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Morrie Shechtman

Date: 5/1/2009

From: Morrie Shechtman

Subject: Monthly Newsletter



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I seem to be coming across great quotes these days. This one was provided by a good friend and colleague – Tony Burnham – probably the best labor lawyer in the country. Tony and his partner – Leslie Gray – have provided invaluable HR/legal consultation to a number of my clients. Tony is also the author of a great book on getting one's act together, called *Employed for Life*. The quote superbly captures the thrust of our current administration in Washington – “A Government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always count on the support of Paul.” ~ George Bernard Shaw

Business Tips

What Is A Good, Profitable Relationship?

One thing this recession has unequivocally driven home for businesspeople is the penultimate importance of relationships in building and maintaining viable businesses. Unfortunately, though, not many people have offered very specific definitions of what constitutes a good, profitable and growing relationship. For me, that relationship has five characteristics. It is, or it has the following:

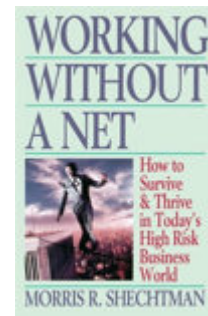
1. Judgmental
2. Conditional
3. High Expectations
4. Reciprocal
5. Renewing

Judgments give people the information they need in order to grow. They allow people to put their values and beliefs up against a measuring standard and make conscious, informed choices; perhaps for the first time in their lives. We owe others our convictions of what we believe is right and wrong, good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable. We not only have the right to be judgmental, we have the obligation. Not doing so is a form of moral, ethical, and interpersonal abandonment. Others can accept our judgments, reject them wholly, or incorporate aspects that feel right. In any case, they must ask themselves what *they* believe, and why they believe it.

All good relationships are conditional. Conditions set the limits,



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boundaries, and values that create respect, integrity, and self-esteem for all parties to a relationship. Unconditional acceptance creates the platform for abuse, neglect, and manipulation. If anything and everything you do is acceptable, then both you and I have little value. Business relationships (and personal relationships) often fail because of the lack of clearly articulated conditions, which inevitably lead to the tolerance of corrosive and destructive behaviors.

High expectations are a vote of confidence in people's ability to continually get better and be better people. We only have high expectations for those who we believe have the capacity to not only achieve more, but to feel better about themselves. High expectations create high performance and high self-esteem. You get what you expect. For years, people have asked me what the difference is between great companies and average companies. Great companies expect more – and they get it.

All good relationships meet the needs of both parties. This is the perfect confluence of individual selfishness meeting individual selfishness. Though politically incorrect and somewhat counterintuitive, reciprocity is the highest distillation of self-interest. In fact, reciprocity is impossible without self-interest. I cannot get my needs met if I refuse to meet yours. That's why infants are so draining and adult narcissists are so repulsive.

A great relationship ought to be energizing. It should be magnetic, attractive, and re-charging. Its purpose and intent must be clear and direct and there should be no doubt or ambiguity about the agendas of the parties involved. Indirectness, hinting, and circuitousness are draining. The worst thing businesspeople do is to put up with and even indulge draining relationships. It rewards mediocrity, wastes inordinate amounts of time, and erodes profitability. Practice putting up your hand and asking, "What is this conversation about and what do you need?"



[Love in the Present Tense](#)



[This Ain't Your Parents' Marriage](#)

Political and Cultural Observations

Values and A New Politics

In last month's newsletter, I discussed the growing disenchantment with both the Left and the Right in the American political scene. I also discussed the sense I had that we may be ready for a new political constituency based on a true understanding of core values, as opposed to the clichéd, hobby horse issues that dominate our current political blathering.

In the first place, no one on the current political spectrum would recognize a *value* if it fell on them. A value is a belief system about how the world ought to be and ought to operate. It lays out the kind of world one wants to live in and work toward creating. And it has the following five characteristics:

1. It is always black or white – there is no gray, middle ground. You can't be somewhat honest or have partial integrity.

2. It must lead to a decision between two or more alternatives. A value demands that a choice be made – no equivocation is acceptable.
3. It is personally neutral. It is irrelevant *who* is involved – values apply equally to everyone.
4. It is situationally neutral. Situations never determine value decisions.
5. It is unambiguous and incapable of further definition. Anyone looking at a particular value statement can readily understand it and should have no questions about what it means.

Values are very different from goals. Goals are where you're going. Values are how you're going to get there. And values always trump goals. I'm interested in where you want to go and what you want to accomplish. But I'm much more interested in how you're going to get there. How we're going to get somewhere determines our quality of life much more than where we're going. All brutal, inhuman, tyrannical regimes in the history of the human race have been crystal clear in their goals (often beneficent, charitable, and generous in tone); and all have been scurrilous and ruthless in the articulation of their values.

A brief example of the critical difference between goals and values. World peace is an admirable goal. We could achieve it in a fairly short period of time by militarily subjugating all the most lunatic regimes and factions in the world, including, probably, the use of nuclear weapons. On the other hand, we could achieve it by having all first world countries abdicate democracy and voluntarily submit to the rule of autocratic orthodoxy. In either case, we could have world peace, but at what price? (What really irritates me about causers is their self-righteous snobbery. They act like there are millions and millions of people who are opposed to world peace, feeding the poor, or other noble ventures; and that they are the caring few. What chutzpa!) You can readily extrapolate from the world peace example to other lofty issues – global warming, abortion, gay rights, poverty, etc. The question is always the same; and it's not – "Can we solve this problem?" It is – "At what price to our values?"

I believe we can build a strong and vital political force around four fundamental values:

1. *Individual Responsibility* – This concerns how you answer to yourself, and assumes that you are ready to look at your role in all the situations you find yourself in. This is a no victims zone.
2. *Accountability* – This concerns how you answer to others; and require others to answer to you. Making and keeping commitments is at the heart of this value. This is a no excuses zone.
3. *Continual Growth* – This concerns how one chooses between self-learning and comfort. Learning about oneself often involves discomfort and pain and the conscious choice to experience it, in order to grow. The choice of comfort is the road to mediocrity. This is the courageous zone.
4. *Direct and Honest Communication* – This concerns how one chooses to participate in relationships. It is about the

commitment to tell others (and have others tell you) what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. This is the challenging zone.

I'm convinced that these four values can mediate us through all the troubling and difficult questions and dilemmas of our time. These values are tough to live by, but they offer us the opportunity to participate in a dialogue that can bring us together, as opposed to dividing us further. For example, look at the burning question of our time – "Who caused the recession and what's the way out?" Answer – "We all did; by violating the core value of individual responsibility." With very few exceptions, across the socio-economic board, we bought, spent, and indulged ourselves like drunken conventioners. What's the way out? To not be rescued from the pain of our individual irresponsibility and to learn something from it. All the rescuing will do, is simply reward us for violating a set of values that can sustain us through any changes and dislocations coming our way. I see signs throughout the culture that we're ready and up to the task of living by a coherent and sustainable set of values.

Personal Notes

Bringing Mom Home – The Bitter and the Sweet

Two months ago we moved my mother from an assisted living facility in Florida to a skilled nursing facility in Montana, twenty minutes from our home. Her physical and mental condition were deteriorating and it was getting increasingly difficult to manage her care at a 2500 mile distance.

When people ask me how she's doing (she's almost 90), I never quite know how to answer. Her physical care is much better; some of her medical issues have stabilized, and her memory loss, at times, seems less severe. On that level, she is clearly doing better.

On another, quite different level, things are in turmoil and in a painful transition. I have not lived this close to my mother, nor seen her this often, in close to fifty years. The contrasts (and the similarities, in certain things) are stark and sad. At various times, earlier in her life, she has been a classically trained ballerina, a teacher, a chorus line dancer in three Hollywood World War II era movies (starring Donald O'Connor, who hit on her regularly), a manager at Saks Fifth Avenue, and a homemaker.

She was a kick-ass lady in everything she did. She ran our household like Mayor Daley (without the patronage) and she always knew where we were. If we weren't home on time, she tracked us down and came to get us. She admitted few mistakes – she was in her early 80's when she shared with me and Arleah that it was a mistake to have let her mother live with us, after she had been widowed early in life.

She spends her days now in a wheelchair or occasionally a walker, in a hospital-like room. She has five pictures on her walls – three of myself, my brother, and my sister as young children; a painting

(by her cousin) of a medieval rabbi; and a collage of photographs of our family celebrating our parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary. She reads quite a bit and the TV is almost always on.

Arleah sees her almost daily (she has been unbelievably giving to her) and usually brings my mother's dog with. I see her two to three times a week. The visits are painful and draining. Twenty minutes seems like an eternity. She will often, in the middle of a visit, pick up a magazine and start reading it. She is always ready for us to leave.

Like many women of her generation, she felt she had no right to talk about her (or anyone else's) feelings. So she lived a life of constant activity – we called her the “white tornado.” When we ask her now how she's feeling about the facility, the move, or her life, she looks either puzzled or irritated. The most she says is that, “I never thought I'd end up this way.”

As Arleah says, “Your mother is gone.” I have many memories, and hopefully, she does too.

Morrie

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We've had a number of requests for materials about our work. Here's the link to our online store: <http://www.fifthwaveleadership.com/store.cfm>



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