

First, See Thyself

At an out-of-town meeting I attended years ago, one of the participants talked a mile a minute and crammed so much information into her comments the rest of us could barely keep up. Our meeting should have ended on time, but it did not, because she felt compelled to tell story after story about her adventures and her experience and her projects. She was completely unaware of how this irritated the rest of us. She thought her stories added something necessary to the meeting. Her stories featured her. They actually were great tales, but there were too many; one or two would have been sufficient to add something to the day's discussion.

We all actually liked her! We just didn't like her domination of every conversation. The truth is all of us get into trouble when we are completely unable to see ourselves as others see us. This woman was a valued and important member of her company, and she was not without friends. But you can be sure that there are many who, before entering a meeting in which she is participating, take a deep breath and prepare to sit with her and her endless chatter.

Is this kind of draining behavior what we want to be known for? Frequent interruptions, retelling the same story three different ways, ignoring the cues others are signaling . . . it's all so self-centered. Most who act this way are completely unaware of it, as are the folks who are on the opposite end of the spectrum: the ones who sit in silent criticism of every comment made, who wait until everyone has weighed in and moved the process along to set every attendee back ten paces by dropping a

judgment bomb. "Why would you do it that way?" they'll intone with morbid seriousness, as though everyone in the room is a simpleton exhibiting unrelenting stupidity. They can't be convinced to participate with enthusiasm, because enthusiasm is just not something they do. In an imperfect world, these folks must show themselves beacons of precision and thoughtfulness. Too bad they can't see how others avoid them. They perennially rain on even the most modest of parades. They are know-it-alls.

What I have described to you are characteristics of weakness in two personality types that also have many highly desirable strengths. The self-centered talker who is aware of her tendency to take over a conversation can be a charming, lighthearted presence in even the toughest of situations. She'll always have an entertaining story and never meets a stranger, and part of her appeal will be that she hears herself and knows when to put a cork in it.

The morose, self-appointed authority frequently has a deeply compassionate streak, and his desire to prevent others from being affected in adverse ways makes him seem like the constant bearer of unwelcome news. Because he cannot step outside of his mental skin to hear how dreary and even snooty his pronouncements sound, he creates

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Sue Thompson is a personality trainer, an etiquette expert, and an instructor in life lessons. Her seminars on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused listeners at companies and business organizations throughout the

country to rate her presentations as "the best seminar of the conference!" She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.

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resistance instead of the empathy he's often shooting for. If he could see himself as others see him, he might use that empathy to gauge the tone of the folks he's with, because it's a skill he possesses. But when one is living in one's weaknesses, that's not possible. One is clueless.



We want to live in our strengths! We want to be self-aware so that what we communicate is received the way it was meant to be heard. We want others to perceive that we see them. I know very few people who truly do not care how they affect others. Most of us want

to be considered receptive and respectful while expressing ourselves uniquely. We don't want our unchecked, negative personality traits to make a greater impact than our positive ones. Personally, I would dread knowing that as I entered a meeting, all thoughts locked together in a collective, "Oh no—Sue's here."

So it can only be good when we understand something a little deeper of ourselves than just our preferences. The good news is that being fully aware of our personality strengths and weaknesses makes us very cognizant of other people's personalities, and when necessary we can adjust our preferences to meet another person at his or her level of communication. This simple act frequently has enormous consequences. We won't always have an impact because of this, but we will far more frequently than those who never attend to it. We will be better friends, better employees, better managers, simply better people.

One of Steven Covey's Seven Habits is "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Do you need help in doing this? I'll begin next month with some powerful insights into personality. ♪

Stumbling into the Place

In 2005, Steve Jobs, the co-founder and CEO of Apple Computer, delivered the commencement address at Stanford University. He began by telling his listeners that he had never graduated from college himself, but explained that by dropping out of college, he stumbled into some learning that was eventually used in his and Steve Wozniak's work in inventing the personal computer.

Then he talked about a difficult period in his working life:

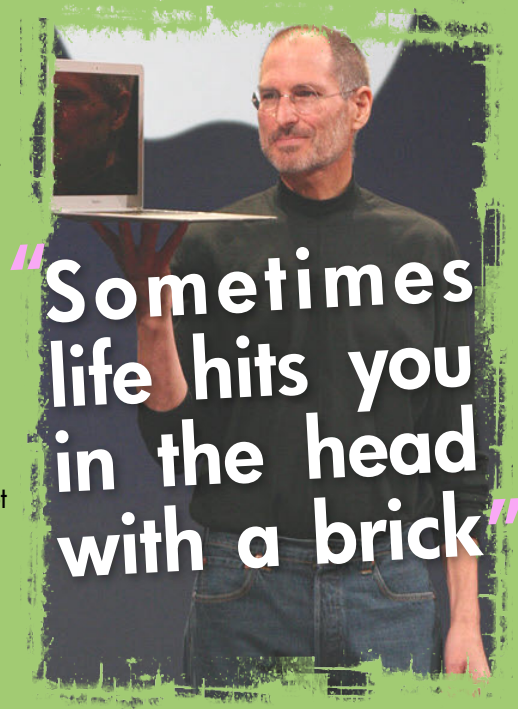
"I was lucky," he said. "I found what I loved to do early in life. Woz and I started Apple in my parents' garage when I was 20. We worked hard, and in 10 years Apple had grown from just the two of us in a garage into a \$2 billion company with over 4000 employees. We had just released our finest creation—the Macintosh—a year earlier, and I had just turned 30. And then I got fired. How can you get fired from a company you started? Well, as Apple grew we hired someone who I thought was very talented to run the company with me, and for the first year or so things went well. But then our visions of the future began to diverge and eventually we had a falling out. When we did, our board of directors sided with him. So at 30 I was out. And very publicly out. What had been the focus of my entire adult life was gone, and it was devastating.

"I really didn't know what to do for a few months. I felt that I had let the previous generation of entrepreneurs down—that I had dropped the baton as it was being passed to me. . . . I was a very public failure, and I even thought about running away from the valley. But something slowly began to dawn on me—I still loved what I did. The turn of events at Apple had not changed that one bit. I had been rejected, but I was still in love. And so I decided to start over.

"I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.

"During the next five years, I started a company named NeXT, another company named Pixar, and fell in love with an amazing woman who would become my wife. Pixar went on to create the world's first computer animated feature film, "Toy Story," and is now the most successful animation studio in the world. In a remarkable turn of events, Apple bought NeXT, I returned to Apple, and the technology we developed at NeXT is at the heart of Apple's current renaissance. And Laurene and I have a wonderful family together.

"I'm pretty sure none of this would have happened if I hadn't been fired from Apple. It was awful tasting medicine, but I guess the patient needed it. Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith." ♪



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forgiveness

Teddy Bear Says...



Have you ever felt awkward and unsure of what to say when someone you know has lost a loved one? There is a very simple phrase that will always serve you well, and it is this: "I'm so sorry for your loss."

Everyone goes through grief differently. Some people want to talk and others can't bring themselves to mention their pain. The important

thing to remember is their grief and the way they manage it is not about you. This means it is not acceptable to attempt to draw a person out if they do not wish to talk because you believe they'll feel better. It means this is not the time for you to launch into the story of when *your* family member died. It also means there may be another time for you to express your beliefs about what happens when we die or the spiritual ramifications of the circle of life. It's not about you or your story or your opinion or your beliefs. Right now, it's about the other person and their loss.

All dogs know this. We're experts on this subject. We know when our humans are grieving, and we know how to sit silently with them. We have learned through millennia of companionship that sometimes just our presence is helpful. You see, we experience no awkwardness in silence. We don't try to fill a wordless space. We aren't wondering if we're doing everything just right; we simply want to let people know we're on their side. This is something all of you could learn from us.

A generous comment about the deceased is called for when one knew him or her, such as, "I will miss Harold's gentleness." But you can never go wrong with "I'm so sorry for your loss." Most people will receive those words with a "thank you" and their next words (or silence) will indicate how they are dealing with their grief that day. Respect what you sense. We dogs know the very best thing anyone can do in this situation is to be present and quiet. By recognizing this and practicing it, you will be more human than a lot of people I know. See how easy it is to show gracious manners?

Keep practicing and make a Greyhound proud!



I seem to be coming across wonderful things to view, from blogs to television specials. No surprise, really; we want to share with friends the things we've seen that have touched us. This month I want to recommend that you go straight to "[The Power of Forgiveness](#)" and either purchase the \$24.95 DVD of the documentary of the same name, which aired on PBS recently, or take the time to watch some of the video clips on the site.

I tend to use the word "powerful" a lot, because no synonym carries the same weight; it applies here. I came across the documentary quite by accident one evening as I was flipping channels, and it turned out to be my great privilege that I happened upon this deeply moving film. Some of you know my book, *The Prodigal Brother*, is about my journey to forgiveness for my family. While the book is written from a Christian perspective, the subject of forgiveness is so universal and compelling that one does not need to be religious to appreciate its value. Forgiveness is life-changing.

What "The Power of Forgiveness" does reveal is the spiritual dimension of the subject. Through a number of personal accounts, including a heart-wrenching review of the 2006 Nickel Mines slayings in the Amish community in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, near where I live, the quality of life offered by walking in forgiveness is . . . *powerful*. Don't miss the opportunity to learn from this film and from the site. ♪

