

Who Belongs?

"I thought for the longest time that I was the only human being who worried that others would find out that I was inferior, that I was vulnerable, that I deserved to be rejected. I now know that every sane human being worries that others will find out that they are not quite good enough, that they can be hurt, that maybe they don't belong."

Walter Anderson; author, editor of *Parade* magazine, and member of the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, which honors those who have overcome adversity through unyielding perseverance and basic moral principles. Anderson grew up with an abusive and alcoholic father, and would often be beaten if he was caught reading. He often sought refuge at the public library in his hometown of Mt. Vernon, NY, and credits reading as the catalyst that enabled him to escape poverty. Anderson went on to be the editor of the *Standard Star* in New Rochelle, the *Reporter Dispatch*, and *Parade*. Today, Anderson serves as an ardent advocate for children on the advisory boards of Literacy Volunteers of America and the National Center for Family Literacy.

Unconventional Wisdom in Leadership, Part 1

Blind Ever notice how averse people can be to listening to the wisdom they need? The poet Samuel Johnson deftly noted that "advice is seldom welcome, and those who need it most like it the least." Once when I was young, I found a stray cat, and somehow persuaded (maybe tricked) my parents to let me keep her. Naturally, task number one was coming up with a name for her, and my older sister, eager to help, came up with dozens of suggestions. Several of her ideas were very creative and I would think to myself, "Wow, what a great name!" Each time however, I would reply that I didn't like the name. This was my cat, my responsibility, and I wanted

to come up with her name myself. In the end, I became convinced that my sister had "stolen" all of the good names, so I settled for one that I didn't really like, but one I came up with.

Like a Child As with many children, I had this desire to prove that I was old enough, big enough and smart enough not to need any help from my big sister. As adults, we often have this same insecurity, only now instead of rejecting those older, bigger, and smarter than us, we tend to patronize the input of those who are younger, less educated, or lower on the corporate ladder. Pride takes over, just like when we were kids, and we would rather muddle

through on our own than heed the advice of someone less "qualified." We can delude ourselves into believing that we have earned our position of leadership all on our own, and therefore must not show any weakness or dependence. You can see how this is even more foolish than a kid coming up with a cat's name. In the Gospels, we see this attitude in the Pharisees toward John the Baptist. Though John is hardly the picture of expertise, Jesus heralds him as the greatest man who has ever lived (Matthew 11:11).

Worlds Apart The Pharisees in Matthew could not see past their own credentials to grasp

Continued on back

The Flywheel and The Vine

In Jim Collins' book "Good to Great," he introduces the concept of "The Flywheel." The momentum of any organization is comparable to a massive wheel on an axle – picture the "Big Wheel" on *The Price is Right* – which requires a great amount of effort to put into motion. You struggle to turn the flywheel

once, then keep pushing to get it around a second time, and a third, and a fourth, and eventually you feel the flywheel's own weight start to carry itself along. Encouraged, you keep pushing, faster and faster, until the wheel's weight is no longer a hindrance to you, but is spinning itself faster than you

can keep up. The key to reaching this point of momentum is the consistency of effort in the first turns of the wheel. If you give yourself a break early on, the wheel will quickly slow to a stop, and you'll be back where you started.

In John chapter 15,

Continued on back

Wisdom

Continued from front

John's wisdom, and, in so doing, they exhibit a common shortcoming of leaders: failing to value the diverse opinions of others. Part of the strategic planning meetings that I facilitate involves mapping out a clear understanding of our clients' customers. During this discussion, I stress that there are no irrational customers – everyone behaves in such a way that is in keeping with their current circumstances and perceptions. Although we may often be perplexed by their actions, every wak-

ing second of every person's life is a garnering of new information, new experience, and new perspective. In this way, everyone has wisdom in their own right, whether it's conventional wisdom or not. In fact, the term "conventional wisdom" is in some ways an oxymoron, because wisdom is more than common sense – it is an accumulation of knowledge and experience keenly and appropriately applied to a unique situation. And there's often nothing "conventional" about it.

Flywheel & Vine

Continued from front

Jesus implores His disciples to "abide in Me," and compares their connection to Him as branches on a vine. Just as a branch cannot survive if it is separated from the vine, we need to remain alive in Christ. It is a conscious, daily effort that builds toward an ever-growing, ever-strengthening relationship. When I discuss this with a group, I often ask whether, during the course of the devotional, anyone sinned – severed him or herself from the vine. Inevitably, the answer is a quizzical "no." The point is one that you may have heard before: in the few minutes that we have been discussing abiding in Christ, it is easy to continue to abide.

The challenge to abide in Christ for 5 minutes is easily accepted. The logical question, then, is: If you can abide five minutes once, can't you then do it twice? And if twice, why not three times? Abiding isn't a weekend retreat or a major breakthrough; it's a consecutive series of conscious efforts to abide. Moment by moment, dilemma by dilemma, day by day, year by year, and only by the grace of God.

In business and in personal life, consistency of effort is paramount to success. Jesus compared abiding in Him to being a living branch, because a branch does not change its mind or take a break from

America is Great

In the 1830's, French diplomat Alexis de Tocqueville toured America in search of the key to America's greatness. When his tour was complete, he made this observation:

"I sought for the key to the greatness of America in her harbors...; in her fertile fields and boundless forests; in her rich mines and vast world commerce; in her public school system and institutions of learning. I sought for it in her democratic Congress and in her matchless Constitution. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

Ask for their Best

"Ask... people for their best thinking and then really listen. It shows you respect and empower those who work for you. You will come up with better answers. And those who work with you will take more pride in their own thinking and work."

Matt Rubel; CEO of high-fashion shoemaker Cole Haan.

being a branch. Day in and day out, it continues to work at its purpose of gathering sunlight for the vine, and it knows that apart from the vine it will perish. In the next issue, we'll talk about the key to accomplishing the awesome and daunting endeavor of a life lived abiding in The Vine.

Pass It, Don't Pitch it!

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