's fault?
- What changes could I make to help in this difficult situation?
- Am I demanding that everyone else make changes instead?
- Am I saying, "They just don't understand or they would agree with me?"
- How often do I say, "I need to be more patient, kind, caring." How often do I say, "Just deal with it—if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen?"
- How are my emotions and attitudes affecting those around me? Do I often deliberately alter my mood because someone else needs me to?

No matter how much we like to dance, the only feet we have control over are our own. Until we can at least get this one thing deep inside ourselves, the blame game will continue to be a national pastime.When we blame others, they blame us back; both sides use blame as a justification for continued mistreatment, which tends to escalate over time. In the meantime soft hearts become hardened and hardly capable of deep feeling. Sound attractive?

The antidote is personal accountability and reconciliation. So, get the biggest magnifying glass of courage you can muster and let's go to work cleansing the lens of our perception. Develop the habit of asking, "How am *I* creating what I don't want?" This leverages us to increased effectiveness. And lighten up a little when you ask this question. Savvy workers recognize their own fallibility, their own humanness. In the same way the blame game is self-reinforcing, gracefully working on ourselves builds confidence and trust. Accepting responsibility is liberating, maybe not initially, but the fruit of the effort is sweet.

Develop learning relationships.

Savvy workers manage both the task and people equally well. They are able to solve problems in ways that build relationships. We've all worked with people who are excellent at getting the job done but mistreat others in the process. We've also worked with people who are so concerned with just being nice that they never accomplish anything. It is a rare employee who has near perfect balance between these two dimensions.

The savvy employee understands that to find this proper balance, *learning is the key*. Learning from "below" from subordinates, learning from "above" from bosses, and learning from peers (sideways?) is the best way to anticipate problems before they happen. Constant downsizing and reorganization place increasing demands to get up to speed in a hurry, often in a hostile, political environment. The workers of the future can expect continual job "churning," changing jobs, changing companies, changing disciplines. Many managers move as often as every 12 months—high tech workers every few months.The lean and mean attitudes of the workplace require continual adjustment to new responsibilities and expectations.

Arming ourselves with knowledge leverages us into the most favorable position possible. Identify savvy people who know how to get things done with respect. Latch on to them and watch how they do it. Learn about the subtle things they do that separate them from the others in your company. As you watch an outstanding problem-solver deal with a difficult situation, notice the turn of a phrase, the tone of voice, their attributes that set them apart. If possible, create opportunities to work with them in a reciprocal relationship. Also, mentoring relationships can be extremely valuable in dealing with the political realities of the workplace. Tell others of your admiration and your desire to learn from them and to support them in their goals. Most people are delighted with the opportunity of

mentoring you if you are also doing something for them in return. Seek out individuals who can help you with the things you need.

What should we focus on learning in order to be effective?

- *Administrative systems.* These systems include budgets, performance appraisals, personnel policies, purchasing, and approvals. One manager gave this description of how he learned about the budget:

  > When I became department manager I had to begin to manage the budget, but I was given very little information about how to handle it. When I asked my boss, he said to read the policy manual, but it was very hard to understand. After a few weeks I met Gary, who was a staff member in the budget office. He didn't have a big title or a big salary, but he helped me a lot. I soon found I could call Gary when a budget question came up and he would save me hours of work. In addition, he showed me ways to transfer money between accounts that saved our department thousands of dollars.

- *Technology and operations.* Many organizations frequently transfer people from one function to another. Such transfers often create awkward situations in which the boss knows less about the technical aspects of the job than his or her subordinates. Subordinates can be extremely helpful in getting the boss up to speed; bosses can be very helpful in mentoring those who work for them. And don't forget your savvy peers who are often less risky sources of help.

- *The informal system.* The explicit rules about your company or work group are relatively easy to figure out and conform to. The social norms or standards are much harder to understand. Unfortunately, the unwritten rules often become known only after they are violated.[8]

  I learned this important lesson in my first job out of graduate school. At the height of the recession in 1983, I was thrilled to be hired by a computer manufacturer as a management development specialist. Almost everyone worked in cubicles, with the exception of some managers who had offices with walls, lined up along one side of the building. For some reason, probably because there was no where else to put me at the time, I was assigned an office along with the managers. The unwritten rule was that only managers have offices with walls; everybody else has cubicles. Even though I had nothing to do with the assignment of where I worked, I had violated one of the informal rules of the personnel department. Though I have no way of knowing for certain, I believe this innocent violation of tradition accounted for my getting off to a very bumpy start with some of my co-workers.

Next to my office was a secretarial pool that supported the managers. From day one, the women in the secretarial pool were cold and snooty to me. No matter what I did to build a relationship with them, I got the cold shoulder. They were unwilling to offer support and it became obvious I was the focal point of their jokes.

To make matters worse, I violated another informal rule of the department by opting to work out in the fitness center on my lunch hour. The formal policy of the company encouraged employees to use the facility; however, I was the only one in the department to do so. The rest ate lunch together in the cafeteria. Some of the secretaries complained that I took "two lunch hours," objecting to my eating something light while I worked at my desk.

If possible find someone who understands the informal customs and expectations to help negotiate the maze of the organization (More about this important topic in chapter 8.)

- *Organizational culture.* Learning the values, basic assumptions, and norms of the organization can be critical to your becoming your own hero at work. Organizations are rich with rituals and stories about the past, revealing the pulse of the organization and what it takes to succeed. Ask people to share with you their stories about the heroes and the villains of your company—being careful not to enter into gossip about the villains. Listen for reoccurring patterns and themes about what is prized in your organization. Is conformity or creativity valued? Is teamwork or individual contribution encouraged most? What are the assumptions about human nature; for example, find out if employees are viewed as active or passive, trustworthy or suspicious, hard working or lazy? What are the company's values around conflict? It is often helpful to find someone who has been around a long time to ask: "What's the one thing you *never* want to do around here?" The culture of the company is often imbedded in the stories the old-timers tell. Listen carefully for ropes to skip and ropes to know on your journey to becoming your own hero.

- *Organizational language.* Imagine this petite 37-year-old single white woman on the campus with 2,500 young black students! I was lost, so lost I asked an African American classmate to help me with a list of jargon. Most organizations have a language all of their own. Make a list of acronyms, slang, and jargon and learn what it means. Also, pay attention to who talks, how long, to whom, and in what order. Believe it or not, there are informal rules about language in every company. Speaking the language well creates an impression of group membership, whether you are accepted or not. An example of this was given by a manager in a computer chip manufacturing facility:

> When I first came here, when people said ”wafers” I thought they were talking about cookies! I had to learn the special language of integrated circuits and the technical processes involved. On top of that, I had to learn about jobs performed by others, company politics, personnel policies, administrative procedures and legal details . . . . Did I learn from subordinates? Definitely! I talked to people on the line whenever we had a problem. The technicians offered suggestions and alternative solutions. The secretaries helped me to understand the politics and solve some paperwork problems.

Develop trust.

Learning from others happens best in a climate of trust. Understanding the bases of trust provides a framework for first-aid in strained relationships.

J. J. Gabarro studied the development of working relationships between company presidents and their key subordinates. He found that three types of trust were paramount: trust in character, trust in competence, and trust in judgment. For subordinates to trust their superiors, they must perceive their superiors as being honest, competent, and consistent in his or her behavior. For superiors to trust subordinates, they must perceive them as having integrity, having the right motives, and being open.[9]

Trust does not develop when artificial barriers are maintained. In some organizations, artificial barriers are very strong. Managers may find it difficult to admit that subordinates have something to teach; they may assume that managers should know more than the subordinates. This bias will be even stronger in organizations that tolerate or support other artificial barriers between employees: beliefs that engineers cannot learn from non-engineers, whites from blacks, MBAs from non-MBAs, men from women, or women from each other. The effect of these barriers is an expectation that learning comes only from “above” in the company or from people who are more like us.

Especially perplexing are situations when we expect too much or make inaccurate assumptions based upon stereotyping about whom we can trust. For example, if we tend to *expect* women will support each other because of gender and that belief or trust is violated, the betrayal seems to take a greater toll.

Myth # 16: Women will help other women get ahead.

Leslie Wolfe, of the Center for Women Policy Studies, said, "Just because a person has ovaries doesn't make them pro-women. It's the action, not the gender that's significant." Dr. Alvin Poussaint of the Harvard Medical School says that some of the social dynamics undergirding some of the difficulties women have with each other on the job originate from an obsession with maintaining their Queen Bee status. "If they get to the top, they get some type of charge out of being the only one," he said. "It proves they are great. Another woman making it to their level diminishes her prestige," he said.[10]

Despite the popular notion that women are mistreated or abused most by men at work, respondents in my research report they feel abused equally by men and women. Research by Brigham Young University professor Bonnie Baliff-Spanville and others, shows that women are extremely intense and uneasy in their feelings about other women, not just men. Women find it very difficult to lose out to other women, often scapegoating them to maintain their level of status in the organization. Ironically, women perceive other women to be of less importance than men, often rejoicing more in the problems women encounter than in their accomplishments.[11]

Women and men are socialized very differently, especially around conflict. In Carol Gilligan's study of psychological theory and women's development, *In a Different Voice*, she reminds us that beginning in childhood, name calling and vendettas are normal for girls, not for boys who are more able to resolve disputes more effectively than girls. In Gilligan's report of Janet Lever's research, Lever said,

> During the course of this study boys were seen quarrelling all the time, but not once was a game terminated because of a quarrel and no game was interrupted for more than seven minutes. In the gravest debates, the final word was always, "to repeat the play," generally followed by a chorus of "cheater's proof." In fact, it seemed that the boys enjoyed the legal debates as much as they did the game itself, and even marginal players of lesser size or skill participated equally in these recurrent squabbles. In contrast, the eruption of disputes among girls tended to end the game.[12]

Also, for many women (and minority groups) a lifetime of scarcity of opportunities often creates a zero-sum mentality or a tendency to force others to struggle as hard as they did. Shifting to an

abundance mentality (having faith in enough opportunity for everyone), having a compassionate instead of a punitive attitude, is difficult when your life experience has shown you otherwise. The acceleration of upheaval from reorganization at work exacerbates this unwillingness to help others get ahead, regardless of status in the organization.

To develop trust, remember *mutuality*. Whether your relationship is with a boss, subordinate, or peer, "What's in it for me?" is a basic question in human interactions. To develop trust, think in terms of benefits to others as well as to yourself. These benefits may take the form of credit being given where credit is due, of being assigned more responsibility, or of recognition through formal channels.

First-aid for failing trust in relationships requires that we be clear about what we mean, establishing clarity about a common purpose and a commitment to reciprocal respect. We look diligently for ways to move from independence to interdependence, from competition to collaboration, from being closed and strategic to open and vulnerable, from rebellion and victimism to hope and faith. To rebuild trust, we look for ways to clarify our intentions, to be consistent, available and supportive, and repentant when we make errors:

1. ***Clarify what you do want/don't want, mean/don't mean, do intend/don't intend.***
   Developing the skill of *contrasting* is a way to spell out one's intentions and to clarify what's in our hearts. Say something like,

   - "I'm really committed to (purpose that you both share), and I don't want you to think I'm trying to undermine your plans or ideas. My intent is to discuss both our perspectives so that we can find some common ground or something that we can both be committed to."
     Or,
   - "I didn't mean to give the impression that your presentation was less important than mine by taking too much time."
     Or,
   - "My intention was to (whatever it was). I have a hunch you're feeling (whatever you think). Is that right?"
     Or,
   - "Let's make sure we're both singing off the same page. We're saying that . . . We're not saying . . ."

2. ***Be consistent.*** Whatever remedy is needed to demonstrate renewed trustworthiness, engineer opportunities to show your commitment and never break the routine. In other words, if the relationship is damaged, create opportunities for positive behavior to be shared to develop *new* beliefs about each other. For example, a divorced father visited his married daughter in another city every week for one year to reduce her feelings of abandonment. The remedy matched the offense. In the workplace, instead of hiding from the problem that violated the trust, we must initiate a plan whereby new behaviors, attitudes, and feelings may be tested and shared *over time.*

3. ***Be available and supportive.*** When trust is violated, the tendency to withdraw or to be defensive and spiteful is strong. To restore trust, extend an olive branch through some small gesture showing your awareness of the other person's difficulty. Say, " I can see your plate is really full right now. How can I be helpful?" Or, "I know how important____ is to you, and I want what you want. Perhaps I can help." Showing loyalty under duress is a monumental deposit into the offender's emotional bank account, often rendering him or her unable to proceed with adversarial tactics.

   Especially important is *public* loyalty. Causing others to lose face publicly is a massive withdrawal in interpersonal relationships. I learned the hard way not to publicly voice my disapproval with my boss. In a meeting of all managers to discuss an impending layoff, my boss (who was director of human resources) announced that the employees were being notified by letter deliberately mailed to reach them on the weekend. This action violated everything I believed in concerning maintaining a sense of fair play and respect for employees at all times but especially in such personally devastating circumstances. My righteous indignation got the best of me, outweighing not only my common sense but the need to show public respect to my boss. I said, "Wouldn't it be better to either tell them in person or at least tell them when the plant is open?" Obviously, just because I challenged him on his decision, he wasn't going to admit he had exercised poor judgment! Everybody in the whole room looked at me with amazement. Even though I could see that they agreed with me, they also knew I was a dead duck, a stupid dead duck.

4. ***Use the power of apology.*** One more time, it takes moral courage to put pride aside and say, "I am sorry." Apology puts trust back on track by taking responsibility for mistakes instead of defending the wrong we do. One said, "The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none."

After the event in the story above, my immediate supervisor came to see me at the request of our common boss. He said, "I am *required* to tell you never to do that again and if you do, you're in big trouble. There, now I've said it. But, I want you to know I felt like doing the same thing you did, but I don't want to go out looking for another job right now." At the time I was too immature to accept my responsibility to apologize. But, years later, when I was trying to clean up some of the messes I made, I wrote to my former boss telling him I recognized I was not always supportive and was sorry for this. This was the same man whom I had once saluted and said, "Anything you say, *Mass'uh*." Still can't believe I did that . . .

5. ***Be savvy about telltale signs of untrustworthiness.*** In *Sisterhood Betrayed: Women in the Workplace and the All about Eve Complex,* Jill Barber and Rita Watson offer insight about women's inhumanity to each other, and also offer helpful protection and prevention tips. Their tips are good advice regardless of gender.

   • **Beware of too much indiscriminate talk.** Unfortunately, corporate America does not usually offer women or men with a safe environment in which to share long-term commitments of friendship. Even though women are socialized to develop and nurture networks of relationships, these very connections often leave women vulnerable to betrayal. Show loyalty to those not in your presence. When gossip or statements are made that are demeaning to others, resist the temptation to participate.

   • **Be aware.** Look for telltale signs of betrayal *before* someone can do you harm. For example, pay attention to lavish comments, inordinate interest in your success and how you got there, overly solicitous offers of help, co-workers who reveal confidences about others to you, and repeated "forgetfulness" by failing to follow through on things that make you look bad.

   • **Be straightforward about roles.** Spelling out roles and responsibilities helps avoid misunderstandings and also sends the message that manipulation will not be practiced or tolerated. (More about this later under clarifying expectations.)

   • **Be sure to document your work.** In an ideal world, there would be no need to protect ourselves from sabotage. But in the competitive corporate world, self-protection is just plain smart. Don't automatically *assume* trustworthiness in discussions or when critical ideas are shared. (Neither should you assume *un*trustworthiness.) Assume you

don't know who is trustworthy until you have a history on which to make sound judgments. A brief summary of events after the fact helps prevent problems that may occur and also reduces personal anxiety about whether or not a colleague might use your ideas or information to his or her advantage.[13]

6. Know when to walk away. Equally important, if the relationship is severely damaged to the point that no amount of work is likely to restore trust, cut your losses and move on. Knowing when to walk away is essential to becoming your own hero at work. Don't keep digging the hole deeper when you need to get out.

Clarify expectations.

We should not wait until trust is derailed to work through desires, hopes, and goals together. In all work relationships, to build effective and satisfying relationships, clarify and test what is expected. Violated expectations are at the root of many problems in relationships at work (and at home.) Right up front, sit down with your boss and ask him or her to make expectations explicit. Offer what your understanding is, saying, "Let me see if I understand what my duties (or work schedule, priorities, etc.) are. My understanding is that _____. Is this the way you see it?" Learn how you fit in the company's larger mission and in your department's goals and priorities. Identify the main purposes for your job. Know specific job activities, limits of authority, work priorities, reporting procedures, and evaluation of performance. Ask your manager what she sees as the key constraints in your being able to perform effectively—those booby traps that you want to guard against. It also helps to have similar discussions about the wishes, hopes, and aspirations of subordinates and peers.

Become an effective subordinate.

Everyone works for someone else. How often have you seen brilliant people shoot themselves in the heart, the head, and both feet because they didn't know how to "manage their manager"?[14] Very often work associates have very different expectations about their roles. These differences can

lead to tension, conflicts, missed deadlines, and sometimes real or imagined abuse. In addition to clarifying expectations to avoid these problems, it is also important to do the following:

- **Take *appropriate* initiative.** The degree of initiative desired varies from manager to manager. Does your manager want you to
  - wait to be told?
  - ask what to do?
  - recommend and take action?
  - take action and then advise at once?
  - take action and report periodically?

- **Keep the boss informed, *appropriately.*** Most reasonable managers don't want to know every little detail about how you achieved your results, only that you did. (However, since you are reading this book, perhaps you work for a control freak who *wants* to know everything!) This includes the bad news that we have a tendency to keep to ourselves. When you're tempted to cover up your mistakes, remember the story about the pilot who landed his plane in the San Francisco Bay! Ask your boss his or her preferences about frequency and amount of feedback on special projects and routine work.

- **Ask for help, but not *too* much.** Know how much your boss wants to be involved in a project. Some like to be very involved, others not at all. It is important to take some calculated risks, to handle the details, and inform the manager about what you're doing. It's critical to get help with decisions that impact other departments. Also, when the boss asks for an analysis of a project, always have a recommendation ready.

- **Establish frequency and length of contact.** Differing expectations about the amount of time spent together can be a sore spot for managers and subordinates alike. Meeting either too little or too much are common complaints easily avoidable through prior agreements.

Choose your battles wisely.

We've all heard the expression, "Win the battle, lose the war." When everything becomes a battle, we weaken our influence on the really important things. Focussing on a variety of concerns, continually sweating and stewing about the small stuff, causes people to tire of the negativity. Co-

workers distance themselves from us at the truly crucial times when we need their support. Kicking against the pricks of organizational life is a prescription for unhappiness and frustration. During stressful situations, ask yourself questions that will help to restore balance. What does your inner voice tell you?

- Does this situation support my personal destiny or detract from it? Hypervigilance—striving too hard—in the pursuit of organizational and personal effectiveness gets us exactly what we don't want.

- In the overall scheme of my life, how important is what I am stewing over. Will this matter a year from now? What about five years from now? What about the end of my life?

- Had I rather win or had I rather have harmony? What might happen if I just let go of this?

- Have I confused my need for justice with my value of mercy? Getting caught up in equity issues is a hook to victim mentality.

- Is this my battle or someone else's? It's easy to get sucked into other people's problems, pulling us away from our own goals and priorities. Do I really want to "catch this ball" or let it go by? You can choose to let it go on by.

- Am I overreacting to this situation because of other circumstances that have nothing to do with this problem? Am I just having a bad day or does this problem deserve the level of emotion I am giving it?

Deliberate.

Choosing our battles wisely is perfected in the fine art of personal deliberation. *Intentional* response, making unhurried personal choices within our value system to "choose the right," helps us to live in the *prevention* stage of the heroes's journey cycle. In the deliberation process, we

"work on me first," bringing our own feelings into alignment with our higher self as a prerequisite to solving our problems. We ask ourselves:

- How did I get from my observations to conclusions to emotions?
- Did I attribute the worst motive possible to the other person?
- Is this my old victim tape replaying again?
- Is what I'm thinking fact or fiction?
- Can I bring the problem up in a spirit of love?
- Are my feelings of resentment so strong that bringing the situation up may make a bad situation worse, not just temporarily but permanently?
- Am I exaggerating the outcomes?
- Am I giving the benefit of the doubt?
- Am I using catastrophic thinking to let me off the hook when dealing with a difficult situation?

Explore your options in dealing with the current problem. You can choose to

- *Dismiss it.* Decide if you've drawn the wrong conclusions or it's not all that important to bring up.

- *Gather more information.* You just don't know enough yet. Things may not be as they seem.

- *Put it on the back burner.* Let the situation simmer a bit to see what surfaces. By slowly feeding the back burner of your mind, you tap into the softer, calmer, often more intelligent sense of what needs to be done.

- *Talk it out.* Tactfully check out your assumptions and conclusions; start with a question to confirm or disconfirm what you're thinking. For example, "When did you think the project update was due?" More information may clear up the whole matter. If it doesn't, continue to talk it out by sharing more of your observations, conclusions, and questions. For example, "I've noticed the project update was a week later than we agreed on at the last meeting. Does this fit with what you thought the timetable was?" If more information is still needed, "This is the fourth time the report has been late. I'm beginning to worry that I can't keep my own commitments because I don't have the information I need from you. Help me understand what's going on."

Bringing problems up indiscriminately may make us feel better in the short term but it may have long-term consequences. Learn to pay attention to the cues or red-flags of victim thinking. For me, I act the biggest bully when I am most afraid. Outrage=fear. In my better moments, I am able to stop myself from anger and blaming others by nailing the *underlying* emotion as fear created by personal vulnerability.

We all must have little doors around our hearts. Some people are worthy to enter, others should never be invited in, for they know not or care not upon whom they tread. By bringing up problems to people who have historically been either unwilling or unable to see themselves as a part of the problem, we accomplish nothing more than telegraphing to the world how much resentment we have toward them.

When I was director of training and development of one corporation, a fellow employee in my work group, was being mistreated miserably by his manager. The manager, a woman who scored about a ten on the resentment scale, hired the employee, who moved his family several hundred miles to work for the company. Almost daily, the manager publicly ridiculed the employee, humiliating him in front of his co-workers. She put him on probation with "pseudo" performance improvement goals he obviously could not meet. The employee came to me for coaching and solace.

Having personally observed some of the incidents he described and having experienced difficulties of my own with the woman, it was easy to have empathy for him. I had no trouble in sharing my concerns about this problem with my boss, the head of the "human" resource department. Since my job required a high degree of proficiency in communication and problem solving skills I was direct and specific as well as outwardly nonpunishing. But in my heart I thought he was the biggest weenie I had ever met, totally lacking integrity. He did nothing about the problem. Shortly after our discussion, two weeks before Christmas, the employee was fired.

When I walked into the office the next morning, the silent exchange between my boss's eyes and mine spoke volumes: he felt my outrage and disgust; he knew I knew he betrayed not just the terminated employee, but all of us. We all knew we could not count on him to prevail on our behalf if someone treated us unfairly. I had a hunch my days were also numbered; it was just a matter of time. My value system, coupled with my obvious resentment about this kind of injustice, was a reminder of his lack of courage to do the right thing.

It took me a while to understand that what I perceived to be a duty-bound, courageous gesture was somewhat naive in the realm of interpersonal problem-solving. I was right to care about the

mistreated employee; it was a good thing to want to help him. It was *absurd* to think that bringing this unjust situation to my manager's attention would solve anything. He already *knew* about it! My indignation about my boss's lack of integrity and the lack of compassion from the manager in question (whom he hired) served my own personal need to feel that I would and could stand up for people in trouble but did little else. Bringing the problem out in the open served my value to take the moral high ground when others were doing otherwise—despite the costs. However, confronting my manager did nothing to improve the injustice of the situation at hand. In some ways, my veiled resentment perpetuated it.

Would I intervene if faced with a similar situation again? Probably, but with no ill-conceived notions that doing so would change anything. Sometimes, there is virtue in losing; there is virtue in righteous indignation about injustice. There is never virtue in *self*-righteous indignation. I'm not sure the outcomes would have been different regardless of the approach. But, without true charity in my heart for *all* the parties, I only sealed my own fate and perpetuated the collusion that was already institutionalized in the department. Showing up the weaknesses of others, even if by nothing more than self-righteous indignation, heightens the defenses of others and invokes the Law of the Hog. Once again, by showing up the weaknesses of my boss, I put one more mark against my name that soon was added to the layoff list.

Be up front, specific, and do no harm.

Hence, in spite of our best intentions, just *describing* a problem often creates a new one. For this reason most of us choose an indirect approach of problem-solving and thus deal with problems ineffectively. We *avoid* the problem altogether, saving up the problems (gunnysacking) until we explode. Or, we turn to manipulation by being *too friendly* or paying compliments as a precursor to bringing up a problem (sandwiching).

All of these methods usually make bad situations worse. When we gunnysack our problems and feelings, people learn to become afraid of us—they sense they may be the target often before we are even aware that the sack is full. When we act too chummy or sweeten others up for the kill or ask questions we know the answers to, others feel patronized or mistrust us. People prefer the direct

approach, to ***be up front.*** Come to the point. Straight talk, tempered with kindness— remembering the worth of each person's soul no matter what—makes heroes of us all.

If the problem is with an individual and you decide it is appropriate to bring a problem out in the open, decide how to just communicate what the problem situation is as you see it, nothing more. Solving the problem comes later. ***Be precise***. Give enough detail that the other person knows what you're talking about. Vague descriptions of problems open the door for misunderstanding and confusion. They also lead you away from the problem at hand. For example, suppose your coworker is supposed to relieve you from your job at 4 p.m. He is consistently late, coming in at 4:10 or 4:15. You're sick of it. You say, "You're *always* (or *really)* late." What might he respond? "I'm not always late. Last week I came in ten minutes early!" Or, "What's five minutes? Everybody comes in a few minutes late." Be specific. Contrast what you *anticipated* would happen with what *actually* happened. Explain the problem as the difference between what you *expected* and what you now see happening: "The shift change is at 4:OO, and I've noticed you've been five or ten minutes late three times this week and three times last week."

However, it isn't necessary to always state the difference between expected and observed behavior. The inference alone will do. For example, communicating a problem with someone in higher authority requires a little different approach. Suppose your manager told you that you would get a performance review on October 15 and it is now November 15. For three years your boss has been late with your evaluation. You are anxious to be reviewed because your salary increases are tied to your reviews. You wouldn't want to say, "I expected to be reviewed on October 15 and now it is November 15, and I haven't gotten my review." A more savvy way to say it would be, "You had indicated my performance review would be on October 15; I'm wondering if we could reschedule it for maybe sometime this week."

In describing a problem, the admonition to **do no harm** in words, feelings, and nonverbal behavior to the degree possible cannot be overemphasized. Anger and resentment do little to solve problems; they just bring us new ones in some other way. If you are harboring resentment, it will almost always come through. If you act like a victim, you will most likely be treated like one. Tone of voice, body language, speed of communication, our selection of adjectives describing the event—all will reveal the purity of heart. Sarcasm, insincere flattery, and labeling are poisoned arrows that find their targets in the heart of others, darkening the listener's spirit with messages of enmity. We know when love is absent. We know when others are holding court in their heads. Sigmund Freud said, "He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a

secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out him at every pore." As Herclitus noted:

> The soul is dyed the color of its thoughts. Think only those things that are in line with your principles and can bear the full light of day. The content of your character is your choice. Day by day, what you choose, what you think, and what you do is who you become. Your integrity is your destiny. . . . It is the light that guides your way.

Diagnose before prescribing.

Understanding the cause of the problem requires that we continue to slow thought down—to get to the underlying information we do not have. After describing the problem, *stop*, *look*, and *listen* to what the other person is telling us. Resist the temptation to think about what you will say next. Attend to the person speaking, not to your own ego. Different problems require different solutions; if we diagnose the problem incorrectly, we will have two problems instead of the one we started with. For example, in the case of the person who is late for the shift change: **Ask yourself**, "Why might the person be late? Are they able to be there on time? Do they have the *ability* to be there? Are they *motivated* to be on time? How important is it to them to be punctual?"

An *ability* problem answer might be, "My car has been overheating, and I haven't been able to get an appointment with the garage to fix it." A *motivation* problem answer would be something like, "What's the big deal about getting here a few minutes late?" If the problem is one of ability or skill, ask for ideas, "What do you think you could do to get the car fixed so I'll be able to leave on time?"

Communicate consequences.

If you determine the problem is one of motivation, communicate the *natural consequences* of his or her being late: "When you're late, I'm unable to pick my son up from day care on time." By doing so, there is no need to impose consequences that may damage the relationship. By

communicating natural consequences, you assume the role of teacher, counselor, friend, not an enemy who wishes to impose some control or interference. The assumption is that once others understand the parameters of the problem—the consequences to the task, to others, and to you personally—they will be motivated to do the right thing without coercion.

Natural consequences are motivating. A father and son wants to hike a mountain. Against the advice of his father, the son insists upon wearing his tennis shoes instead of his hiking boots. Instead of arguing with the boy, the father simply lets the boy wear the tennis shoes. Nothing could be more motivating than the boy's blistered and bloody feet! (The same father also took his son to the emergency room one evening to see the natural consequences of drinking and driving.)

To summarize, be deliberate: think through the situation first. Describe the problem by being up front, specific, and doing no harm. Seek first to understand by determining whether the problem is one of skill or will; if it is skill—ask for ideas, if it is will—communicate natural consequences.[15]

Discover dialogue.

Two types of conversations are required at work: *discussion*, normally used for these day-to-day problems just described, and *dialogue* , typically used when problems are more serious in nature. The ability to communicate successfully lies within the deepest part of our true and eternal nature and requires the exploration of our innate spirituality. When we approach others with reverence, ready to be influenced by *their* experience, *their* hopes, *their* fears, and *their* needs, situations can change instantly. Successful dialogue is more about staying true to our values or matters of *conscience* and less about trying to change behavior. What we often do instead is to try to get others to conform to something *we* want done differently or better. Mired in self-concern, we are unaware of our own accusing feelings that put others off. We forget that "to be" is to be profoundly connected to each other. Our unquenchable thirst for self-esteem, directed toward building ourselves up, in fact brings the very opposite. We change best *indirectly*, by going after a "life of goodness" instead of going after a "good life."

From which we may conclude that *studying holy writ is more important to meaningful dialogue than studying psychology or organizational behavior!*

Only when we begin to see the vision of our own culpability in relationships are we able to shed our victim status and develop the hero within. We can no longer hide behind the false notion that our own abuses of power are justified because of what someone else does. We can no longer say, "She deserves it." Heroes stop spreading rumors, building coalitions, and drawing boundaries around individuals and groups in order to control them. They don't hide behind, "If only...." They can no longer make themselves feel all right through materialism, buying bigger houses and more toys. *Savvy* people also give up their fear because they recognize it is an accusation of others. Implicit in the fear is that others are not trustworthy. Heroes stop acquiescing to others because they know their martyrdom is yet another control tactic. To become our own hero at work demands that we submit ourselves to be changed through the light of spirit and truth.[16]

Develop others: Criticize less—
Express gratitude and praise more.

In interpersonal problem-solving, the relationship is everything. Relationships are either developed or torn down depending in large part on how we recognize the accomplishments or criticize others. Expressing sincere gratitude and careful criticism are both necessary in organizational life. Unfortunately, we focus more than 80 percent of the time on our displeasure about what went wrong instead of what went right. William James said, "The deepest principle of human nature is the craving to be appreciated." Often, even when we *ask* for criticism, what we really want is acceptance. Criticism is censure or condemnation; it may be defined as a lack of grace for self and others, despite how we may sugarcoat it by calling it "constructive." Criticism is a scalpel or an herbicide, and they are unlikely tools of choice for *building* anything.

Criticism is a habit of frustration born of unmet expectations. The litany of negativism and fault-finding endemic to corporate America creates an atmosphere of doubt that saps our vitality and slams shut the door to opportunity and success. Nevertheless, criticism is a "critical" part of corporate life, and we must learn how to give and receive it better.

Giving Criticism

John Lund's unique approach to developing the art of giving and receiving criticism focusses on the spiritual qualities to be considered:[17]

Rule #1: Before you speak, ask yourself:

- Is the criticism a part of *my* stewardship or business?
- Is the criticism not only *true,* but is it *necessary* and does it *edify?*
- Do I have permission to give the criticism?
- If the answers are yes to the above, be alone with the one being criticized at a mutually agreeable time and place.

Rule #2: Focus on the behavior, not the person. Be very specific.
Rule #3: Be in emotional control—no crying or yelling.
Rule #4: Use the above process sparingly and in a reverent way.
Rule #5: Affirm the person's worth to you.

Lund says, "To attack another is to attack Deity." Remember, "If ye do it to others, ye do it unto me." Ask yourself, "Would you do this to Deity?" We do not have the right to attack the worth of souls. It is also in our stewardship to protect ourselves from toxic relationships. If we determine that criticism is necessary, we should say something like, "I need to share something with you, but I'm a little concerned about it. How would you like me to approach you if I had something to share with you that may hurt or be unpleasant?" Or, frame it with something lighthearted, like, "If you'll give me just 5 minutes, you'll have 23 hours and 55 minutes of not having me in your face!" Also, in general discussion, be careful of the "but" word. Relationships are about *adding* to, say, "I'd like to *add* to that . . . ." When we tack "but" on the end of every sentence, people begin to look at us as "but-heads."

Nobody loves a grumbler. We are called to love, not to criticize. Yes, even (or especially) in the workplace. Most things that bug us are outside our stewardship or business. Venting hostility does not get to the real issues at hand anyway.

Receiving Criticism

Franklin P. Jones said, "Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger." Or a business associate. Criticism hurts, regardless of the source. Remember the myth that we should not take things *personally*— the myth we should make ourselves into objects to give others permission to behave badly?

Lund's suggestions on receiving criticism change the frame of reference in such a way as to make it possible to receive criticism in a graceful way. He says, "The only way to master the art of receiving criticism is to do it for God, not the other person." We must stop, look, and listen. *Stop* to put our egos away, physically *look* at the other person, and *really* listen. Do not defend yourself. Write the criticism down. If it's important enough for someone to say it, it's important enough to write it down. Give feedback (without emotion) to the other person about what you understood them to say. Allow yourself time to think about it before responding. Evaluate whether changing the issue being criticized is worth your time and energy to change it. Follow up with a response at a specified time. If necessary, agree to disagree.

Expressing Gratitude and Praise

Duc de la Rochefoucauld said, "The hunger for applause is the source of all conscious literature and heroism." People who are effective interpersonally look for opportunities to recognize outstanding performance continually—not from a position of manipulation for continued outstanding performance, but because they truly rejoice in the accomplishments of others. *Savvy* workers genuinely *feel* more kindly in response to the efforts of others regardless of whether or not they are always successful. *Savvy* workers know how to connect with others, to express their appreciation with spirit, variety, and honor:

- **Make praise a priority.** Look for ways to celebrate successes with passion. One of the chief complaints at work is that people are not recognized for the good things they do. Praise heals and inspires; it is a treasured interpersonal gift.

- **Honor small successes.** We can learn much about this from animal trainers. If you want a whale to leap out of the water over a stick or through a hoop, where do you first put the stick? At the bottom of the pool. You reward the effort with a juicy fish and raise the stick a little higher. Too often we withhold praise because we are looking for the "once in a blue moon" outstanding performance, forgetting that we all started "at the bottom of the pool" with someone, somewhere. Positive reinforcement works when it is used sincerely, genuinely celebrating small improvements, not used to manipulate the person to someday achieve what you really want.

- **Be specific and sincere.** Let people know what it is they have done well which you honestly appreciate, clearly describing what they have done and its impact. For example, you might say, "Thanks for helping me finish the proposal. Without your help, I would never have made the

deadline." Also, never throw in a little zinger that takes away from the accomplishment of others. If there are flaws in the performance in some way, give the feedback at another time. How often have our warm feelings been snatched away by a hint of criticism thrown in for good measure? For example, "Good job! Why can't you do this *all* of the time?"

- **Praise efforts, not just results.** One of my most poignant workplace experiences relates to this principle. I was working for a major national company in the early days of its formation. The organization was struggling for its very life, pushing harder and harder for quick results to keep the organization afloat. Commensurate with increasing pressure to meet the payroll, my boss increased his expectations for me to generate new sales in addition to my regular job of providing customer support, a nonrevenue position. I continued to work into the night to complete manuals for our clients. "Other duties as assigned" took up more and more of my time, causing delays in completing the assignment. The president of the company called me in for a discussion about my performance. When I tried to explain the double bind I was in despite what I felt were my best efforts, he replied, "You're not paid for efforts—you're paid for results."

  Results at any price force employees to look at only short-term expediency, not the long-term integrity of the organization and its people. If I had more skill at the time, I would have been more articulate in describing the double bind I felt: my desire to help the company bring in more revenues and to honor the agreements we made with our clients.

- **Focus on the "praise currency" of others.** Praising efforts which others feel are substandard or unimportant is hollow recognition and may be viewed as patronizing. Identify what the person values most and look for opportunities to recognize the achievements *they* care about. In one job, my boss praised only my appearance. Though I care a great deal about how I look, I felt uneasy every time he said, "You look nice today," because he neither had a clue nor cared that I was working 12-hour days launching a new department. I wanted him to appreciate my dedication and the quality of my work, not my appearance. I also knew he would never praise the appearance of male employees to this degree.

- **Be inclusive with praise.** Sometimes public praise is used to intimidate or manipulate others in the group to perform better. Singling people out often creates cynicism and resentment, especially with the new emphasis on teamwork in organizations. If the group is too large to recognize individual achievement, private recognition may be best.

- **Commemorate the event so that the appreciation is remembered.** Recognize successes with thoughtful gifts or tokens of the experience that continue to remind the recipient and others of the good thing they did. These tokens need not be expensive—a personal note, a pen, a plaque, or another memento of the event is usually sufficient.

  When I was a single parent, I often took out my "atta girl" file of personal notes or letters of appreciation that helped me find another bootstrap to grab hold of when I was discouraged. One of my most prized possessions is a plaque given to me by the board of directors of the Forsyth County Mental Health Association 20 plus years ago. Each year this voluntary agency where I was the director recognized one of its volunteers for distinguished service. Instead of giving the award to a volunteer, they gave the award to me, a paid staff member, writing in the back their own personal descriptions of my outstanding attributes. Reading it today still thrills me: "Infectious Enthusiasm, Tireless Energy, Vibrant, Optimistic, Courageous, Vivacious, Alive, Helpful, Open, Honest, Human, Trusting, Dedicated, Dynamic, Able to get people to work and laugh, The Carrie Nation of Junk Food, Best giggler in Winston-Salem, Diligent, oft-times lovable panda bear eating her way through a bamboo forest." How sweet it *still* is…

- **Accept praise gracefully.** Knowing how to receive compliments without rebuttal or denial helps ensure that we get praise more often. If we say, "Oh, its nothing," we essentially imply the person who is giving the compliment has rotten taste or judgment. Duc Francois de La Rochefoucauld said, "When we disclaim praise, it is only showing our desire to be praised a second time." A simple "thank you" is a good thing.[18]

Practice mercy.

We all know the futility of seeking perfect judgment. The tragic and ugly reality of human inequality and suffering is staggering, often shaking to the very core our belief in a just God. Our personal nightmare voices cry out *why*, and *how long*, as we lament what might have been or could be *if only*.

There will never be enough justice in the workplace or any other place. No matter how much we cry foul and beg for relief from our supervisors, human resources, or the legal system, the scales of justice will continue to be tipped more often than not in favor of the corporation. Organizations by

definition have more power than individuals. Organizations are more concerned with making a profit than making righteous judgment.

The emphasis upon exercising our rights at the expense of *behaving* right undercuts our influence and often diminishes opportunity and value. It's a good thing to be direct—to put an end to boorish treatment; it's a bad thing to adopt indiscriminate "in your face" complaining about unfairness.

Have you noticed that when you change a behavior you almost always overshoot the mark? We muster up so great a momentum to pull ourselves away from something that, like a pendulum, we swing too far in the opposite direction. What was timid becomes *aggressive*, not *assertive*. One of the difficulties with assertiveness as the problem-solving style of choice is that we are viewed as a "pain in the butt" by a lot of people. Sometimes indirect is good, too; sometimes, silence is savvy.

Asking *why* questions *can* be helpful if we focus the light inward to reveal the rest of the story hidden from our view.*Why* questions such as, *"Why would a reasonable person behave this way?"* are also helpful in understanding another person's perspective. However, often our *why, how long* and *if only* questions are not really questions at all. They are expressions of our resentment, keeping us trapped in helplessness and victimism. Asking *what* questions, such as *"What can I learn from this?"* and *"What is required of me now?"* moves us to new levels of faith, hope, and charity. The bounds of justice are transcended as we move into the inextinguishable light of mercy.

The divine attribute of mercy—showing compassionate or kindly forbearance toward an offender or adversary—makes heroes of us all. In the *Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare writes,

> The quality of mercy is not strain'd
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from
> heaven
> Upon the place beneath; it is twice blest;
> It blesseth him that gives and him that
> takes:
> It is an attribute to God himself.

Like patience, mercy is a quality of the heart that can be greatly enhanced with deliberate practice. Dealing with adversity at work gives us "mercy practice periods." The real test for all of us is to

learn to perform miracles of the heart—to show compassion when it isn't "deserved." How hard is it to show compassion to deserving people?

The historically documented account of a nineteen-year-old Confederate soldier's compassion made Richard Rowland Kirkland's name synonymous with mercy for a post-Civil War generation, both North and South.

From December 11 to 13, 1862, the Union forces attacked Marye's Heights, a large hill overlooking Fredericksburg, Virginia. Six thousand Confederate soldiers awaited them, secured in defensive positions hidden behind a stone wall. The Union troops—over 40,000 strong—launched a series of suicidal attacks across the open ground. Wave after wave of soldiers were mowed down by the Southern troops, leaving twelve thousand Union troops wounded and dying by sunset. They lay crying for help throughout the bitter cold night.The next day, as the morning fog lifted, the agonized cries could still be heard. Richard Kirkland, a young sergeant on the Confederate side, could stand no more and asked his commanding officer if he could go give the wounded Union soldiers water. His request was denied because it was too dangerous. Eventually his request was granted, and Sgt. Kirkland climbed over the wall and walked directly into harm's way to the nearest wounded soldier. He gently raised the stricken man's head, gave him a drink, and covered the man with his own coat. Sgt. Kirkland then moved on to the next of the wounded, and the next, and the next. No shots were fired. Soon the Union soldiers began to cheer as he continued his work of mercy for more than an hour and a half. Though Richard Kirkland was tragically killed a short time later, he apparently had no regrets or feelings of injustice. His last words to his companions were, "Save yourselves, and tell my Pa I died right."

Kirkland became known on both sides as the "angel of Marye's Heights." A monument to his errand of mercy stands in front of the wall where the battle took place in Fredericksburg. A plaque in honor of his memory hangs in an Episcopal Church in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The inscription reads, "A hero of benevolence, at the risk of his own life, he gave his enemy drink at Fredericksburg."[19]

On the battleground of the workplace, the cries for "water, water" are no less worthy of our mercy and courage. "He [or she] that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass . . . for everyone has need to be forgiven."[20] When faced with aloneness, persecution, betrayal, false witness, unreciprocated concern and respect, meek suffering—resisting the tendency to shrink or recoil from the test enlarges the soul for more joy yet to come.

"Partaking of the bitter cup without becoming bitter" ensures that mercy comes to the merciful.[21] Blooming where we are planted in spite all that opposes us is a divine undertaking. These interpersonal attributes provide the light necessary to begin transforming upside down branches into strong and sturdy roots, sinking deeply into freshly spaded soil. These qualities create opportunities to liberate us, so we may exercise our agency free from unrighteous dominion. In so doing, we begin to bind ourselves to Godliness in every act, responding to the distinct nature of the other, revealing the uniqueness of our own humanity. Through these processes we learn the truth and the truth sets us free. Knowing the truth *delivers.*

Endnotes

1. John W. Gardener, *Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society,* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1965), 14.

2. Jerry B. Harvey, *The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management (*New York: Lexington Books, 1988), 98.

3. Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water* (New York: North Point Press, 1995), 72.

4. Chris Argyris, "Skilled Incompetence," *Harvard Business Review* (September–October, 1986), 74-79.

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6. Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 110-113.

7. The concept of taking personal responsibility as a precursor to *inter*personal effectiveness is a widely accepted principle. *Work on me first, us second* and the skill of contrasting *what we do want/don't want, do mean/don't mean* are terms used in *The Path of Dialogue*, a program developed by Vitality Alliance of which I am a certified trainer.

8. Paul Thompson, Reba Keele, and Vivian Couch (Zabriskie), "What Managers Can Learn from Their Subordinates," *Management Review*, July 1985.

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14. Paul Thompson, "Managing Your Manager: The Effective Subordinate," *Exchange*, a publication of the Brigham Young University School of Management, Fall/Winter edition, 1978.

15. Some of these skills are adapted from a program developed by Interact Performance Systems for which I was a certified master trainer and are used with permission. "Seek first to understand before being understood," and "Begin with the end in mind," are terms used by Stephen Covey's, *7-Habits of Highly Effective People*, of which I am also a certified trainer.

16. I am grateful for the influence of Terry Warner for his seminal work in self-betrayal.

17. John Lund, Education Week, Brigham Young University, 1996.

18. Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, & Al Switzler, *The Balancing Act: Mastering the Competing Demands of Leadership* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Thomson Executive Press, 1996), 304.

19. Story recounted by Thomas S. Monson in "Mercy—The Divine Gift," *Ensign Magazine*, May 1995, 54.

20. George Herbert, quoted in *The International Dictionary of Thoughts* (Chicago: IL, J. G Ferguson Publishing, 1975), 301.

21. Neal Maxwell, *Ensign Magazine*, November, 1997.