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the Leadership Difference

Laugh and Learn!

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Content, or Just Complacent?

After years of being overly self critical, I find myself now becoming more comfortable with who I am. I figure this must be a good thing; but is contentedness a sign of complacency? I ponder that concept in this newsletter. Also, you'll find some thoughts on the challenges we all face when it comes to listening. And, how one unusual wine has created one of the biggest trends in wine making. Cheers!

I Am Comfortable in My Own Skin (But Sometimes I Don't Like the Company)

Every year around the time of my birthday, I become particularly introspective. Now, saying that I become particularly introspective is pretty significant considering how much time I spend alone. As a solo business traveler, I spend a ton of time by myself. Even at home, I enjoy the solitude of hiking in the wilderness with just my hiking buddy Boone Dog for company. In restaurant parlance, I am good at being a one top. Even as a child, I could occupy myself for hours by wandering the woods near our house or inventing ways to play a mock baseball game by pitching a rubber ball against the side of the house. When you spend that much time alone in your life, you become a pretty introspective kinda guy.

The month of May is different. Something about "celebrating" a birthday moves the aim of the introspection from philosophical issues and towards your own self worth, personal development and overall evaluation of how your life has gone. By the way, the reason for the quotes around "celebrating" is that few people actually revel in their 53rd birthday or as I like to call it, the 13th anniversary of my 40th birthday.

In my first book, *Live and Learn or Die Stupid!*, I talked about the importance of positive self talk. As a younger man, I often found myself being very self-critical. I focused on the things about myself that I didn't like. Of course, doing that increases your stress, undermines your confidence and just generally makes your life miserable. I know these things now, but back then I felt like the mantra of "No one is as hard on me as I am on myself" was something of which to be proud. Today, I shake my head when I hear someone utter those words, knowing full well the damage they are doing to themselves physically and mentally.

Today, the self-talk takes on a different tenor. I am less critical of physical imperfections. I allow myself the occasional mistake or lapse in judgment. There are almost none of the feelings of sudden rage when I screw something up. In the immortal words of Popeye, "I am what I am." The bigger issue for me now is to determine if what I am is what I want to be. And, if it is, does that make me content or complacent?

I have spent much of my life aspiring to help others by being the best educator I can be. That is really the only big, hairy and audacious goal I set for myself. Oh, I set financial goals, fitness goals, personal development goals; each very specific and short term; but the big goal was to positively affect each person I met. The nagging question for me is, "Am I still pursuing a path that maximizes my contribution as a human being?" Is a feeling of contentedness reflective of a life lived at its fullest or is it just a person who has settled for "good enough?" Sometimes, I feel like I could be doing a lot more and that familiar, critical self discourse comes rushing back into my mind. It is during those times that I am shaken from a feeling of centeredness and forced to examine my future. Maybe you have moments like that, too. Maybe you, like me, respect the person you have become but wonder what more might be possible. Those moments can make your own company just a bit irritating.

For more information about learning, communication and leadership, check out Dave's new book The Power of Understanding People.



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A Wine Jailbreak!

For me, it started on December 31, 2005. We were hosting a New Year's Eve party that featured a wine tasting of five of the top 100 wines of the year from Wine Spectator. One of the featured pours was a modestly priced wine that was a unique blend of Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Charbono, and Petite Sirah.

The concept of blending such a wide range of grapes to make a wine of exceptional quality was a bit radical. Orin Swift The Prisoner 2003 was not only unusual, it also had an attractive price (less than \$20 at the time) and had eclipsed more well known wines to land at #38 on the Wine Spectator top 100 list. When we served it to our guests, it was easy to see why it had achieved such acclaim. It was the Belle of the Ball! It soon became my favorite wine to recommend to people looking for something a little different.

Today, The Prisoner sells for \$40. It has increased in production from 4,500 cases in 2005 to over 70,000 cases today. The wine maker and founder of Orin Swift, Dave Phinney, is now a wealthy man making lots of interesting wine. He sold The Prisoner in 2009 and the most recent vintage is his last as a consultant for the making of the wine which is now made by The Prisoner Wine Company. Now winemakers everywhere are blending all sorts of grapes in an effort to recreate The Prisoner success story. The Prisoner started a jail break!

While I mourn the passing of a dear wine friend (and by that I mean passing my price point for an everyday bottle of wine), I am delighted that so many other wine makers have filled the void. If you are looking for a unique red blend with a catchy name and an attractive price point, there have never been more options. Here are five that, while probably not quite as amazing as The Prisoner, will surely delight you for less than half the price. Grape varieties in parentheses.

- Dunham Three Legged Red Columbia Valley 2011 \$19 (Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot)
- Beckmen Cuvee Le Bec Santa Ynez Valley 2011 \$18 (Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre, Counoise)
- Bogle Phantom California 2010 \$18 (Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Mourvedre)
- Cline Cashmere California 2012 \$17 (Mourvedre, Syrah, Grenache, Petite Sirah)
- David Hill Winery Farmhouse Red NV \$12 (Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Pinot Noir, Counoise)
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**To all our wonderful clients and friends (many of whom are the same folks!), thank you for enriching our lives.
*Laugh and Learn!***

From Our Blog: Are You Listening?

As part of my Masters of Education degree from the University of Illinois, I experienced several courses that focused on the transfer of learning and examined exactly how individuals convert information to which they are exposed into something that they understand and can use in the future. As a teacher, I have organized my presentations around a simple model of absorb, connect and apply. The absorb step involves sharing information with students and requires that the recipient is actually paying attention. More than just hearing, a successful absorb activity requires the student to truly understand what is being said.

There exist several theories that individuals have different preferences for how they learn. Research suggests that people utilize different learning modalities based on their sensory preferences. This particular theory suggests that some people are auditory learners, others are visual learners and still others are kinesthetic oriented. Auditory learners, as the theory goes, are well suited to understand what they hear and convert that information to useful knowledge. Visual learners are more inclined to convert information to knowledge if they can see it. Kinesthetic learners, it is suggested, are more prone to learn when they physically interact with the subject or can imagine doing so through the use of stories told that recreate a specific application of the topic.

While the theory has its detractors, I have found it to be a useful tool in providing instruction. [Read more here!](#)