

WHY DOGS WAG THEIR TAILS

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Lessons Leaders Can Learn About Work,
Joy, and Life

Written by
Sherri McArdle and Jim Ramerman

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FOREWORD

Dogs are natural “connectors” – they tend to gravitate toward people, are open and responsive, and they usually let you know what they are feeling. There are no hidden agendas with the canine set.

No bones about it – it’s pretty easy to know where a dog is coming from.

However, responding to them appropriately, giving them what they need, and helping them become the best dog they can be is another story. It’s the same with people. And, it’s the same with leadership.

That’s where this book comes in.

Why Dogs Wag Their Tails: Lessons Leaders Can Learn About Work, Joy, and Life is an insightful book for leaders at all levels – from the CEO to the mid-level manager to anyone who has to assume a leadership role. It is a book written for those of us who truly want to create a great place to work.

I’ve worked with Sherri and Jim over the past ten years and they’ve helped me create a great place for people to work. In fact, my seventy-person marketing, advertising and public relations firm, located in upstate New York, has ranked on the Top 25 “Best Small Companies

to Work for in America” list for three consecutive years. The list is produced by the Great Place to Work Institute and published in *HR Magazine*, the flagship publication of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).

Sherri’s and Jim’s expertise, their earnest approach, and the accountability they foster in their clients have proven invaluable for my business. They’ve given me tools to help me focus on what’s truly important for building a business, increasing morale, and generating a spirit of celebration and recognition in the workplace.

I remember meeting with Sherri for the first time. I was (I thought) quite prepared for this dialog and confidently explained to her how I approach each business day by waking very early and jotting down my to-do list. I proudly showed her that day’s list with the typical one hundred or so items on it.

Sherri listened attentively, reviewed my list, and then asked a simple question: “How do you measure your success?” I responded enthusiastically by saying “By how many items I crossed off my list!”

You can probably guess where this conversation went.

Sherri encouraged me to rank the items on my list according to priority. Ultimately, the experience prompted me to hire an executive assistant to focus on many of the important things on my daily list, but not the essential ones that I needed to own as a leader to grow my business. This was an exercise in “Focus and Finish” – one explored more deeply in this book.

The book delves into other concepts that have also been important for me, including aligning my role as a leader with my top talents. By looking closely at my core competencies, I realized I needed to hire more people that complemented my skill set versus those who had personalities similar to mine.

Another concept is the importance of celebration, which is near to my heart and central to our agency culture. We do it at every level – from the huge, winding metal slide and “Primal Scream Room” in

our office to summer sipper events with our clients to ski outings for the entire agency to having ice cream delivered to employees every Thursday in the summer to individual profit sharing.

Ultimately, this book affirms what Sherri and Jim have taught me – that leaders who can read people well, who make their cultures joyful, and who foster environments open to divergent ideas, are able to create an atmosphere in which others can truly benefit. The lessons in this book translate into real results: improved job performance, profits, and happier people.

So keep this book somewhere handy. If you're like me, you'll go back to it time and time again as a reminder of how to add more joy into your life and your work.



Lauren Dixon
CEO

Dixon Schwabl Advertising, Inc.

PREFACE

High-GainSM Insights and Practical Ideas

When my business partner, Sherri McArdle, came to me with the idea for this book, there was no question in my mind that it was a terrific one. The nexus between dogs and the lessons of life is a natural one, so natural that I couldn't believe I hadn't thought of it myself – and this, of course, is the root of all great ideas. When you experience that “Why didn't I think of it first?” moment, you know that you've discovered something special. This book carries the force of epiphany, the power to transform the way people think, work, and live. As my daughter, Kristin, might put it: *This book is awesome!*

Two of the many important things I share with Sherri include the commitment and passion we have for our work as leadership consultants and the excitement we have for “applied sciences.” On the one hand, we are grounded in the libraries and think tanks of great ideas; on the other hand, we are firmly grounded on the shop floors and in the offices and conference rooms of our clients. The deep enthusiasm we foster for our work comes from the real, honest, and powerful changes we've seen our clients invent in the laboratories of their own lives, both at work and at home.

For Sherri and me to be effective in our jobs, we need to be congruent — that is, to believe in and experience each and every recommendation we make to our clients. To quote Mahatma Gandhi, “We must become the change we seek in the world.” That’s the idea behind the High-GainSM Insights and Practical Ideas I’ve added after each of Sherri’s chapters. You can use these sections as tools for achieving positive change for yourself — and for “becoming.” These insights and ideas, joined with so many of Sherri’s wonderful stories about people, dogs, and business, create an invaluable resource for those looking to find meaning in their lives and in their work. Like all great inventions, it’s the idea and the practical application that bring it all together.

I love dreaming. I love creating. So why not dream *and* create? That’s the challenge we all face today in an ever-more complex, ever-changing business environment. You can dream about what you want to become and what you want to achieve, and then you can take the positive steps necessary to build your vision. You have the power to create your own future. Sherri and I, through the stories and ideas we jointly put forth in this book, can help.

I am proud to have written the High-GainSM Insights and Practical Ideas segments of each chapter of *Why Dogs Wag Their Tails: Lessons Leaders Can Learn About Work, Joy, and Life*. These segments represent the culmination of many years of business consulting, a fervent immersion in the depths of diverse working environments, and countless lessons in the training room of life. To say that I support all the great wisdom in this book would be an understatement. I hope you enjoy the journey as much as I have.

– JIM RAMERMAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sherri McArdle

I would like to thank my beloved Bichon Frise, Scout, for teaching me, day in and day out, what leadership means (even if it is the hard way sometimes) and for his constant inspiration and unconditional love. I would like to thank Bob Minchella, my dog trainer, for showing me how to become the leader Scout needed me to be and especially for his direct feedback and sense of humor when I needed it. I would like to thank George Gazarek for planting the seed for writing this book on New Year's Eve when he first heard me talk about it. I would also like to thank Elaine St. James for firing me up to write this book with her enthusiasm for this project on a long walk in Santa Barbara.

I would like to thank all of our clients, colleagues, family, and friends who inspired me in their remarkable ways, and by their work, stories, and enthusiasm for this project. A very special thank you to those people whose personal stories we used with their permission: Terry McArdle, Ron Spingarn, Father Jim Callan, Jim Smith, and Paul Hudson. I would like to thank all of the generous dog owners and their wonderful dogs for showing me how canines can teach us

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about ourselves, and how to become better at life and at work if we are willing to listen. Special thanks to BJ Mann and her well-trained dogs, Kayla, Cody, and Spirit; Jenna Rawlins and her dog Diamond; Sharon Gordon and her dogs Bailey and Maggie; Vicki and Myron Liebhaber and their magnificent dog Logan; Steve Schwartz and Alice Tariot and their dog Milo; Adam and Carrie Grossman and their dog Jack; Jamie Schuster and his dogs Roxie and Sydney; Erin Martin and her dog Libby; and Karen and Ken Baker and their energetic dog Blaze.

I would like to thank Nick DiChario for his talented editing, encouraging style, and his “can do” attitude, a rare combination. Thank you to our agent Ken Lizotte, our attorney Mark Costello and to the team at WBusiness Books. Thank you to my business partner, Jim Ramerman, and the McArdle Ramerman team—Terry, Peg, Erin, Alissa, Judy and Francine—for their talents, contributions and support in the wonderful work they do for our clients every day. A special thank you goes to Peg Mercier for her ongoing dedication to our firm and for her amazing attention to all of the details of this project.

My deepest thanks are to my husband Terry, and our children Matt and Rachel, for their incredible support, love, and encouragement, and for listening to yet another dog story. They are truly remarkable (and patient) people.

Jim Ramerman

My thanks to the wonderful canines in my life who brought me great love: Cisco, my first dog, a Dalmatian, was named after *The Cisco Kid*—a 1950s TV Western. Once when I was lost in the woods at six-years old, my dad found me only because he could see Cisco’s black-and-white spots leaping well above my head. Hogan, the puppy my family adopted while I was in junior high, was half Basset, quarter Beagle, and quarter Cocker. He was named after Colonel

Hogan in the 1960s TV comedy *Hogan's Heroes*. This wonderful mutt was eccentrically popular as the underdogs of the world can sometimes be.

Most especially, I thank Terra, my family's purebred Golden Retriever, who has taught me the most about myself and about life because of who she is and maybe because this student was finally ready.

Along with Sherri, I thank the tremendous team at McArdle Ramerman, Inc., who make so much possible—you are each so incredibly talented in what you do and are the wind beneath our wings. I join Sherri in appreciation of Nick DiChario. He is a rare individual, a talented writer and editor, and a joy to work with beginning to end.

Thanks to my family, friends, and clients who have given me all the reason in the world to celebrate life. Because of them I've wagged my tail often, long, and vigorously.

For the record, Sherri is the driving force and main author of this work. My thanks for her partnership, her boundless energy, and her passion to deliver results. She has helped a lot of us—clients, family, and friends—answer a lot of life's important "why" questions.

INTRODUCTION

People, Dogs, Life, Work

Ralph Nader once said, “I enjoy my work so much that I have to be pulled away from my work into leisure.” Do the people you know talk about their jobs with that kind of passion? Do your friends and family love their work so much that they have to be pulled away from it? Do you?

Some people are working much harder than they would like to work and want more time to spend with their families. Some people are stressed by the pressures and the pace of change. Some feel unprepared to perform at new levels, while others are in the wrong positions and would do something else if they only had the opportunity. Some are coping by disconnecting emotionally from work and from their loved ones.

Clearly, there must be a better way.

Why Dogs?

From the East Coast (where I live) to the West Coast (where I often visit) to Europe (where I wish I could visit more), I can tell you that many people I’ve met love their dogs. They walk them with

pride. They take them to work, if and when they can. They bring them to restaurants, shopping areas, and outdoor cafés. They introduce them to people as if they're members of the family. More and more, dogs have become part of our everyday lives and landscapes. Today, Americans as a whole own nearly seventy-four million dogs.

Dogs are great companions and great teachers. They teach us about ourselves: our humanity, our compassion, and our tolerance. I've learned firsthand that dogs can also teach us how to be happier in our lives and our careers.

Several years ago, I surprised myself. My family and I got a dog, Scout, and I started watching him closely. I began gaining insights into many things canine and human.

One of the first things Scout taught me about was the power of smiling. I smile when I think of Scout. When I smile, my mental state changes. I become more relaxed and more approachable. When I'm in a more relaxed and approachable state, I connect better with people, and I'm more encouraging. My dog Scout has taught me a lot about being a more effective and happier person at home and at work. He was my inspiration for this book.

I've noticed that my clients relax when they talk about their dogs. Their eyes light up, their body language softens, and they are at peace, suddenly and profoundly, without even thinking about it. The powerful connection they have with their dogs outweighs their problems and stress on the job. They connect with me on a more intimate basis. We talk about the adventures we've had with our dogs and how much we've learned from them and about ourselves.

For dogs, there is no such thing as work, and they don't need a handbook for living. Instead, they rely on their instincts, the structure placed around them, and the leadership that directs them, either from people or a pack leader.

For people, there's life and work. Nobody gives us a handbook for how to live or work effectively. We rely on our intuition,

our experience, and the structure and leadership we have been given.

Dogs need to be led by good leaders. They require structure in which to operate effectively. They want to be good followers. When they don't sense leadership, they fill the void and try to assume it.

People need good leadership and structure in order to operate effectively. They want to work for good leaders and follow good leaders. When people don't sense strong leadership, they, too, try to fill the void, either consciously or unconsciously.

My business partner Jim Ramerman and I both have beloved dogs. Scout is my family's wonderful and energetic Bichon Frise. Jim's family has Terra, a sleek, intelligent, and loving Golden Retriever. In fact, everyone on our team at work has had dogs in their lives at one time or another. Dogs are special creatures. They are the perfect companions. Loyal. Playful. Intent. Loving. Fully engaged in the moment. They reflect back to us so much about ourselves. If we watch them, if we listen to them, dogs can help us become better people at work and at home. Dogs can teach us new tricks.

I decided to use the lessons I've learned in developing leaders over many years, and the lessons Scout has taught me in my daily life, to make some very interesting connections among people, dogs, life, and work. Some of the principles you'll read about I have been working on with clients for years, and I've discovered that dogs pick up on them naturally. Other behaviors I discovered through Scout (and other dogs) and simply began applying them to work situations. The people with whom I've worked have applied these principles with great success in their careers, and I believe that you can apply them in yours, too.

Napoleon Bonaparte once said, "A dog teaches us a lesson in humanity." Who doesn't need that from time to time?

* * *

I've run an executive- and leadership-development firm with my business partner – Jim Ramerman – for the past twelve years. We've

worked with CEOs, senior executives, and people throughout the workforce, logging more than twenty-thousand hours of High-Gain conversations with individuals in every corner of the marketplace, including public, private, not-for-profit, and family-owned businesses, as well as multinational corporations. After many hours of conversations, I've discovered that far too many people are unhappy with different aspects of their lives and work.

Dogs, on the other hand, are happy naturally. Dogs overcome their adversities, no matter what life deals them. Dogs are remarkable for their joy and playfulness, their capacity to keep learning, and their resilience.

Every so often, we come across some very remarkable people, too. Some have found joy in learning new job skills they never thought they could master. Others have found great satisfaction in increasing their sense of self-worth and learning how to cope with change. Still others have taken risks they never thought themselves capable of until they looked at themselves in new and interesting ways.

Throughout this book, you'll read humorous and heartwarming stories about interesting people and remarkable canine companions. You'll meet the incredibly joyful spinning dog, Ruby, and Logan, the regal Collie Club champion. In Chapter 5, you'll discover how Terry brought joy back to his work when he discovered he could choose his boss. In Chapter 11, you'll meet a brilliant young man named Kenny, who is overcoming a learning disability to achieve remarkable personal goals. You'll get a glimpse into the lives of dogs and people and, along the way, you'll gain valuable insights into work and life.

All the stories here are true, or based on actual events. Sometimes they are a compilation of more than one situation. I have changed names, genders, companies, and details whenever necessary to uphold our pledge of confidentiality to clients and colleagues, a vital tenet of our work.

I hope you will read with interest, answer the High-Gain questions at the end of each chapter, and actually take the steps to implement the valuable lessons you learn. This book will help you do all of that, if you're willing.

One final thought: It's not essential for you to have a dog of your own to get something out of this book. You don't necessarily have to be a "dog person," for that matter, although chances are if you've read this far into the introduction, you've known at least one dog closely in your life.

What it comes down to, I believe, is this:

If you have the capacity in your heart to love, to be passionate about something dear to you, these stories will reveal their secrets. Rest assured that you already have the inherent ability to make positive changes in your life and work. You will come to see that there are many reasons dogs wag their tails and, that by learning a little about these marvelous animals, you may learn quite a bit about yourself. In fact, you may even learn how to wag your tail, too.

CHAPTER 1

Keep On Learning

I was the last holdout in my family when it came to the decision about getting a dog. My husband, Terry, had known two wonderful dogs, Pinky and Schooner, both mutts. Pinky had been the dog of his early childhood and, as such, had been a special part of the family. His mother got Schooner when Terry was older, and I grew to love Schooner after I met Terry.

Our two children fantasized about getting a dog, as most children do. They made all the usual noises about how the dog would be *their* responsibility, how *they* would walk it and feed it and clean up after it, and do whatever needed to be done so Mom and Dad wouldn't get stuck with all the chores.

I knew right from the start, of course, that this was bunk. I'm a practical person. Working at a marriage, raising two children, and running a leadership-consulting business was plenty for me to manage, and I didn't want to take on a pet, too. So I hemmed, hawed, and delayed the inevitable for as long as possible, until I finally warmed up to the idea (or cracked under the pressure), although to this day I'm not even sure I could tell you why.

The next consideration was our oldest daughter, Rachel, who was allergic to dogs and cats. Terry took on the research of finding hypoallergenic breeds, and we settled on the Bichon Frise. We found a reputable breeder in upstate New York, and soon after, became the parents of an energetic, white puffball of a male Bichon pup. Our son, Matt, named him Scout.

Scout was born in the year 2000 on Labor Day weekend, with a built-in connection to work (the labor part) that had escaped me at the time. I believe Bichons have a high “adorability factor”; that is, they are made so people will fall in love with them, and then all rules go out the window. Adding Scout to the family was like adding another child to the household. And as with human babies, the early months weren’t exactly easy.

I remember standing outside on many cold nights, snowflakes falling in the moonlight, while I waited for Scout to pee for the tenth time in two hours. (Telling a dog to hurry up about it, by the way, is a complete waste of time.) After eight months of this, Scout was finally housebroken, or so we thought.

We installed a doggie door on the patio so he could go in and out at will. He had the run of the house during the day while we were at work. He often napped on our beds so he could look out the window from the second floor and watch the world go by. He sat on our laps in the family room, satisfying all those baby cravings for me, and providing lots of affection for our children.

For the next five years, my life was full of the usual challenges of raising two kids and running a company. Everyone in the family was busy. Rachel went off to college. Matt played sports and attended middle school. Terry left his job at a large corporation and eventually joined my firm. My business grew into a well-respected leadership- and executive-development corporation in upstate New York.

This, however, was not the end of the story.

We've Got a Problem



The supposedly housebroken Scout began peeing all over the house. I know that may not be a pleasant thought, but if you've ever lived with a dog in your life, you understand that many things come with pet ownership, including cleaning up the occasional accident.

I would find the places he “went” almost weekly. I suppose I was aware of what was happening, yet the magnitude of the issue seemed to creep up on me in slow motion. This is often the case with recognizing issues at work too, as you will discover later on in this book.

The vet assured us that there was no medical problem. Scout did not have a urinary-tract infection, which I sort of hoped would be the answer, as that would have meant we could solve it with medication. But our Western philosophy of “let's fix it now with meds” didn't extend to the animal kingdom this time.

We had just redecorated the house with nice furniture, which he was now ruining unashamedly, and I was growing increasingly frustrated. We could never catch Scout in the act, and no amount of after-the-fact scolding worked either.

One day I was lamenting about the problem with a friend, and she suggested I see a dog behaviorist in town, a highly respected expert named Bob. I eagerly (OK, frantically!) placed the call, and after trading several messages, we finally connected. He was clearly busy and in demand. To the best of my recollection, here is how our conversation went:

Bob: So what's the problem you're having with Scout?

Sherri: Scout is a five-year-old Bichon. Over the last six months he's been urinating all over the house: in the dining room, in the family room, and even on our bed. I've had him checked out by the vet, and he's fine, no urinary-tract problems.

Bob: OK. Have there been any other big things going on at home?

Sherrri: No.

Bob: Have there been other changes in his behavior?

Sherrri: No.

Bob: I think I know what the problem is. You're having a leadership issue.

Sherrri: (Laughing) Do you know what I do for a living?

Bob: No.

Sherrri: I own a leadership firm.

Bob: (Laughing) Physician, heal thyself.

Sherrri: How soon can we get together?

Bob: The sooner, the better. For your sake.

The first session with Bob was an eye-opener. When he entered the house, he never looked at Scout or acknowledged him. He didn't pet him or touch him. Consequently, Scout did not do his usual jump-and-bark routine.

Terry, Matt, and I sat on the couch across from Bob, and Scout jumped onto the couch with us, lying down. Bob sat across from us and commented on how calm a Bichon Scout seemed to be. He asked if Scout was always this way.

"No," I replied. In fact, I had never seen Scout so relaxed around a stranger.

After spending a little time observing Scout and getting to know him, Bob said that Scout had taken the dominant position in the house, and we needed to reclaim our authority. He said that we were not going to like what he was about to suggest. He also said that some people didn't follow his advice because it meant making changes with their dog that they didn't want to make.

I grimaced, waiting for the other shoe to drop. I wasn't sure what Bob was going to say next. I braced myself for the worst.

Bob assured me that Scout's problem could be solved if we were willing to make some changes. Those changes included the following:

1. Scout would no longer be able to sleep on our bed.
2. Scout should not sit on our laps anymore.
3. Scout should not run up the stairs ahead of us.
4. Scout would need training in some simple "sit," "stay," and "down" commands.

My husband Terry is the natural alpha male in our family pack, and Scout obeyed him unquestioningly from the start. Knowing how to handle a dog comes easily to Terry. It seems I was more of "a problem." Scout didn't see me as an authority figure. Looking back, I would have flunked doggie training. I referred to Scout as "my last baby" and treated him accordingly. I never established good dog boundaries. Scout became a full member of our household with all the privileges of membership.

In her wonderful book *The Natural History of Love*, Diane Ackerman writes, "Once a pet enters a household, it enters the family dynamics, and that can be either good or bad, depending on the people involved." For me, it turned out to be both good and bad.

Unintentionally, I had reinforced Scout's dominant behaviors and sent the wrong messages about what I would tolerate (another leadership issue). Scout, for his part, was just being himself and taking my apparent cues that he was in charge. Like the wolf descendent he was, he had simply marked his territory and worked his way up our household chain of command.

As heartbreaking as it was to think about no longer having a lap dog, I decided that it would be worse if he were to continue ruining the furniture.

Under Bob's tutelage, I started training Scout, and I begrudgingly made all the changes he suggested. Scout stopped urinating all

over the house. As I stepped up my leadership with Scout, it was as if I had turned off his faucet.

Bob and I started meeting with Scout for regular training sessions. I'm the boss now and Scout is respecting my authority. Training isn't easy for either of us. I don't always get the commands right or the timing down, but I continue to work at it "doggedly."

I'm becoming the leader that Scout needs me to be.

And yes, you can teach old dogs new tricks. Take it from me.

An Old Dog Learns New Tricks



Dogs (old or young) aren't the only ones capable of learning new tricks. Anyone in business can and should develop this survival skill. Just ask Frank.

Frank was a nationally respected executive with a thirty-year career in his field. He gave talks and published papers. People listened when Frank spoke. He had a soft but authoritative voice and a distinguished manner about him. He was also incredibly knowledgeable, focused, and disciplined. Ironically, he was more respected outside his company than inside when we started working together.

Frank's responsibilities were changing. His business unit was consolidated with several others under one large umbrella. It was becoming more important for him to add new clients and develop his people to support a growing business. While his technical skills were highly respected, his credibility within the company was now being tested because the business results weren't up to par. Frank knew it. His boss Alan knew it. Alan's peers knew it. And the CEO knew it.

Alan had always believed in Frank. They'd worked together for almost twenty years and were very similar in nature. Like Frank, Alan thought everyone was a professional. Alan and Frank assumed people

knew what needed to be done and would figure out how to do it. Neither of them had developed their people much nor liked conflict, so performance issues went unaddressed for long periods.

Both took their time in deliberating the issues of the day, often with each other. As a result, in the eyes of the increasingly business-focused executives, they were seen as slow decision-makers. Alan and Frank came across as cautious and tentative during intense business discussions about how to raise revenue and attack markets. Pressure was growing on both of them; their ability to change wasn't keeping pace with the crisis.

I met Frank and got to know him and the issues facing him. I suggested that he start getting feedback about his effectiveness from people in the company. As a result of our conversations, he began to develop some deeper insights into himself and his role in both the problems facing the company and in the solutions he would have to find.

It wasn't easy for Frank to ask for feedback and to acknowledge his shortcomings. A proud and religious man, Frank had built his career on his credibility and a strong set of personal values. Now his credibility was being questioned. We met several times to talk through the issues.

One day Frank declared, "I have to move beyond consensus leadership and elevate this business problem to a crisis level in the minds of the people who work for me. It's up to me to see that they make more rapid corrections."

As he said this, Frank sat upright in his chair. He stared straight ahead with his hands folded in his lap, unblinking. He was a neatly groomed man, wearing beige pants and a blue blazer. His presence was often gentle and quiet, so when he made his declaration it caught me by surprise – and I was glad to hear it.

"I've been reactive to problems," he said, "not anticipating them. I've been tentative about making changes. Consequently, I haven't

been able to influence the organization cross-functionally. People respect me technically, but they don't respect me as a businessman."

"You haven't been getting the level of business results the company needs," I suggested. "You're getting lost in project details. You're going to have to do some unlearning and new learning if you want to rise to the challenge. You'll need to let go of some of those projects you love and learn to become passionate about the business of acquiring and leading projects through others."

"You know," he said, "this has become a fundamentally different job from the one I accepted. I've been growing increasingly tentative, which breeds tentativeness in others, and then their support for my leadership wanes."

"What would help increase your effectiveness?" I asked.

Silence . . . a thoughtful hesitation. "I want to become clear about what I need to do to build this business. I want to figure out how to break into a huge new industry and to become an integrated solution provider."

"Where should you start?"

"Well, I'm pretty familiar with the industry. The problem is that I haven't figured out how to apply what I know about the industry creatively or innovatively."

"Who can help you figure that out?" I asked.

"I know three guys who are nationally recognized industry experts outside of the company. I could start with them."

"Would they do some brainstorming with you?"

"I could ask," Frank said a bit tentatively.

"Why are you hesitating?" I asked.

"I've never had to reach out to them in this way," Frank said quietly. "I usually see them at conferences where I'm speaking or

they're speaking, and it's just a whole different environment. I guess I feel funny about asking them for help."

"Is that how you see it? A desperate plea for them to save you?"

That got a smile out of him. Sometimes when I hit the fear with a hammer, I can bang it into an insight.

"My guess is," I went on, "if you raise your clarity about what you need, if you're confident in your ability to attack it, and if you have strong convictions about the importance of building this business, any one of them would be happy to talk to you. You'd be opening up, Frank, being inclusive. If you really think about it, you'd be aligning with your personal values, not contradicting them."

Frank took in the suggestion and nodded in agreement. I imagined he was processing the input and already figuring out how he could make those phone calls.

Frank focused on developing his most mission-critical skills over the next few years. These included driving himself and his team to higher levels of results, confronting underperformers in positive and encouraging ways, recruiting talent to fill specific needs within the organization, and developing his staff.

The business didn't turn around right away. Alan continued to get a lot of pressure about Frank. But Alan's support for Frank was unwavering. He never caved in when his peers suggested Frank be repositioned or terminated. His instincts told him to wait it out.

Meanwhile, Frank persevered. He was not a quitter, and he always had a strong faith in himself and his abilities. Frank's prospecting efforts started to bear fruit within a year. He landed two of the largest pieces of business the company had ever had. He stirred a few pots by letting his people know where they needed to improve. One by one, he also added new levels of talent to his team.

Alan's patience paid off. He continued to encourage Frank and gave him the room he needed to grow. Frank's dedication to the

company and his willingness to learn and apply new skills was a powerful combination. Frank is now one of the company's stars.

Frank recently told me that he felt like a kid again. "Isn't it great," he said, "that at this stage in my career I can still learn and grow and make a difference?"

Just as Scout and I had found new tricks to change old habits, Frank, too, had learned that he could adjust to his changing business environment. Frank still reminds himself that his development needs to continue, that even highly educated and credible people benefit from help once in a while. And Alan, for his part, continues to remind his peers not to be in such a hurry to give up on "old dogs."

High-Gain Insights



Your ability to continue learning and to grow is critical to your effectiveness and success at work. According to Lominger International, a company offering development resources for individuals, teams, and organizations, approximately ten percent of the population is highly "learning-agile." These ten percent are eager learners. They seek out learning opportunities on their own. About 60 percent of the population is passive about learning. They'll learn if presented with the opportunity, but they won't seek it out. And finally, 30 percent of the population is learning-blocked.

If you work on increasing your learning agility in many directions – people agility, mental agility, results agility, and change agility – your organization will regard you as having higher potential and is more likely to offer you opportunities for advancement.

For those committed to becoming learning-agile, here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. How eager are you to learn and grow?
2. How learning-agile are you, and in what ways?

3. How can you increase your learning agility and what would the benefits to you and your organization be?
4. What skills or special knowledge would you like to pursue that you don't currently possess?
5. What skills that you already possess would you like to update or strengthen?
6. In what ways can you more actively seek development?

Once you've answered these questions, you can begin to form a learning plan, either on your own or with the help of your supervisor, manager, or human resources and training departments. You'll be amazed by the positive reaction you will receive at work when you show an eagerness to learn and grow.

Practical Ideas

- Be interested in people, especially new and diverse people (e.g., people in different professional fields) and act on that interest. Start conversations with them and ask many respectful, yet probing questions.
- Read books and articles on the latest breakthroughs in your field. Even more important, read magazines from other, unrelated fields. This will keep your brain growing and agile, and will open your mind to creative insights.

“Learning is not attained by chance. It must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.”

– ABIGAIL ADAMS