



Choir Director

CHOIR DIRECTORS ARE A GOOD PICTURE OF LEADERSHIP AND TEAM BUILDING. THEY RECRUIT, AUDITION, ASSIGN PARTS, REHEARSE AND DIRECT MUSIC. BUT AT THE END OF THE PERFORMANCE, THE DIRECTOR MAKES SURE THE APPLAUSE GOES TO THE CHOIR.

I remember singing in a couple of choirs growing up. I sang in our middle school chorus, as well as a youth ensemble in high school. Both were fun, despite the fact that I can't sing. I'm serious. I don't have a good voice. I often tell people I'm known as a back-up singer—each time I approach a microphone, everyone says, "Back up!"

Looking back, I can see now what those choir directors were up to. They had plenty of girls in the choir, but needed more guys. So, they went after what they needed and worked with what they got. Both directors approached me, and asked if I'd sing in their choir. Both auditioned me, and for some reason, felt there was a place for my voice in the group. After all, it was a team, and I could blend with the others, right? They determined what part I could sing: tenor. (Tenor is right... "ten-or"-twelve notes off key!) Both choir directors spent extra time rehearsing with me, many times after the regular rehearsal was over. They put up with my mischievous sense of humor until I finally learned my part. After our performances were over, I remember getting standing ovations from the crowd. Imagine that. Not bad for a choir with a guy who can't sing. Today—I know better. I realize that no matter how good the choir sounds, standing ovations really belong to the director.

Dr. Johnson is the director of an outstanding collegiate choir. Every year, he auditions numerous men and women for the seventy-two-voice choir. And every year, many talented singers are turned away. You might even say many extremely talented singers do not meet the audition requirements. Why? Because Dr. Johnson isn't looking for outstanding soloists. The audition process entails more than just listening to individuals. He rehearses each person with everyone who sings that part, and does this for all eight parts. Having seventy-two soloists doesn't produce an outstanding choir.

Dr. Johnson's goal is to find seventy-two voices that blend together in pitch, style and harmony to create one unified sound that resonates like a pipe organ. Directors like Dr. Johnson know how to assemble a choir in order to achieve the sound they want. A choir director is a broker of talents.

Athletic coaches are a little like choir directors. You might be familiar with 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey coach, Herb Brooks. He was portrayed by Kurt Russell in the 2004 movie, *Miracle*. In one scene, Brooks is observing players on the first day of tryouts with assistant coach Craig Patrick. Announcing that he's made his selection, Patrick is shocked. It's only the first day—AND—he's missing some of the best players on his list. Brooks tells him, "I'm not looking for the best players. I'm looking for the right players." Brooks knew everything about every one of the players trying out. He had talked to their coaches and watched tapes of their games. Brooks' coaching technique called for players who would work hard, play smart, and care more about the name on the front of the jersey than the one on the back. And those players weren't necessarily the best ones.

Brooks' hand-picked team went on to win the gold medal. They defeated the seasoned and unbeaten Soviet team—a nearly impossible task. Ken Morrow, one of the players on this team, described Brooks' coaching as, "an understanding of how to get the best out of each player and make him part of the team." Brooks built more than a team. He built a family.

The 2004 NBA championship is another example of a choir director. The L.A. Lakers were undeniably an all-star basketball team. They had Shaquille O'Neal, Kobe Bryant, Karl Malone and a truckload of others. They were stacked. The Detroit Pistons, on the other hand, were a team with "smaller-name" talent. As the season opened, the Pistons were ranked 9th, with the odds of winning the NBA title at 18 to 1. The Lakers were strong favorites to be champions again. Both teams made it to the NBA finals, but do you remember who won? The Pistons—the underdogs. Although the Lakers were overflowing with talent, it was an atmosphere thick with individualism and self-interest. Piston's coach, Larry Brown, knew that individuals may win trophies, but teams win championships. An article covering their win said, "The Pistons completed the biggest upset in NBA Finals history, toppling the mighty but misguided Los Angeles Lakers with a 100-87 victory that was entirely emblematic of a team triumphing over individuals." Larry Brown defined basketball as a sport that's about players playing the right way—showing you CAN be a team AND be successful. While the Lakers leaned heavily on their superstars, the Pistons shared both the ball and the spotlight. Fortunately for them, coach Brown was a choir director.

Good choir directors do something all good leaders must learn to do: team building. Effective leaders eventually recognize that their dreams are bigger than they are. In order to accomplish them, they must recruit a team whose personalities will blend well—just like a choir director recruits singers whose voices blend well.

Soon, leaders realize they must equip their people for their role in fulfilling the dream. First they recruit people based on character, competence and chemistry. Next they equip those people for their specific positions. Let's take a look at the process.

RECRUIT PLAYERS

Leaders who are "choir directors" don't let just anyone sing in the choir. Unlike my experience growing up, good directors look for three elements when they recruit:

CHARACTER—they look for honesty and discipline, instead of hoping it will come later.

COMPETENCE—they find people with the abilities they need who can deliver the goods.

CHEMISTRY—they recruit people who fit the personality and culture of the group.

AUDITION AND ASSIGN PARTS

Deciding who meets the audition requirements involves getting familiar with the candidates. Good leaders explore the strengths, track record and passion of potential candidates. Positions are assigned based on the GIFTS of the person:

G – GIFTED

Leaders discover where the candidate's greatest gifts, talents, and values lie.

I – INFLUENTIAL

They discover where the candidate's deepest influence exists.

F – FRUITFUL

They discover where the candidate's greatest results will be achieved.

T – TRUSTWORTHY

They discover how much the candidate can be trusted on the job.

S – SERVICE

They discover where the candidate most wants to serve and invest their life.

CREATE HARMONY

Effective leaders don't leave harmony and healthy relationships to chance. They foster it with helpful team building exercises, bringing choir members together and encouraging them to help each other. Leaders build trust and alignment. They create bridges of relationship that can bear the weight of the principles they value. Choir members don't sing the same notes, but together they create perfect harmony.

REHEARSE AND PREPARE

Great vision without great people is irrelevant. Great leaders spend time preparing the choir for the "performance." They get the team ready for the game. They equip and resource the members with whatever is needed to get the job done. I suggest you equip your people using the following acrostic, IDEA, for your training:

I - INSTRUCTION

Verbally teach them the principles they need to know.

D - DEMONSTRATION

Model for them the desired results.

E - EXPERIENCE

Launch them into participation, giving them on-the-job training.

A - ASSESSMENT

Offer them helpful feedback through evaluation.

DIRECT THEM

When leadership guru Peter Drucker was asked to explain the most important question a leader can ask, he leaned against the table, lowered his head, and rocked a little. After a few minutes of silence, he looked up. "Who... does... what?" he said in a slow, deliberate voice. I agree. And I would add a second question: "Where are we going?" (Stephen Covey writes that only 17 percent of employees know exactly where their organization is going.) Answering these two questions provides the direction.

DEFLECT THE APPLAUSE

Do you know what Herb Brooks did when his Olympic hockey team won the gold medal? He left the ice. Why? "It was not my spot," Brooks said in an interview. He wanted to leave the applause to his players—to those who deserved it. The glory of the victory went to the team. Brooks was a "choir director" who knew it was the singers, not the director, who needed to be recognized.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

In this *Habitude*, we looked at three elements to look for when recruiting a team: *character*, *competence*, and *chemistry*. As you reflect on your team, identify how these three elements come into play—both positively and negatively—in the daily operations of your team.

CHARACTER

COMPETENCE

CHEMISTRY

SELF ASSESSMENT

On a scale of 1 to 10, assess yourself as a choir director:

1. I identify and recruit the right people for the team:

< POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT >

2. I accurately evaluate their strengths and passion:

< POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT >

3. I'm good at placing people in their area of strength:

< POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT >

4. I align the jobs of team members, so they work in harmony:

< POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT >

5. I prepare my team to win by equipping and encouraging them:

< POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT >

6. I provide clear direction to my players, both individually and as a team:

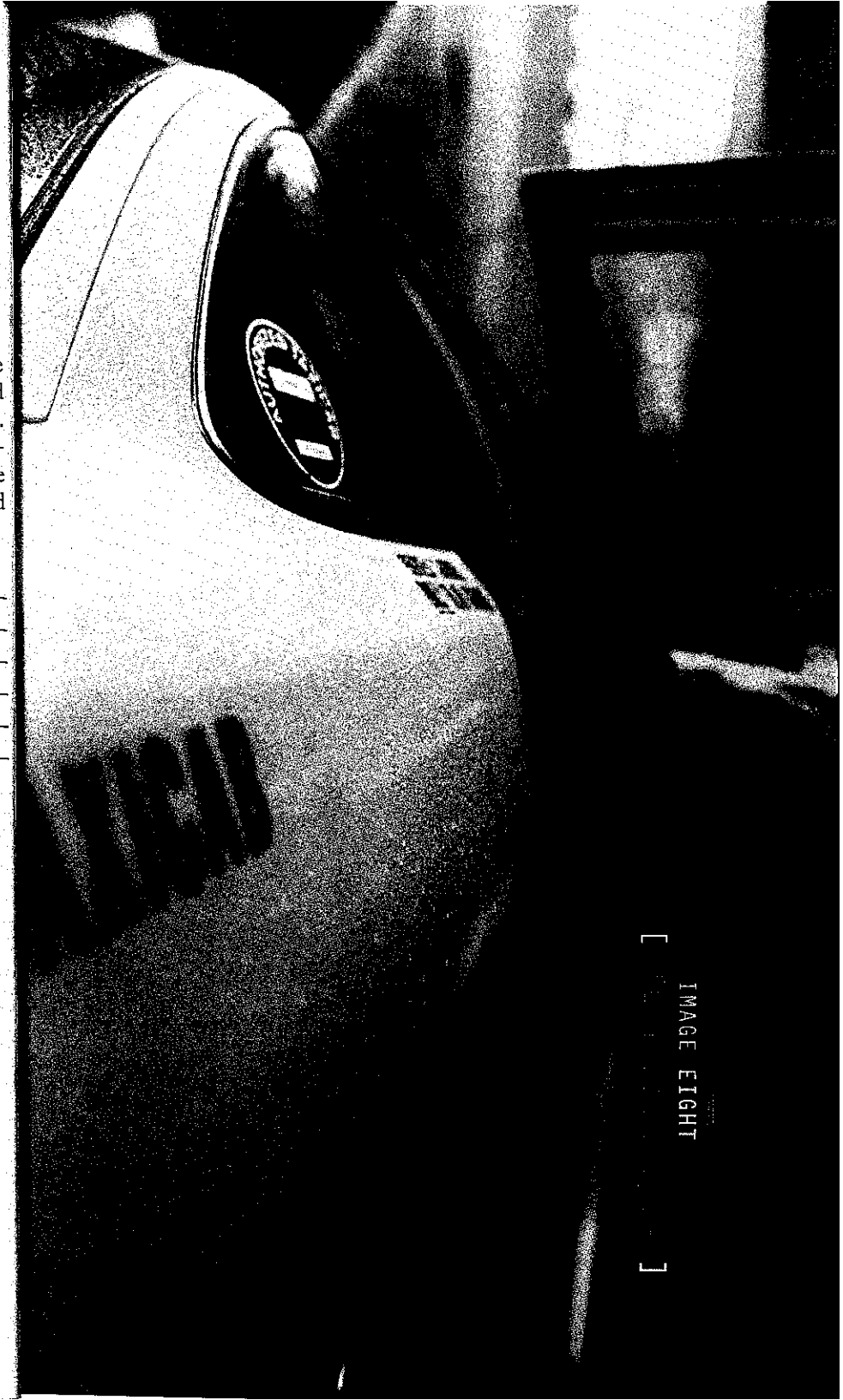
< POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT >

7. I enjoy passing the credit for success to team members:

< POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT >

EXERCISE

Select an event that you normally wouldn't be in charge of planning. It could be as crazy as New Year's Eve in Times Square, or as ordinary as a third grade field trip. You will need to find people to help you run different aspects of your event. Make a list of all the areas that need someone in charge. Do a mental "walk-through" of the event. How would you go about selecting the right people for the specific jobs you've chosen? How would you effectively equip them? How would you build harmony?



[IMAGE EIGHT]

IMAGE EIGHT
[Taxi Principle]



Taxi Principle

ALWAYS ASK THE PRICE BEFORE YOU GET INTO A CAB. LEADERS COUNT THE COST BEFORE THEY BEGIN THE JOURNEY: PEOPLE, MONEY, TIME, AND ENERGY. WE MUST SIZE UP THE COST AND PREPARE BEFORE WE START DOWN A ROAD.

I travel quite a bit to New York City. In fact, I'm in big cities all over the world, from Manila to London, from Hong Kong to Prague to Buenos Aires. I learned something early on as I climbed into musty, humid taxicabs in those major metropolitan areas. Many of the cab drivers want to take you for a ride—in more ways than one.

I've spent major bucks on rides through town, simply because I didn't discuss the price, or route, beforehand. I've seen drivers take the longest route possible, just to hike up the price. So, at this point in my life, I try to follow a little rule. I stand outside the cab, and talk to the driver about these things before I ever get into the car. That way, if I choose to get into the cab, I've removed as many surprises as possible.

If you haven't grown up in a big city, you may not be aware of the term, gypsy cab. Basically, it's a "fake cab" that will make a round-about trip to your destination for an obscenely high price. So if you haven't stumbled upon any gypsy cabs, consider yourself warned! A friend was telling me of a time he was overseas and fell into the gypsy cab trap. He and some buddies got into what they thought was a cab, but when they got out, they were nowhere near their intended destination. So, they got into another cab for the second leg of their journey. They eventually got to their destination, but arrived with empty wallets.

Humorist Lewis Grizzard unintentionally touched upon this Taxi Principle on one of his tours. "I asked a bellman outside a Miami hotel to call me a cab. It was late in the evening. Just then, I noticed a cab parked across the street. 'Never mind,' I said to the bellman. 'There's a cab across the street.' 'No, no,' said the bellman. 'That is a fake cab. You get inside, and the driver takes off somewhere and beats you up and takes your money.'" Oops. Fortunately for Grizzard, someone knew the high cost of that journey and gave him a heads up.

Most of our time is so focused on reaching our destination or goal, we forget about how we're going to get there. It's been said, "The longer the line of preparation, the more likely it is to intersect the line of opportunity." While preparation may not require years for every situation, it does require you to stop before you begin. If you take the time to plan and prepare for your journey, you'll save yourself numerous struggles. This applies to taxi cabs in a small way. It applies to leadership in a big way. Always count the cost before you get in.

Charles Lindbergh, or "Lucky Lindy," was the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. But he didn't just "take-off" one day on a whim. Lindbergh knew that any task, especially one as big as this, took preparation. While his plane, "The Spirit of St. Louis," was being built, Lindbergh prepared. His friend Frank Samuels recalled a time when he and Lindbergh flew to San Diego to check on the plane's progress. Waking up during the night, he looked over to see Lindbergh's bed was empty. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness of the hotel room, he noticed him sitting by the window. Samuels asked what he was doing up at that hour? "Just practicing," replied Lindbergh. Practicing? What could possibly be practiced by gazing at the stars? "Staying awake all night." Lindbergh knew his flight would require being alert for an extended period of time, and he prepared mentally and also physically.

Others had attempted the flight between New York and Paris, but no one had succeeded. Some had even ended drastically. When Lindbergh took off, he equipped himself with four sandwiches, two canteens of water, and 451 gallons of gasoline. He'd done a "mental walk-through" of the trip several times, calculating all that could happen. During his flight, sleep began to cling to the plane. "That worried me a great deal," Lindbergh noted in his journal, "and I debated whether I should keep on or go back. I decided I must not think anymore about going back." He knew the trip may cost him his life, but he'd counted the cost beforehand. Because of his preparation, Lindbergh was able to remain calm and choose a wise course of action. He succeeded because he practiced the taxi principle.

THE MENTAL WALK THROUGH AND NEXT STEPS

Many times, the preparation we put into an event far exceeds the amount of time we're actually at the event. (It may take hours to prepare a twenty-minute speech!) This is where a "mental walk-through" comes in handy. Charles Lindbergh flew that plane across the Atlantic mentally, before he did so physically. Furthermore, he experienced many of the hazards inwardly before facing them as realities. As you lead people, projects and events—practice the mental walk through whenever possible. For instance, before the big social event you're planning, attend it in your head. Walk through the doors of the building. Is everything in place? Where are the cups and napkins—how about the greeters? As you size up what's needed, ask yourself: Can we pull this off with excellence? Is it worth the cost? And if so, what do I need to do to make it happen?

Whenever you participate in a planning meeting, write every action step down, making sure every base is covered. Then, recognize that the most important item to come out of that meeting will be "next steps." What are the next action-steps needed to make progress? Who will take them? When?

In April of 1988, a news program did a feature on a photographer who was also a skydiver. He often combined his two skills and filmed groups of skydivers jumping from planes. The film shown on the telecast was different from any the photographer had taken before. As the final skydiver opened his chute, the picture went berserk. The broadcaster reported that the cameraman had fallen to his death, having jumped out of the plane without his parachute. It wasn't until he reached for the ripcord that he realized he was free-falling without one. He'd forgotten to pack it.

Until that moment, the jump was probably exciting and fun. But tragically, the photographer prepared to film the fall, but failed to prepare for the fall. His faith was in a parachute that was never buckled to his back. How many times do we lead like this? Whether it's a meeting, a test, or your job, there is always a price to pay for lack of preparation.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

We looked at two key principles for leaders to consider before they attempt to reach their goals:

1. COUNT THE COST
2. PREPARATION

Jot down how you have (or have not) implemented these two elements in your leadership. What was the end result?

Charles Lindbergh prepared for his solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean by doing "a mental walk through" of the trip several times before the actual flight. Describe the benefits of walking through an event in your head before the actual event.

How could this practice help you avoid pitfalls as you lead people, projects or events?

SELF ASSESSMENT

Based on the following questions, assess yourself on the taxi principle:

Where do I need to go? (Find your target)

How "far-out" is my goal? (Assess the distance)

What are the conditions? (Factor in any adversities)

What will it take to get there? (Select your tools)

Am I willing to pay the price? (Count the cost)

EXERCISE

Some night this week, put \$10 in your pocket and leave your wallet/checkbook/credit card at home. This solitary ten-dollar bill needs to feed you and two friends for the next four meals. How do you approach the situation? How will you go about feeding three people, four times? Can you make it? Come up with a plan. If you're ambitious, put your plan into action and see how well you planned.

A final warning: Robert F. Scott and Roald Amundsen were both explorers. These two men are a contrast in leadership. Scott resolved to be the first man to reach the South Pole. His team set out in 1910, but was ill prepared for the journey—and suffered because of it. On January 17th, 1912, they became the second team to reach the pole. Even worse, Scott failed to prepare for the return home. His team was low on food and fuel, causing them enormous hardship. A deadly blizzard left them just eleven miles short of a supply depot. Their remains were found the following spring. Roald Amundsen, on the other hand, quietly and secretly set aim for the South Pole. He planned every aspect of the expedition, maximizing his chances for success. On December 14th, 1911, with a team of expert skiers and dog teams, Amundsen made the feat—he reached the South Pole (and did so 32 days before Scott!). The difference in these two stories was preparation. Successful preparation begins with knowing "what you want" and "what you're willing to pay."

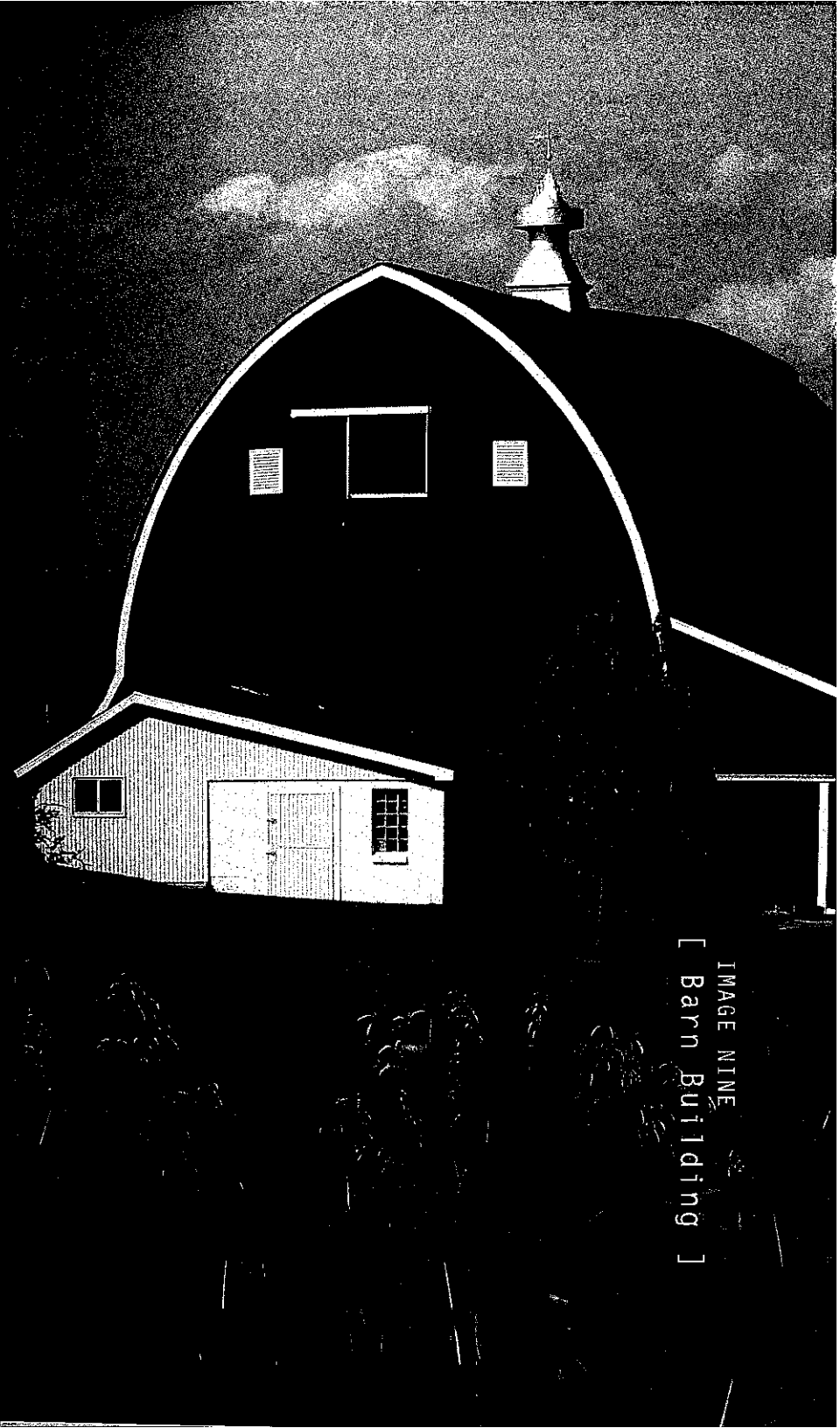


IMAGE NINE
[Barn Building]

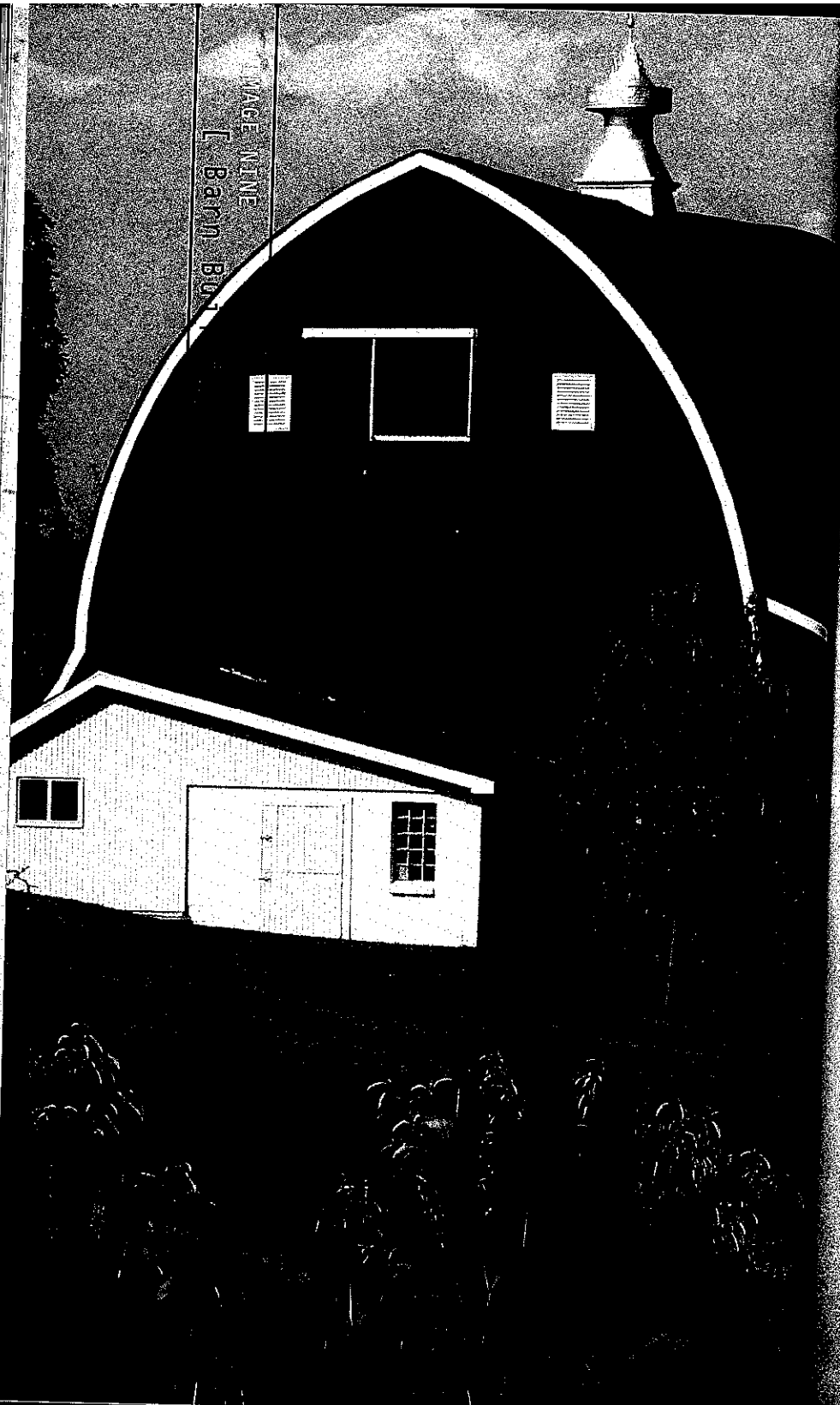


IMAGE NINE
[Barn Building]

IMAGE NINE
[Barn Building]



Barn Building

A FARMER BUILDS THE BARN ON HIS PROPERTY FIRST. WHY? BECAUSE THE BARN WILL PAY FOR ALL OF THE OTHER STRUCTURES. LEADERS DETERMINE THE CRITICAL TRANSACTION THAT ENABLES EVERYTHING ELSE TO HAPPEN.

A farmer and his wife purchased some new property. They were excited about moving and settling down on this new land. It was just perfect. A dream-come-true. One evening at dinner, the two of them began discussing hopes and dreams for their piece of real estate. Soon, it became apparent they needed to come up with a plan for what they would build, and when. They both wanted to build a house, a silo, a three-car garage, a shed, a swing-set and a barn. They were passionate about each structure, but which should come first?

The decision was finally reduced to either the house or the barn. The wife wanted to build the house first. She could envision just how the living room would be decorated and how the kitchen would be laid-out. She knew the color schemes, the window treatments and the furniture she wanted. The farmer had to admit, it sounded great! He listened quietly and pondered her words. But when she finished, he smiled and said they shouldn't build the house first. He felt they should build the barn first. She was shocked. "Why?" she asked. "Aren't we more important than the animals?" They went back and forth in disagreement. Their argument finally ended when the farmer played the "trump card." He said, "Sweetheart, we have to build the barn first—because the barn will build the house."

Do you understand how profound these words were? Like his wife, if you were developing a farm, the first item you may think you need is a house. That's where you eat, sleep, and live. Sounds logical, right? But any wise farmer would suggest a different plan. Build the barn. The house is "overhead." The barn is the hub of all of the profit-making work. The animals live there, so it produces your milk, eggs, and meat. The equipment stored there is necessary for working the fields and growing crops. Without the barn, the farm could generate little income. If you neglect the barn and build only the house, the house is all you'll get. Build the barn, and you can build a house, shed, silo, chicken coop, and even another barn—you can build pretty much anything!

These days, the number of private farms is dwindling because of technology. When it was more standard, however, it wasn't uncommon for families to live in their barn. Building it was a large expense, and many times families had to save more money before they could build their actual house. Living in the barn was an easy and affordable option. Half of the barn was reserved for the animals, while the other half served as their living accommodations. Prior to 1900, such a practice was relatively normal as families waited to build their house.

While living in a barn has become rare these days, there are still many instances where families sacrifice the comforts of a house, in order to develop security for the family. I read a story about Becki Neal and her sister Judy who moved to Sisters, Oregon in 1978 to open a beauty salon. For the first nine months, the two women and Judy's two teenage sons lived in tents. Financing the salon was their first priority, and they didn't have enough money to also build a house. Eventually, they wanted horses. They still didn't have a house, but you know what they did? They built the barn and finished half of it for living quarters! Wow. Talk about sacrifice. But they were shrewd; they knew how to reach their goals swiftly and wisely.

In almost every endeavor, there is a "barn," or an activity that is vital to the life of the project or organization. In business, it's called the "critical transaction." It's the activity that if you don't do it, you're "out of business." On a farm, the barn represents the critical transaction. Without the barn, the life of the farm cannot be sustained. Similarly, the critical transaction of an airline is not when the plane takes off, but when the customer buys the ticket. A radio station's critical transaction is not choosing what songs to play, but selling airtime for commercials. When people don't buy, businesses don't run, planes can't take off, and songs cannot play.

Organizations that discover their critical transaction have a better chance of succeeding. While many companies provide numerous products, almost every company has one they feature as "their" product. Many big name companies are thriving, simply because they've discovered their critical transaction. Hewlett-Packard makes computers, digital cameras, and scanners, but they're known for their printers. Ketchup made Heinz 57 famous, but did you know that they also produce bagel bites and baby food? Xerox discovered its niche in the world of heavy-duty office copiers, but continues to produce scanners and computer monitors on a smaller scale. This "Barn Building" *Habitude* complements the other images you read about earlier, like "Rivers and Floods" and "Bit Market." The "Rivers and Floods" *Habitude* teaches us to narrow and clarify our vision. "Bit Market" reminds us not to confuse our methods with our mission. This Barn Building *Habitude* helps us zero in on the one activity that helps every other activity to happen. There are three criteria for finding your "barn":

GENERATES REVENUE:

What brings in the most income so everything else can happen?

CREATES MOMENTUM:

What sparks movement and excitement toward your mission?

ENABLES ACTIVITY:

What is the catalyst for all other activities on your team?

The concept of finding your "barn" works beyond finding a product that will earn money and a name. Any group of people working toward a purpose should discover their critical transaction. In 2000, the film *Remember the Titans* illustrated how one man taught his team how to play football. Coach Herman Boone, an African-American, was faced with the difficult challenge of coaching a team of African-Americans and Caucasians. Racial prejudice still existed in his small, Virginia town. Boone knew the critical transaction moved beyond the realms of football. It involved breaking racial barriers and building healthy relationships. Without that camaraderie, Boone knew the team's performance on the field would suffer. And if the team failed, this would only add another roadblock toward gaining equal rights. Coach Boone centered on this critical transaction with his athletes, and everything else took care of itself. Good leaders always find the one catalyst that makes everything else happen.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Reflect on your leadership responsibilities. Choose one specific area and describe your "critical transaction." In other words, what is the one catalyst that makes everything else happen, that is vital to the life of a project or your organization?

The critical transaction of an airline is not when the plane takes off, but when the customer buys the ticket. Planes can't take off if tickets aren't purchased. Illustrate how it is possible to forget what really produces.

Why do you think we get distracted from focusing on the critical transaction?

SELF ASSESSMENT

With the following questions, assess yourself on how well you know and practice "barn building" in your organization:

1. What one function could either make or break me as a leader?

2. What one function can either make or break my team (organization)?

3. What is your critical transaction?:

4. What generates the most revenue?

5. What sparks the most momentum?

6. What enables the activities of the rest of the team?

EXERCISE

List all of the activities your organization performs. Then, jot down how each activity relies upon the others. (Drawing a chart of the relationship between all activities might be helpful). Is there one activity that seems to be the hub of the wheel—the one around which all others revolve?

To make this exercise more vivid, sit down with your team and pretend you're starting a new program from scratch. You have no money—only ideas. Once you come up with it, ask yourself: what must we focus on to generate the money and excitement needed to get this off the ground?





Small Sprocket

LEADERS ARE THE SMALL SPROCKETS IN EFFECTING CHANGE. WE MUST SPIN DOZENS OF TIMES BEFORE THE BIG GEAR MAKES ONE REVOLUTION. IT'S PART OF THE TERRITORY. SPIN LIKE CRAZY AND EVENTUALLY OTHERS WILL RESPOND.

As a high school student, I rode my bike to school—at least until I got a car. Riding my bike was memorable because I had to ride up a huge hill called “Fletcher Parkway.” It was a solid, three-quarter mile, uphill climb. Every morning, I was sweating by the time I reached the top. Thank Schwinn for ten-speed bikes! Shifting into low gear was my only hope. (As you know, low gears allow a biker to climb hills when there’s no momentum). My trade-off was pedaling like crazy just to move a few feet.

I suppose it’s a little like a car. When you drive, the engine revs between 1,000 and 3,000 RPMs (revolutions per minute), depending on the momentum you have. In other words, a car’s motor spins thousands of revolutions each moment, only to move your tires down the road just one, short mile! It’s a small wheel moving a big wheel—a tiny gear spinning frantically, to move the larger one just a bit. It’s the Law of Leverage...and it illustrates the principle of the Small Sprocket.

Imagine two sprockets. One small one, one big one. It’s the job of the small sprocket to turn the big sprocket. If the small sprocket is half the size of the big one, it must go around twice before the big one completes a full revolution. Doesn’t sound too bad, does it? Now imagine that small sprocket is 100th the size of the big one. Now it must rotate 100 times in order to make the big sprocket complete a full revolution!

That’s how life is for the leader of an organization. Sometimes things flow smoothly and you don’t feel like you’re working too hard. Then there are times (and these are more common) when you have to work, work, work, work, work—just to feel like the team is progressing at all! You spin and spin and spin in order to accomplish all of your leadership tasks. You keep communicating the vision, but everyone still seems fuzzy on it. You tell them what needs to be done, but they need a reminder. You equip them to recruit a team, but they continue to be a one-man show. You labor and labor...anticipating seeing some result. It can be discouraging. It feels like you’ve moved ahead fifty miles, but the group is moving like an inchworm! How can this be?

Relax. It's normal. Welcome to leadership. Leaders must spin like a small sprocket to get the larger group to spin just once. It can be tiresome. At first, the labor ratio is often disproportionate. But just wait. Continue spinning. Good news is coming. People will eventually respond to your spinning. And you know what? Once you really get moving and have the group responding positively, that big sprocket starts picking up speed from its own momentum. In time, the group will be spinning you!

You may remember the 2000 movie, *Pay It Forward*. Based on a true story, Trevor McKinney creates the "pay it forward" idea as a social studies project in school. The breakdown is pretty simple: do something to help someone, then ask them to do the same for three other individuals. Don't pay the kindness back; pay it forward. The whole movie is about Trevor helping people and trying to inspire them to pay it forward. His project seems to be failing, as Trevor spins and spins...and nobody seems to join his quest to make the world a better place. He is ready to give up.

In the end, Trevor learns that he started a movement. From homeless people to corporate CEOs, his good deeds and their forward momentum reached so many people that they caught the attention of a reporter. The truth is, Trevor had been spinning a long time before he saw any results. In his eyes, the big sprocket hadn't moved. But in reality, it was actually just picking up momentum. Hearing that his project was successful re-ignited Trevor's original desire to share kindness in the world. In the movie, there were increased random acts of kindness throughout the region. In real life, however, the movie inspired the creation of the "Pay It Forward" movement. People are paying it forward from Washington to Florida, all the way to Singapore and Australia.

In 1809, a boy named Louie was born in a small town near Paris. His early years consisted of many difficult obstacles. Playing with his father's tools one day, Louie pierced and destroyed his left eye. Shortly after that, his damaged eye infected the other, causing complete loss of sight in both eyes. While most blind people at the time became beggars, Louie wanted to attend school. So at the age of ten, he enrolled in a school for the blind. Students were taught to read raised letters, but due to the difficult process, only 14 books were available to study. Louie knew there had to be an easier way and set about creating a finger alphabet.

He began creating a system that would allow every blind person to read, write and communicate. Early on, it had little success because the system was too complex for kids to master. But Louie experimented with more simplified systems over the next few months, finally arriving at the ideal "six dot" system. By the time he was fifteen, Louie had developed separate codes for math and music.

Although his creation had improved life for blind people, it didn't catch on. Sighted people didn't understand how the dot system could be useful. One teacher even banned children from learning it. Eventually—after years of spinning like crazy—folks realized the benefits of the system. Today, the Braille System has been adapted to almost every known language, from Albanian to Zulu. Against all odds, Louie became an independent man and even went on to become a teacher in his old school.

As a young leader, I remember trying to start new projects in the organization where I was employed. I thought my ideas were great, but few others agreed. After all, I was the new kid on the block and I was young. Fortunately, there were a few of us who began spinning like small sprockets. We knew we couldn't spin wildly in all directions, so we consistently spun like crazy in one direction. I'd look in the mirror each day and say, "I'm a small sprocket!" Over time, momentum picked up. Management saw that our ideas had potential, and we were given the go ahead to begin implementing some of them. By the time I left that job, we were successful in reaching all of our original goals.

We were small sprockets. As leaders, if we don't have the courage and determination to keep spinning, things will grind to a halt. Very little will change. In fact, the vision will shrivel and the team will likely suffer. It's the leader's job to spin like crazy and fire up the rest of the team. It's part of the territory of leadership. Fueled by determination, leaders are the engines. We are the small sprockets.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

In the world of nature, we can learn a lot about the small sprocket principle from the ant, a small creature. Their highly organized colonies often consist of millions of individual ants, yet they appear to operate as a single entity. They work in teams to move extremely heavy things. They gather food during harvest and store it until the winter months. Without an administrator, they perform specific jobs as workers, soldiers, drones and queens. Yet, when a catastrophe occurs, the ants quickly adapt their duties to overcome the problem.

Summarize the characteristics that enable the ant to succeed:

Contrast the ant's initiative and perseverance with our own human laziness. Why do we often fail to persevere? What prevents our "spinning?"

SELF ASSESSMENT

Evaluate yourself on the following three qualities that we find in an ant's work ethic.

1. **INTEGRITY:** THE ANT DOESN'T NEED SUPERVISION. IT WORKS BECAUSE IT IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

Have you ever been in a program that seemed stagnant? What kept it from making progress?

2. **INITIATIVE:** THE ANT STARTS TO GATHER FOOD WITHOUT BEING PUSHED. IT DOESN'T NEED SOMEONE TO SHOW IT THE WAY.

In your activities, do you ever feel alone in doing all the work? How do you typically respond?

3. **INDUSTRY:** THE ANT HAS A SPIRIT OF INDUSTRY. IT WORKS AND WORKS UNTIL THE JOB IS DONE.

How do you stay inspired when you don't see results and you don't feel any gratification?

EXERCISE

Choose a cause that you believe needs to be promoted on your campus or in your organization. Determine to take six months and actively promote this cause. Choose two or three actions you can take that would strategically help people understand and support the cause. Then—do them. Spin like crazy. Evaluate at the end of six months. Do you see any improvement? Will it take more time?

You may remember the story about two mice that fell into a milk pail. The sides of the bucket were too steep for the mice to climb out, and the milk wasn't deep enough for them to scurry over the edge. So the pair began to tread milk, desperately trying to stay alive. After awhile, one of them grew weary and stopped. He gave up. As a result, the mouse drowned in the milk. The second one, however, kept treading. His little legs paddled and paddled and paddled. Eventually, his ceaseless paddling churned the milk into butter, solid enough to climb upon. Like a small sprocket, that second mouse kept spinning. His unrelenting treading eventually provided a place to stand.