

Leaders Hold the Vision

Notes on Living, Leading, and Legacy

An ebook by John David Mann

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The essays in this ebook are adapted in part from material previously appearing in my [Journal](#) (blog), in my book *The Zen of MLM*, and in *Networking Times*.

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Living

The Blank Page

Take Its Hand

It starts with a blank page. The next thirty minutes; tomorrow; next Tuesday. The rest of your life. Does it seem that it's already booked, mapped, planned out, determined? Oh, the obligations, expectations, responsibilities, limitations —

Figments of your imagination. None of that is real.

The rest of your life is a canvas you have yet to paint, a 3D screen waiting for the film you're about to write, star in, direct and produce.

Perhaps we think of our future as a rapidly filling calendar, a place already charted and committed, because it feels safer that way. Emptiness looming before us can feel daunting. Writers often talk about the terror of the blank page. Aaron Sorkin (*A Few Good Men*, *The American President*, *West Wing*) put it this way:

"I love writing but hate starting. The page is awfully white and it says, You may have fooled some of the people some of the time but those days are over, giftless. I'm not your agent and I'm not your mommy, I'm a white piece of paper, you wanna dance with me?"

The late great Jeff MacNeilly, cartoonist-author of "Shoe," said:

"Writing is easy. All you have to do is stare at a blank piece of paper until beads of blood start to form on your forehead."

Ernest Hemingway, who competed in amateur bullfighting competitions, survived a plane crash, and was awarded a Bronze Star for bravery in combat during one of the several wars covered as a journalist, was once asked what was the most frightening thing he ever encountered. His reply:

“A blank sheet of paper.”

I see it a little differently. When I look at a blank sheet of paper (or its present-day equivalent, a blank Word document), it looks not like a terrifying mountain peak daring me to scale it, but like a trusting child, reaching out its hand and counting on me, with that unerringly unselfconscious faith that only a child can have, to take it and lead us to wherever it is we are supposed to go.

In the face of such total trust, who am I to doubt?

So I take its hand, and off we go.

Your life offers a blank page. Take its hand . . . and off you go.

The Hard Part

Feeling Tumblers Through Steel

I've just spent a week doing what for me is the hardest part of writing: *starting*. If life is a blank page, then this must be what it's like to create one's life.

I'm working on a new book, need to have a draft done in a few weeks. But that's not the hard part. The hard part is figuring out what the book *is*.

This is the cutting-down-the-trees part of the cabinet-making, the part in the very beginning, the part nobody else ever sees. This is the part when there's nothing to show for what you've been doing for all these endless struggling hours. You can easily spend the entire day sweating, striving and laboring mightily, and end up feeling like you've wasted the whole time.

Once a project is in full swing, I might turn out one or two thousand words a day. At that point, the book sprouts like an adolescent hitting a full-on, high-hormone growth spurt. At that point, the project makes a lot of noise.

Later, when the book is in completed first draft and it's time to go back through it, refining, rewriting, adjusting — that's the easiest part. At that point, you're dealing with a fully (or mostly) grown adult; there's plenty to show for your effort, and it goes fast. I've gone through an entire book, doing thorough copy-edits and even major rewrites, in a matter of days, dealing with tens of thousands of words per day.

But not now.

At this messy stage, the project isn't even really born yet. I can't see it. I don't know what it is. And so I spend the day groping, messing around with a few paragraphs of clumsy ideas, and they don't look much different (and certainly no better) at the end of the day than they did at the beginning.

Hours go by. I catch myself playing solitaire on my mobile phone. I'm doing email. Oops. Back to the book. Hey, I never realized ironing was this much fun. Back to the book. ("I'm hungry." *Stop that. You just had lunch an hour ago.* "Buddayum huuunnnngreee . . ." *I said no!*) Back to the book.

You don't have to be a writer to know what this is like.

This is the hardest part of creating anything. It's the part nobody sees, the part where there's no glory, where you feel the most unsure — and it's where the real work happens.

This is the time of trusting yourself.

For me, it's where I have to trust that there is a book in there waiting to be found. That once its core ideas have been excavated, I'm going to feel like I know what I'm doing, it's going to get easier.

And it goes like this for *days*.

And then today, suddenly, something shows up. I'm doodling around, polishing an introduction that I wrote ages ago (and that needs no polishing) and playing with a few other pieces of text that I might or might not use, and I realize a few intriguing ideas have just unearthed themselves. They have a substantial feel.

I reword them, and now they seem like key principles . . . six of them. I write them down, rewrite them, sort and shuffle. Something's missing.

Then, a seventh. *Click*.

It's a magical moment, like a key fitting into a lock. For days I have been feeling like a safecracker, straining to feel the tumblers with my fingertips through inches of poker-faced steel, like trying to *listen* through my fingertips — impossible, but necessary. Now, all at once, I feel an unseen tumbler slipping and turning.

Creeeeeak . . .

And I'm in! I know what this book is about, and how its pieces fit together. Now I just have to write it. And while that *looks* like the hard part, the part where all the work happens, it's not. The hard part is behind me now: it was being willing to struggle with the unseen, to spend days working hard, only to end up at dinnertime with no visible evidence that anything at all was happening, and still trust that *something was*.

In that way, living a life is very much like writing a book.

The writer Joan Didion once said, "I write to find out what I think."

We live to find out who we *are*.

Making Real Realer

The Life Well Told

One summer, when I was a kid, I read Fred Gipson's 1956 classic *Old Yeller*. I hadn't seen the movie version (still haven't), so all I had to go on was the words on the page. When I got to the end, when the boy Travis Coates has to shoot his beloved dog, I cried and cried.

That same summer, I also read a book that had just come out in paperback, *Born Free*, Joy Adamson's real-life memoir of her experiences in Africa with a lion cub named Elsa. The movie had not yet been made, nor the Oscar-winning theme song yet written. At the end of that book, as a postscript, the author notes that Elsa died. I remember closing the book and realizing with a stunned shock that I had not shed a single tear when I read about Elsa's death.

Why not?

At the tender age of 8, I was a bit freaked out at my own lack of response. Here I'd wept and wept over the death of a dog who I *knew* was a complete fiction, an invention of the author's imagination. And now, faced with a description of the actual, nonfictional death of a real animal whose entire life I had just read about, I was unmoved.

Why?

My mom helped me figure this out. It was the story-telling, she said.

I don't have a copy of *Born Free*, but my recollection is that Elsa's death was reported in a brief epilogue, a line or two that seemed almost an afterthought. "A few weeks later, Elsa died in the bush." No details given, no reactions noted.

When Gipson describes the death of Old Yeller, it's similarly brief, almost telegraphic, yet at the same time bursting with pathos and feeling, told from the boy Travis's point of view. Amazingly, I feel myself tearing up right now, remembering it nearly half a century later. *And the dog wasn't even real.*

Or was he?

Thinking back on that heart-wrenching scene stirs resonant chords: pets in my past who are long gone; people in my life who've died; and for that matter, pets and people who *haven't* died, but those I simply love—and who *will* die someday. The events of Gipson's tale might be fictional, but the feelings he evokes circle back and embrace events and characters as real as can be, making them even more real.

That's what great story-telling is: not simply real, but *realer* than real. That's how a story-teller's art works.

Come to think of it, that's how your life works. It's a story you're telling. No wonder it's so real.

"Sure You Can"

Lessons on Staying Young

I am 6 years old and have just asked my mom to help me make a list of piano compositions I have learned to play. I've come up with three, maybe four, all of the two- and three-note variety. (Mozart, I am not.) She glances at the list and comments, "Away in a Manger." I look at her with genuine astonishment. *Away in a Manger?! That's pretty advanced stuff . . . I can't play that!*

She says, "Sure you can."

We sit down at the keyboard. Thirty minutes later, she's right: I can. I feel exuberant. Come to think of it, everything I've been able to accomplish in my life I attribute to youthful exuberance. Not mine: hers.

Fast forward seven years.

I am 13 and my mom is planning a school trip to Greece with me and about a dozen classmates. We're going to perform Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. She says, we ought to have music for the choruses. She asks, would I mind writing it? Just like that. Like asking if I wouldn't mind doing the dishes.

But . . . I'm no composer. I'm 13! I can't set Aeschylus to concert-quality music!

She says, "Sure you can."

A few months later we are performing the music in an ancient stone amphitheater near Delphi — the same spot, incredibly, where the play had its premiere several thousand years ago.

A few years later I'm at a reception at the Waldorf Astoria in New York . . . because I've won the international BMI Awards for Student Composers.

My mom was right again.

A few years after the BMI ceremony, I'm on the verge of doing something a little radical: I'm about to drop out of high school in order to start a new school with some friends. We've been talking. We're all going to schools we hate, and one day we think, wouldn't it be cool to start our own school, where we could actually learn something?

But we're only kids. We can't really start our own high school . . . can we? And you already know what my mom has to say about that.

"Sure you can."

We meet. We dream, talk, plan, take action. A year later we're an independent alternative high school that goes on to send its graduates to places like Yale and Harvard. I end up graduating, and then teaching there myself.

The bumble bee, Mary Kay used to say, flies because it doesn't realize that it can't.

When I was young, adults would ask, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I never knew how to answer that. I still don’t. Maybe I never grew up. But why “be” one thing? My mom had a different approach. She simply said, “You can do whatever you set out to do.” For five decades, I’ve been putting her belief to the test. If I were a high-wire performer with my mom’s philosophy as my only net, I’d still feel pretty safe.

They say children will drive you crazy asking the question, “Why?” But we know we’ve truly taught them well when we hear them ask this one: *Why not?*

And if you think you can’t, my mom has three words for you: *Sure you can.*

The Cliff

You Might As Well Jump

When I was 19, I was offered a position as composition instructor at a university. To my dad, a musicologist and college professor, this must have seemed a dream come true. What more wonderful career opportunity for a budding composer than a university position!

Which made it all the more amazing that, when I turned down the offer in order to pack my stuff and move up to Boston to study macrobiotic philosophy and drive a cab instead, my dad did not even flinch.

To this day, I cannot quite imagine how it is that he did not throw a fit. But he didn't. He absorbed the news and said nothing. Years later, he confided to me that, with the wisdom of hindsight, he was now so glad I had *not* taken the university position. "It wouldn't have been right for you," he said. "They would have driven you crazy." I hope I am able always to muster such restraint and trust in the face of my own kids' decisions (which by definition are at times bound to appear whacko).

When my dad was 19, he had a college position ripped away from him — not by choice but by history. As a young German with some Jewish blood, he arrived in Berlin in 1936 to assume a teaching post he had won, only to find himself barred from entering. Within the year he had left home, career and country. As he writes in his memoir, *Recollections and Reflections*:

“It was on my twentieth birthday, in 1937, that I first realized that I must leave my homeland. What loomed as a desperate conflict then became in retrospect my future’s blessing, but it took time to arrive at such understanding.”

I love that last observation. *But it took time to arrive at such understanding.* Doesn’t it always?

I had perplexed my dad before when, at 17, I dropped out of high school and started my own alternative school with a group of friends. When I later graduated from that school, which we called Changes, Inc., my diploma bore an inscription (from unknown source — probably something we made up ourselves):

“We did not know what to expect upon the open road, but we began here.”

A noble sentiment — which my father quietly and good-naturedly lampooned with this paraphrase: “*We had no idea what the hell we were doing, but we did it anyway.*” I think he got it exactly right.

We like to think we can offer guidance to our young, and I suppose, in many ways, we can. But for this and every generation, life is essentially this: *jumping off a cliff.*

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid are driven by the superposse to a cliff overhanging a river far below. Butch says they’ve got to jump; Sundance refuses. Why? He finally confesses: “I can’t swim.” Butch gives him an incredulous look and says, “You crazy bastard! The *fall* will probably kill you!”

I still have no idea what’s ahead on that open road. Neither does anyone else. Tomorrow is a cliff overhanging a river far below. Afraid you can’t jump? Hey, the *fall* will probably kill you. Might as well jump.

The Cello Lesson

If You Can't Sing It, There's Nothing to Play

Playing cello since the age of 13 has given me the opportunity to study with a number of masters of the instrument. The most fascinating cello lesson I ever had was from a maestro in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Having heard a great deal about him, I was apprehensive as I sat down in his studio and took bow in hand.

He asked, "What are you going to play for me?" I said, "Haydn, C-Major Concerto."

He said, "Play," sat back, closed his eyes, and prepared to drink in the sound.

I had learned the entire first movement to perfection, I thought. I drew a breath and plunged in — and had completed only the first section when he said, "Stop." I looked up.

"That was very nice. Again, please." Again? But I hadn't even gotten to finish the movement! Okay. I reassembled my concentration, drew another breath, prepared for a glorious seven-minute sky dive, and again began the sonorous opening passages of the great C-Major.

This time he stopped me after just the first eight notes. "Again, please," he said. I started over.

Eight notes. "Stop. Please, again." Furrowed brow. Beads of sweat. Another breath. Eight notes — "Stop."

Now I really stopped. Looked at him. He looked at me. He said, "Your cello sounds marvelous. Now I want your cello to disappear. I want to hear *you*. Try it again." Eight notes. "Again." Eight notes. "Again." Eight notes. "Stop."

Then he did something unexpected. "Here, look . . . put your cello down for a moment. Sing it to me."

I protested, "Sing the Haydn Concerto? I don't think I can sing that." (I am a fairly decent cellist; Pavarotti I am not.)

"If you can't sing it," he told me, "then there's nothing there to play. So sing it."

So I sang it, over and over. Eight notes, the maestro stopping me each time. After the ninth or tenth try I must have found the conviction in my voice that he was listening for, because he stopped me once more, this time agitated with excitement, and exclaimed, "That's wonderful! Now do that with your cello." I picked up the cello, played those eight notes — and he smiled.

You may have all sorts of tools to help you in your career. Perhaps you have beautiful web sites, cleverly constructed autoresponders. Professionally tooled presentations in streaming audiovideo. Integrated social media campaigns. We embrace these marvelous new tools, their whispered promises draped like perfumed veils seductively at our front doors: *We'll build your business for you, we'll make your life easier. . .*

But the truth is, they don't, and won't.

Yes, digital technology has opened new doors to immense possibilities and opportunities. Social media have burst old bonds and leveled acres of playing fields. But the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Will new technologies make the mechanical, technological, fundamentally impersonal functions of your business easier? Absolutely. Which will provide you more room to get down to the real business of your business — which is to *create value*.

And here you must set your cello down, because at its core, the value you bring others is about *who you are*.

The real task of business, of *any* business, is the art of relationship. That's why machines can't do it for you. George Burns once said, "In Hollywood, sincerity is everything. If you can fake that, you've got it made." Business is at its core about authenticity — and that cannot be faked, simulated, scripted, or duplicated. Web sites will never build your business, no more than the carefully crafted words of a sales script or the pretty pictures in a brochure.

These can be marvelous instruments. What builds your business is *you*.

If you can't sing it, then there's nothing there to play.

So sing it.

The Eighth Day

The Day That Never Comes

“Some day, when I have the time, I’m going to . . . Some day, when I have the money, I’m going to . . .”

Have you ever said that? “*Some day . . .*” It’s a way we have of reinforcing the illusion that the future is safely far removed, that it doesn’t really touch us in our here and now. It’s a lie. Not a willful, intentional deception, but a lie nonetheless.

Let’s say that, “some day,” you’re going to travel around the world. If that’s really true, if you genuinely intend for that to happen, then here’s how that looks: *you’re making plans*. If it’s not practical for you to just up and circumnavigate the globe right this instant, then you are looking at what needs to happen first, and second, and third, to end up with that result. You’re at the drawing board, making genuine preparations, excited and ready to go.

When you set that process in motion, the words “some day” disappear. You’re making it happen today, right now. In a very real sense, you are *already taking* the trip. It may be months or years before you actually do the physical traveling, but the words “some day” no longer apply — so you stop using them.

When we say “some day,” though, we’re not really talking about our future. Our future is a concrete reality that we’re connected to by what we’re doing *right now*. “Some day” is about some vague possibility that we’re not taking seriously.

“Some day” is not a vision of your future. “Some day” is a fantasy — nothing more.

Here’s the damage we do with this illusion. When we give weight to our “some day” fantasies, we squeeze some sense of enjoyment from them *as if they were real* — and in so doing give ourselves permission to take no practical action whatsoever while we swim in the comforting sense that those some-day scenarios will somehow, on their own, move closer to the unfolding present . . . eventually.

But they won’t. The wistful, wouldn’t-it-be-nice pretendings of maybe-futures do not insert themselves into your reality of their own accord. You’ve got to go claim them. You’ve got to grab hold of those practical steps you can take *today* to move your dreams and aspirations from the realm of *some day* to the world of *right now*.

Ask yourself, “What is there in my life that I hold as ‘some day . . .’?”

Some day . . . the eighth day of the week. The day that never comes.

There is no eighth day. This is the day — *this* one. Right here. Right now.

Intention

Strings to the Future

The word *intention*, meaning “to stretch in a certain direction,” comes from the Latin *tendere*, meaning “to stretch.” Related to the Sanskrit *tantram*, meaning “loom,” it also owes homage to the Persian *tar* and the Greek *tono*, which means “string” and therefore also “sound” or “musical note.”

Stretch, loom, string, note . . . let’s put this all together:

To create an intention around a thought is to take that thought and string it out as the threads of a loom, weaving a tapestry of the future — to stretch it out as the strings of a musical instrument and play the melody of your heart’s desire.

What a beautiful word: *intend*.

P.S. The word “goal” is believed to derive from the Old English word *gal*, which referred to the “barrier” or “obstacle” at the end of a race, and is related to *gælan*, meaning “to hinder.” Hmm.

Knowing what you now know about the two words, which would you rather have: a *goal*, or an *intention*?

Leading

Leaders Hold the Vision

Stance, Substance, and Circumstance

Master motivator Zig Ziglar once said, “People with hope take action. Encouragement is the fuel on which that hope runs. That encouragement is what everyone needs.”

That’s a good job description for a leader: *You are the fuel on which others’ hope runs.* You create a context for other people’s actions by articulating and embodying that hope.

The apostle Paul enunciated an intriguing leadership concept: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.” (At least I suspect it was Paul; scholars aren’t sure. In any case, it was whoever penned the *Letter to the Hebrews*: this is the opening of Hebrews 11:1.)

When people start out in any new endeavor, pursuit or movement, they *hope* it will work. But hope alone is not a force sufficient to keep them in the game long enough to get results.

In the original Greek text, the word we translate as “substance” is *hypostasis*, which literally means “standing under.” (Look inside the English word “substance” and you’ll find the same concept.) That’s a good definition for faith, and for vision, too. Your *stance* is where you stand, your thoughts and ideas, your wants and intentions — and your hopes. Faith is what exists behind or *under* your stance.

The single biggest challenge to any young and growing organization (as to any young and growing person) is the constant current of emotional disorder that swirls around it. People are surrounded by doubts, fears and disbelief, both others' and their own. Your job as a leader is to *hold the vision* for people — your company's vision, your industry's vision, your own vision. *Their* vision. They count on you and rely on you to do this.

It's one of the biggest jobs you have.

Virtually everyone who follows you (or who *may* do so) is to some degree infected by a universal epidemic of low financial and professional self-esteem. People are just *looking* for evidence that "this won't work." Your accomplishments won't help the situation, either: the more impressive your skills, whether at speaking, presenting, performing or achieving, the more likely the other person is to say to him- or herself, "That might work for you — but I'll *never* be able to do that!"

Those swirling currents of doubt, fear and skepticism that bathe people's psyches are what surrounds their stance — literally, their *circumstance*.

One of the most important leadership attributes you can bring to the people in any organization or enterprise is your clarity about what it is you're all doing together. If you are conflicted or discontented, apologetic or defensive, they won't "catch the vision" from you, they'll instead catch your ambiguity like the infectious disease that it is.

The people who look to you for leadership don't need you to have all the answers or to be sure to the point of fanaticism. They *do* want you to have the

courage of your convictions. They want to know that you know what you're talking about. They don't necessarily want you to always be in charge, but they do want you to *lead* the charge.

The moment your vision falters — your *substance* — is the moment their faith starts to fade too, eroded by the entropy of their circumstance.

These are the two forces, your *substance* and their *circumstance*, that battle for influence over their *stance*, over what they believe and feel, which in turn determines the decisions they make and the actions they take. Your confident vision plays tug-of-war with their context of motivational hydrogen-death.

Some people look as if they're ready to set the world on fire when they join your business, your organization, your cause. Don't believe it. Everyone, absolutely everyone, needs to be not just enrolled but also re-enrolled, and re-enrolled again. Circumstance will serve as a continual drag on their confidence in whatever it is you're doing together.

This is why orientations, newsletters, info packs or follow-up kits typically accomplish so little. People need more than informational content; they need emotional content, personal content, belief content. They need the most important thing you have to offer, which is something they cannot get from anywhere else. They need your unshakable substance. They need your faith. They need leadership.

They need *you*.

You are the evidence of what they cannot yet see.

Genuine Leadership

Cultivating the Art of Kindness

Among orchestral musicians, there is a favorite story about Fritz Reiner, the brilliant maestro and stern taskmaster of the Chicago Symphony.

Reiner was famous for his tiny, hyper-controlled conducting movements (more or less the opposite of the grand-sweep-gesture Leonard Bernstein school). One day, as a joke, a double bass player brought in a pair of binoculars to rehearsal. As Reiner began conducting, the bass player raised his binoculars and peered through them at the maestro. Without missing a beat (literally), Reiner continued conducting with his left hand while with his right, he scribbled a hasty note and held it up so the bass player could read it.

It said, "You're fired."

That's one leadership style. My father had a different one.

For fourteen years, my father conducted one of the country's most famous Bach choirs (in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania). I played in the orchestra several times. My father's voice is so soft, it's often hard to hear in normal conversation, and on a crowded rehearsal stage, practically impossible. However, I noticed that not a single musician ever missed a word. Why? Because they were so quiet, a dropped pin would have sounded like cymbals clashing in the *1812 Overture*.

Why so quiet? Because they were craning to hear his every word.

I've seen the most cynical, don't-tell-me New York union musician turn into putty when my father made a suggestion to start this passage with an up-bow, or to take that passage *sotto voce* so we could more clearly hear the tenors. People would turn themselves inside out to follow him, and they would follow him anywhere. There are two reasons for this: he was superb at what he did — and he treated them with *respect*.

This is another leadership style altogether.

This is like the difference between pushing and pulling. How far can you push a column of air into a room with an ordinary window fan? Not far: within a few feet it starts doubling back on itself. But reverse the fan's position so that it is blowing out and you can *pull* that same column of air from a single open window clear on the other side of the house, even hundreds of feet away.

How far can one push people? How far can one pull them? (The question makes me think of Tom Sawyer drawing in his friends to whitewash the fence. Twain knew about pulling.)

There is leadership that pushes. And there is leadership that pulls.

When that second kind of leadership speaks — even when in a voice as soft as my father's — people listen, because they trust. That kind of leadership, we'll follow anywhere.

"Musician, mentor, friend." So read the headline of a newspaper story about my dad, a year after he died. "Noted as a scholar and a gentleman," it went on, "the late Alfred Mann is credited with bringing attention to early music. As brilliant as he was in his field, Mann also was gifted in the art of kindness."

The story marked an event, the Alfred Mann Music Festival, held in the fall of 2007 in Rochester, New York, to celebrate his life and career.

As exquisite as the musical performances were (Handel's *Messiah*, performed from my dad's edition, and Bach's *B Minor Mass*, his signature piece and one which I had to privilege and delight to play under his direction many times), the really remarkable experience was being with so many of my dad's friends and colleagues and hearing all they had to say about him.

One of these was Michael Dodds, a young teaching assistant who had grown quite close to my dad and lunched with him weekly for an eight-year stretch. In the program notes for the festival concerts, Michael wrote this:

"I find it remarkable that in spite of the tremendous adversity Alfred faced during his formative years and early adulthood, during one of the starkest manifestations of evil in human history, I never heard him express bitterness or regret. For every path denied, new opportunities, discoveries, and friendships resulted, and he never lost his wonderment and gratitude for these things."

At a special dinner held for festival participants, Michael asked me about that. Had I ever heard a bitter word from my father about the havoc that Nazism wreaked on his homeland and his own life?

After giving it a few moments' careful thought, I replied, "No — never." Upon further thought, I recalled this sole exception:

My dad told me once that when he was a teenager, a Nazi military parade went through his town. He needed to get across the street, thought he saw a quick opening and tried to dart through the column of soldiers. Nobody stopped: they trampled him, destroying his bike, and kept right on marching. (Eveready Bunny meets Hieronymus Bosch!) Yet he described this scene without a trace of rancor or vitriol, but with a simple sense of continuing marvel at how awful human beings could become. And having thus marveled, he then set the entire issue aside to focus on what mattered to him, which was how magnificent human beings can become and what beauty they can create.

You become what you focus on. Surrounded by monsters, he never focused on monstrosity, but kept his gaze always on Bach, Handel, family and friends. As far as I can tell, that's how you cultivate "the art of kindness."

Perhaps that is also the art of genuine leadership.

Compassion

What Matters, and What Doesn't

One New England summer evening in 2009, while my sweet wife Ana was traveling in Singapore, I had dinner out on our deck with her sweet mother, Sylvia. As we chatted over salmon and goat cheese, she told me about an experience from her youth.

As a nursing student at Franklin Hospital in Greenfield, Massachusetts, Sylvia had a paper to write. The students in her class each had to pick a patient they had worked with and prepare a detailed report on the patient's condition, treatment, progress, and the rest.

She chose a young woman who was pregnant, and had all sorts of complications. The pregnancy was not going well, and the woman had a really rough time of it. To make matters worse, there was no husband: Sylvia's patient was an unwed mother.

This was the 1940s, remember: the stigma of unmarried pregnancy loomed large, and unwed mothers had a much tougher time of things than they do today.

Sylvia (then all of 18) sympathized with the young woman, but decided that her marital status was not relevant to the matter at hand, and she made a point of leaving it out of her paper altogether.

She did a pile of research, documented the woman's condition and progress carefully, including the birth, which she attended. The birth went well. The woman called her baby Treasure, which no doubt was quite accurate.

When the papers came back graded, Sylvia was nervous. She had really worked hard on it and hoped it had gotten at least a passing grade. With her first glance she saw the big letter A written at the top. Then she looked closer, and realized it didn't say A.

It said A+.

Sylvia was both thrilled and puzzled. She went to see the instructor and asked, what was so good about the paper that it had earned her an A+?

"You did an excellent job with your research," the woman told her. "The case was documented well. It was clearly work that deserved an A."

She paused.

"And I noticed that you left out any mention of the fact that the young woman was not married.

"That deserved an A plus."

Being Heard

The Bond Forged by Listening

My office is downstairs in our house; directly above me is the living room, at the edge of which sit the food and water dishes of our inimitable seven-pound poodle, Ben.

One night while focused on a manuscript at my desk, I heard the *pat-pat-pat-pat-pat* of Ben's tiny feet upstairs as he trotted in from our bedroom (where he had been faithfully guarding Ana while she watched TV) through the kitchen and toward the location of the dishes. From the sound of it, he was popping in for a drink of water.

Cocking my ear, I heard that right-to-left *pat-pat-pat-pat-pat*, followed by a brief pause — too brief for drinking and with no telltale *clink-clink-clink-clink-clink* of his dogtags signifying his lapping at the dish — and then an immediate about-face left-to-right *pat-pat-pat-pat-pat* receding again toward the hallway, where the stairs are located.

Then about ten seconds of silence.

And then my door slipped slowly open an inch. His nose poked through, then his face. He trotted toward me and stopped. He looked at me. I looked back.

"What's up, Ben?" I said. "No water? Your dish empty?"

I will never forget the look on his face.

His is an awfully expressive face, but I don't think I'd ever seen him register such an unmistakable expression before, and perhaps not since. He did a visible double-take and gaped at me with a look of stunned revelation, notching his head forward a full two inches to peer at me with intensity, a gaze that said unambiguously:

Yes! Yes! That's *exactly* what I meant! How the hell did you *know*?!

I got up and went upstairs, him trotting excitedly at my heels, and found the water dish empty.

Ever since that day, Ben has been noticeably more attached to me, more so than he ever was before.

What a powerful thing it is, whether for dog or for human: to be seen, heard and understood by another.

The Power to Create or Tear Down

The Words Come First, Then the Phenomenon

The words you speak have enormous impact on others. Indeed, which words you use and how you use them is one of the most powerful leadership secrets there is. Yet often we don't even realize what it is we're saying.

I recently lost my phone charger and went to the store to buy a replacement. Standing at the register, I held out my debit card and looked uncertainly at the card-swiping gizmo. The man behind the register saw my confusion and said, "Strip down. Facing me." I paused, then repeated his words back to him.

The woman at the next register burst out laughing.

Strip down. Facing me.

Words. Honestly, they're pretty malleable.

I have a friend who grew up hearing "Silent Night" and thinking that "Round John Virgin" was a character in the story.

When I was 6, I had a classmate who wet her bed every night. My mom told me she had "a bladder problem." I had no idea what a "bladder" was. I thought she said my friend had "a splatter problem," and that made perfect sense to me.

When my son Nick was very young, he had a problem pronouncing the words "airplane" and "airport." He said, "ahhplane" and "ahhport." This went on for a few years.

Then one day, we drove to the Charlottesville *Ahh*port to pick up my dad, who was coming for a visit. We collected the maestro, and as we began driving home, Nick said something about how exciting it was to “come get Grandpa at the *ahh*port.” Then he turned to my dad and explained, in perfect English, “I can’t say *airport*.”

“No?” said my dad, intrigued. “What do you say?”

“I say, *ahh*port,” Nick replied.

Words often get a bum rap. “We tried to talk it over,” sings George Benson, “but the words got in the way.” I don’t think so. I think it’s more like this: “We tried to talk it over, but *we* got in the way.”

People often say of some especially intense experience, “Words cannot describe how I felt.” Sure they can. It’s a question of how you’re using them.

We often don’t realize the power our words have to influence others — and ourselves.

There’s a scene in the film *American Beauty* where the parents (played by Annette Bening and Kevin Spacey) have just seen their daughter Jane (Thora Birch) in a high school dance number, and the mom says:

“Honey, I’m so proud of you! I watched you very closely, and you didn’t screw up once!”

What’s the real message? “I totally expected you to screw up, because that’s what you always do — but for once, you didn’t, and boy, was I surprised!”

She could have told Jane how great she looked, how well she moved, how good her timing was and how fantastic the coordination of the whole group was, or any one of a hundred things that would have affirmed something positive about who Jane is and what she accomplished. But Jane's mom was so busy being vigilant about what she saw as Jane's potential to screw up, that was all she could comment on. It's a classic passive-aggressive, "left-handed compliment" — the sort of compliment that actually conveys a concealed insult.

And by the way, nobody is more expert at giving us left-handed compliments than we ourselves.

If you get a chance to watch the film, pay attention to Thora Birch's expression as her character's mother delivers that line. Does she get the message? She sure does. We all do. We always get the message behind the words, even if we're not consciously aware of it.

Compare this scene in *Julie & Julia*, when Julia Child (Meryl Streep) is distraught because a major publisher has once again turned down her manuscript. As her husband Paul (Stanley Tucci) consoles her, he paints a word picture for her of how her book is absolutely going to be published and is going to be a huge success. Then he tells her:

"Your book is genius. Your book is going to change the world."

He was right, of course. It was, and it did. *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* transformed cooking in American households for generations.

But would all that have happened if he had not said those words?

Here is what James (Jesus' little brother) had to say about the power of the human tongue (James 3:1 ff.):

“Look at ships: they may be huge and driven by fierce winds, but they can be turned by this tiny little rudder in whatever direction the pilot chooses. That’s the power of the tongue. . . .”

The man ought to know: he was involved in some pretty powerful networking circles and saw both sides of the word-of-mouth coin. In fact, he ended up being hurled off the temple wall and stoned to death because of the propaganda people promulgated about him in their first-century version of the telephone game.

Obi Wan told Luke that the power of The Force could be used for great good, or for great evil. Consider yourself a Jedi Knight of the Force of words.

The fourth gospel-writer claims that words were here before we were: “In the beginning was the Word.” Genesis confirms the sequence: God says “Light — *be!*” and then light *is*. The words come first, then the phenomenon.

Words, in other words, are not mere reporters after the fact, but central players in the drama.

Words create.

Words *lead*.

Three Powerful Words

. . . and the Elevation of Character

During the financial meltdown of late 2008 and early 2009, it was surreal to watch the news and see that nobody — not one Wall Street banker, Washington politician or media commentator — would admit culpability. Day after day the reports continued, the analyses, the hand-wringing, the opinionating and pontificating.

We kept waiting to see genuine leadership. It never appeared. What would it have taken? One person to stand before the camera and say those three little words that mean so much:

“I was wrong.”

In 1633, the Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei was tried, convicted and sentenced to death. (The sentence was eventually commuted to house arrest for life, which, while an improvement over execution, was still pretty austere.) His heresy: publishing a book that claimed the earth was not the center of the universe. Eventually, the church acknowledged that Galileo was right, and that they had been wrong to condemn him. But this acknowledgment did not come in his lifetime, and not even in his century. In fact, can you guess when the great man was finally given an official, formal apology? October 31, 1992.

It's never too late to say those three little words. (Bankers, take note.)

Why is it that we so ardently cling to the illusion of being right? In *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle writes, “The obsessive need to be right is an expression of the fear of death.”

The first time I heard those words I was driving down Route 81 somewhere in the mountains of western Pennsylvania, listening to Tolle on audiotape, and that single sentence so riveted me that I had to pull off the highway to stop, rewind, and listen again.

The obsessive need to be right is an expression of the fear of death.

Had this man just identified the single most compelling cause of conflict — from friendly household spats to global warfare — in the history of civilization?

Perhaps we hold tight to our rightness out of the sense that doing so might enable us to stay in control of our world. My experience is that in fact, it does quite the opposite. The more tightly I try to hold onto being right, the more relationships and events seem to spiral out of control.

Giving up the need to be right, even the *right* to be right, may well be the single most important step one can take in the passage from childhood to adulthood. (Some, alas, never quite take that step.)

As a leader, one of the most empowering things one can do is to declare openly and without rancor, “I was wrong.” I believe this is an act that can elevate one’s character and ennoble one’s life as almost nothing else can. The capacity to admit you were wrong — not grudgingly, not under duress or someone else’s insistence, but freely and in the spirit of excited discovery — is a glorious thing for the care and feeding of your soul, and of your relationships.

Here is a proposition, which I invite you to test out in the crucible of personal experience:

You will participate in and serve a team only to the degree that you give up the right to be right.

It may be that the person most driven by the need to be right is the one most likely to undermine and even destroy the team. And that the person most free of that need is where the heart of the team most resides.

Sips of Silence

Leading By Not Talking

This year I celebrated my birthday by spending twenty-four hours writing *nothing*.

For a writer, spending time not writing is precious, in the same way that cleaning out your closet helps grow your wardrobe and having earthworms in your garden helps the soil bring forth plants. It's the *aeration* that comes from introducing emptiness.

Empty space is one of the greatest treasures the passing years reveal. It is the core secret of all creative endeavors, the one that most readily divides wannabes from masters. The value of white space in page layout; of silence in music; of understatement in rhetoric. Of knowing when the greatest eloquence lies in not saying anything at all.

In traditional churches, mosques and synagogues there are vast empty spaces above our heads — extra breathing space, someone once said, “to leave room for God.” In the same way, the conscious pause in action leaves room for inspiration, and the silence of listening makes room for other people.

This is where the most fertile impact of leadership resides: not in the speaking and doing, but in the actively passive — in the devotion to making room for another.

Blaise Pascal, writing during the generation of Isaac Newton, when the science of Europe was just beginning to grasp the vastness of the universe, wrote, "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me." (*Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.*)

I like to think of these infinite spaces as a pool from which one may sip when the brain and heart become parched from too much fullness, too much noise.

Legacy

Footprints

The Other Side of Frailty

It was cold and icy, the day before Thanksgiving, and I was pumping gas into my car, or trying to anyway. After a few attempts, the gizmo still wasn't working. I was annoyed. I turned to step over the hose and head into the station to get an attendant.

Suddenly I heard an eerie sound: it sounded just like the *thwack!* of a baseball and bat making contact. But it was neither bat nor ball: it was the sound of a human head slamming into concrete.

My head.

I'd tripped on the hose, and suddenly I was face-down in blood.

It's so easy to forget, but this is exactly how life operates. One second you're standing upright, absorbed in a petty annoyance, and a split second later you're lying prone on concrete, bleeding profusely and marveling at how utterly and instantaneously your reality has changed.

People later asked me, "What lessons did you learn from having your head cracked open on a filling station pavement?" I had to think about this.

Lesson #1: Concrete is hard. Also, be careful how you step over things. These are two parts of the same lesson, and it's a good one to learn.

Lesson #2: That stitching thing they do at hospitals? That's amazing. I had never been awake for stitches before. It makes me immensely grateful that we have hospitals, antiseptics, and doctors. (Ana successfully removed five of my six stitches at home; the sixth was coy, and I eventually ended up having the local doc coax it out.)

Those were the more obvious lessons. Eventually a third emerged.

Lesson #3: Life is shockingly fragile — and astonishingly resilient. I was flabbergasted to find myself so suddenly, unexpectedly and irrevocably at the center of an emergency room event. And equally flabbergasted, only hours later, at how little damage had occurred, and how quickly recovery came on the heels of trauma.

No concussion. No swelling. No pain medication at any point, not even a Tylenol, not then nor in the days that followed. A horrific ugly yellow-purple shiner by day 4, but that soon vanished. And three weeks later? You wouldn't even know it had happened. The scar was by then half-hidden behind my left eyebrow, where it remains today. (At the hospital that night, the triage nurse looked in my pupil with a flashlight and said, "Do you feel confused?" I replied, "No more than usual." So far, still true.)

How human beings are built to heal — it's astonishing.

Then again, we have a friend who has a cousin, a fellow my own age, who fell one day a few weeks after my mishap, slipped on the ice and went down on his head. Wham: bat, baseball, trauma — and no recovery. Two days later, he was gone.

It is both terrifying and marvelous to contemplate how it is we actually live each day: suspended in thin air, without a net, between the two poles of frailty and resilience.

We know frailty will ultimately win out and declare our mortality. So while we're here, we throw ourselves into creating works, connections and footprints that will stay on past our departure, declaring our resilience.

To Break or to Bend

Adversity and Choice

Many years ago, I was teaching an adult class in macrobiotic philosophy. After the session was over and the students picked themselves up and shambled off to their next class, one woman stayed behind. When the room was empty, she came up to me and said, "You've lost a child, haven't you?"

I was stunned. She was right: I had lost my first son to an illness when he was not quite one year old. But how did she know?

My mind raced back over the previous ninety minutes. There was nothing we'd talked about in the course of the class that remotely related to the subjects of parenthood, bereavement, infant diseases, or anything else I could think of that would have conveyed the slightest clues to that buried bit of personal information.

"I just knew," she said, and in that moment I realized that she had lost a child too. How did I know? I don't know how I knew, but it *showed*.

Adversity changes you.

It doesn't simply add an experience to your memory banks, it engraves itself onto your being and alters forever who you are.

This is true not only of death and bereavement but also of divorce and deep disappointment, reversal of fortunes or discovery of one's own profound error, loss of a friendship, frustration of an ambition, failure or collapse of an enterprise.

Or having a key business partner say, “I quit.”

I sometimes tell new entrepreneurs that they are not truly *in* business, genuinely committed and there for the long haul, until after they’ve had their first crushing disappointment. Hearing myself say these words sometimes makes me cringe, because it sounds a bit brutal — but it’s the absolute truth. About your business, and about your life.

Losing a child was an experience so terrible I would not wish it on anyone. Yet at the same time, now that it’s part of who I am, I cannot truly say I would wish it gone, either. It certainly made me less cocky (at least a little) and a bit more capable of empathizing with another’s pain.

Loss and failure *shape* you; they tend to carve furrows of compassion, understanding and generosity of spirit. And that was how the woman knew I’d lost a child: she recognized the impact of adversity because it resonated in her, the way an A440 tuning fork hums when you strike A above middle C on the piano.

However, while it’s true that loss and failure *tend* to carve furrows of compassion and understanding, that result is not foreordained. There is choice involved.

People respond to suffering in different ways. Adversity *can* deepen character, but sometimes it simply *damages* character. Faced with difficulty that feels too great to bear, the human being has two choices: break, or bend. In the breaking, we simply become bitter; in the bending, we are humbled and stretched.

You have no choice but to suffer loss; it is an inevitable part of the human journey. To break, or to bend: *there* is the choice.

Passage

Becoming the Tree

Recently I was scheduled to do an interview with a fascinating author. A few minutes before the allotted time, he called: he had just returned from London, where he'd been to his father's funeral, and he wondered about the possibility of postponing our interview. After setting a new date, we conversed briefly. I mentioned that in the last few years, my father had died too, and my fiancée's father, and two of her best friends' fathers, and just the month before, my little brother's fiancée's father.

"We're at that time," he said.

"Yes," I agreed, "it's the changing of the guard."

The other day, I heard on NPR that a 106-year-old man, a veteran of World War I, had just died, and that his passing left alive one solitary veteran of the US forces in that war. Something on the order of a thousand WWII vets were dying each day, said the report. It was the quiet departure of an entire generation.

And as they leave, we are becoming them.

This is startling to me, because while I am in my mid-fifties *chronologically*, my personality's internal clock still thinks I am existing somewhere in my thirties, perhaps my twenties.

Every time something significant happens — a book sells, a child has a crisis, I hear an especially hilarious joke — my first impulse is to go tell my dad. Then I remember — he is no longer just a phone call away.

Now we are becoming the ones others come tell.

I remember as a child, feeling upset about something (I don't remember what it was), and lying down outside under a tree. Lying there, feeling the strength of the tree's trunk, smelling the smell of the grass and especially the patient, comforting scent of the earth underneath, made everything feel immediately . . . if not actually better, at least more manageable and not as acutely painful.

My memory of my father is exactly like that: something solid that holds me up, a patient and comforting presence, a smell that makes me feel grounded and not alone, and that makes things, if not actually better, at least more manageable and not as acutely painful.

Now it's our turn to be the grass, the trees, the earth, the patient listening.

Last Letters

“How Countless Many More Things There Are . . .”

Several years ago, my dad died. He had lived a very long life (he was just months away from turning 90) and a very rich one, too, being loved by most everyone who ever met him, none the least of which were his three sons, the middle one of which, the baloney in the brother sandwich, is me.

He had no major illness, no prolonged suffering, no terminal trauma. He just went to bed on a Wednesday night after a normal day and, absent-minded professor that he was, never got around to getting up again on Thursday.

I think this is the way I'd like to go, when it's my turn. (I have already placed my order with the Fate & Destiny Dept.) For that matter, I wouldn't mind leaving a legacy like his, either. I've studied under him (composition and conducting) and performed under him (cello and recorder in his Bach Choir orchestras — even once in Bach's own church in Leipzig, behind the Iron Curtain, when there still was such a thing), as well as grown up under his influence. As role models go, it's hard to imagine doing better.

Some years ago, one autumn, he starting feeling used up and began making very morose predictions that he would not last the winter. But then he found a new project to work on, and it blew fresh spring air into his life for another handful of years. (Note to self: purpose = longevity.)

The project was this: there is a rich correspondence between Johannes Brahms, the famous composer, and Clara Schumann, the pianist and wife of the other famous composer, that extends for decades. Although fourteen years separated them, Clara (the elder of the two) and Johannes became fast friends and remained close throughout their lives. Their letters had never been fully translated into English.

This became our task. Over the last few years of his life, my dad would call me twice a week and dictate one translated letter from his handwritten notes, which I would type into my computer. I would then translate his “English” into something that you and I would think of as being English. (Although he came to the U.S. in the late 1930s and made this country his home in almost every way, my dad’s English never quite escaped its German-thinking underpinnings.)

We started with the letters of 1855 and had gotten all the way through 1871, when he called one day and said he had something a little different: he wanted to skip a quarter-century, just for the day, and translate a few letters from 1896, the last year of their correspondence. We set about to the task.

On May 7, 1896, Clara Schumann wrote to Brahms: “Warmest good wishes from your affectionately devoted — Clara Schumann” and then added this postscript: “More I cannot do now, but all soon. Your —”

It was her last letter to Brahms.

Brahms, not realizing that he was writing the final page of his correspondence with his lifelong friend, wrote her a reply the next day that concluded with a pledge that he would write again soon:

“You wouldn’t believe how countless many more things there are, waiting for me to tell you. — Johannes”

Clara left this life less than two weeks later, and in less than a year’s time, Johannes joined her.

As it turned out, these were also the last letters my dad dictated to me.

He must have known on some level that his symphony had reached its coda, and he made sure that I had the end of the Clara-Johannes story, leaving it to others to fill in the missing, still untranslated pieces in between.

I imagine him saying, “More I cannot do now, but all soon.” To which I can only reply, “You wouldn’t believe how countless many more things there are, waiting for me to tell you.”

The Days

Ready to Awake in the Morning and Play

How does your day end? Do you succumb to gravity and crash into the mattress, feeling defeated? Nod off to the chatter of the television? Or spend a moment looking back over the arc of your day and pronounce it, like God on the sixth day, "Very good"?

Some nights, I hate the idea of going to bed, resist it like a hyperactive 8-year-old, because I feel there's still so much to do. I'm not satisfied with what I got done during the day, don't want the opportunity to end.

Other days, I welcome the rest and look forward eagerly to sleeping, and when I feel myself hit the sheets, actually let out a big *Ahhhhh* of satisfaction, as if I had eaten all my dinner and as a reward now been served a delicious dessert.

That latter is how I like my days to end. It is also how I want my *life* to end. And you? How do you want your life to end?

"Eeuuwww, that's too macabre — I don't want to think about it."

But hang on. They're not so different: how you end your days, and how you end *this* day. It seems to me that what your entire life amounts to is simply the sum of whatever your individual days amount to. As the Virginia Woolf character says in the magnificent film, *The Hours*: "Always to look life in the face and know it for what it is . . . always the years between us; always the love; always the hours."

Our lives really do come down to this: how we spend each day. *Always the days; always the hours.*

I once asked a friend, Scott Ohlgren, if he knew what, when the time came, would be his preferred cause of death. He answered with a single word: "Use." Another friend, Gianni Ortiz, once shared with me her ideal exit strategy: "To be taken by a sniper's bullet while in an asana at a yoga retreat." Now *that's* a classy way to go.

How does your day end? How does it flow? Is it brimming over with joy, with excitement, with fulfillment? Have you seen through the illusion of "some day" and made the decision to step onto the path with vigor, élan and passion, right now, *today*, and not just "eventually"? (What does that ridiculous word *eventually* mean, anyway? "Not right now, but later, when an *event* happens"?!)

Does your day sometimes feel like a desperate chase, the pressing pursuit of goals that remain teasingly ever distant? Or like an exhilarating footrace whose principal aim is the exhilaration itself?

Too often, we have turned Rene Descartes's famous dictum, "I think, therefore I am," into the modern achievement-obsessed, "I do, therefore I am." We too easily confuse our accomplishments with our selves, as if productivity were the sole measure and evidence of our worth. (Funny thing, too, about Descartes's statement: *The Power of Now's* Eckhart Tolle says he got it precisely backwards — that it's only when we are *thinking* that past and future come into existence and we lose touch with present reality. According to Tolle, the truth is closer to this: I think, therefore I am *not* — it is when I *stop* thinking that I *am*.)

How does your day end? What is the footprint it leaves behind, on the path outside your door and on the paths within your heart?

As I write these words, it is exactly ten years since my mom put aside her toys, donned her PJs and crawled into bed for the final goodnight.

When I was little, she once told me, I had a peculiar way of preparing for bed. I would brush my teeth, say goodnight, then slip into my room and change back into my day clothes, carefully make my bed, and lie down to sleep on top of the covers. Observing this one night, my mom inquired, what was my purpose? According to her, my answer came without hesitation:

“That’s so when I wake up in the morning, I’ll be ready to get up and play right away, without any distractions.”

I like to think that’s how she felt when she closed her eyes for the last time.

I like to think that’s how I’ll feel the last time I close mine.

Sources

The essays in this ebook are adapted in part from material that previously appeared in my [Journal](#) (blog), in my book *The Zen of MLM*, and in *Networking Times*. Specific sources are as follows:

The Blank Page is based on "Counting on the Trust of a Blank Page," [Journal 10-20-07](#).

The Hard Part is based on "The Hard Part," [Journal 12-4-07](#).

Making Real Realer is based on "More Real Than Real," [Journal 11-30-07](#).

"Sure You Can" is based on "Why Not?" from *The Zen of MLM*.

The Cliff is based on "The Folly and Wisdom of Nineteen," [Journal 11-9-07](#) and "Generation What?" [Networking Times Jan/Feb 08](#).

The Cello Lesson is based on "The Cello Lesson" from *The Zen of MLM*.

The Eighth Day is based on "The Eighth Day of the Week" from *The Zen of MLM*.

Intention is based on "What Happens When You Intend," [Journal 2-19-08](#).

Leaders Hold the Vision is based on "Leaders Hold a Vision" from *The Zen of MLM*.

Genuine Leadership is based on "True Leadership" from *The Zen of MLM* and "The Art of Kindness," [Journal 11-20-07](#).

Compassion is based on "Compassionate Nursing," [Journal 6-22-09](#).

Being Heard is based on "Being Heard," [Journal 3-16-09](#).

The Power to Create or to Tear Down is based on “Words Don’t Fail People, People Fail People,” **Journal 4-15-08** and “The Things About Words,” **Journal 9-5-08**.

Three Powerful Words is based on “Giving Up the Right to Be Right” from *The Zen of MLM* and “Those Three Little Words,” **Journal 10-31-07**.

Sips of Silence is based on “The Value of Nothing,” **Journal 6-11-08**.

Footprints is based on “Without a Net,” **Journal 12-13-07**.

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Passage is based on “The Changing of the Guard,” **Journal 2-18-08**.

Last Letters is based on “Last Letters,” **Journal 9-21-07**.

The Days is based on “The Days” from *The Zen of MLM*.

About the Author

John has been creating careers since he was a teenager. At age 17, he and a few friends started their own high school in Orange, New Jersey (called Changes, Inc. — you can read about it in his book, *The Zen of MLM*). Before turning to business and journalism, he forged a successful career as a concert cellist and prize-winning composer. At 15 he was recipient of the 1969 BMI Awards to Student Composers and several New Jersey State grants for composition; his musical compositions were performed throughout the U.S. and his musical score for Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (written at age 13) was performed at the amphitheater in Delphi, Greece, where the play was originally premiered.

In 1986 John founded and wrote for *Solstice*, a journal on health, nutrition and environmental issues; his series on the climate crisis (yes, he was writing about this back in the eighties) was selected for reprint in *Utne Reader*. In 1992 John helped write and produce the underground bestseller *The Greatest Networker in the World*, by John Milton Fogg, which became the defining book in its industry and sold over one million copies in eight languages. During the 1990s, John built a multimillion-dollar direct sales organization of over 100,000 people. He was cofounder and senior editor of the *Upline* journal and editor in chief of *Network Marketing Lifestyles* and *Networking Times*.

John is coauthor with **Bob Burg** of the *Wall Street Journal* bestseller, ***The Go-Giver*** and its companion volume, ***Go-Givers Sell More***. He also coauthored ***The Secret Language of Money*** with David Krueger, M.D., ***A Deadly Misunderstanding*** with Mark D. Siljander, and ***Flash Foresight*** (Harper Business, January 2011) with **Daniel Burrus**. His writing credits in the past few years also include ***The Answer*** by John Assaraf and Murray Smith; ***The Vision Board Book*** by John Assaraf, ***You Call the Shots*** with Cameron Johnson, ***Success for Teens*** for The Success Foundation, ***The Next Millionaires*** by Paul Zane Pilzer, and ***The Slight Edge*** by Jeff Olson. In 2007 he published ***The Zen of MLM***, a collection of his writings from the past two decades.

He is married to Ana Gabriel Mann and considers himself the luckiest man in the world. You can visit or contact him at www.johndavidmann.com.