

JAMES P R E F A C E

I spent most of my life suppressing my feelings and ignoring them in order to do what was necessary to accomplish things I thought I was supposed to do. This so-called achievement orientation in some respects served me well. I was able to graduate with great distinction from Stanford University, earn a doctorate at the Harvard business school, and eventually become a chaired full professor at the University of Virginia. I felt active, intellectually, physically, socially, spiritually, and societally. I became a leader in my church, and I was active in a consulting practice that took me around the world. Somewhere along the way, though, I began to feel empty inside. This was hugely ironic for me since I had spent my life doing things that I was told and which I believed were of great value and of lasting impact.

One day I woke up feeling deep despair because I felt further behind than I had the day before: further behind with my health, with my family, with my work, with my charity work, basically on every aspect of life. I looked at the next day and the next week and the next month and the next year, and I couldn't see how anything would change. It wasn't so much that I was blindsided by this, since I have been a student of human development and behavior since my studies at Harvard. I was aware of the transitions that people typically go through in life and of the stages of professional careers. But somehow things weren't turning out the way everyone said



they would. My assumed strategy of “do what you’re told and do it really well” was working on the outside but not on the inside.

One of my pleasures in life had been playing basketball. I began playing in the third or fourth grade in Boise, Idaho. I made the high school basketball team but didn’t start. I played on all-church basketball teams, but never won. In a pickup game in Cambridge, MA in the Cage once, the former starting point guard for the Stanford University varsity team, told me that I played extremely good defense. It was the kind of thing I would never forget, but which would never appear on my resume. So, I was good enough to enjoy the sport, but never good enough to make it a profession.

When I moved to the University of Virginia, one of the first things I did was find the noontime pickup game. Every university has one. I played in that game until I was physically unable to do so. One day, I had a very challenging matchup. I took a shot and he blocked it. I made a pass and he stole it. I tried to block him and he swished it over me from 40 feet. (Yes, 40 feet.) My frustration on the court led to a series of conversations off the court which have blossomed into an extremely rewarding professional and personal relationship. The guy I was checking was Doug Newburg, former varsity basketball player for the University of Virginia who played with Ralph Sampson during the glory days of Virginia basketball. Our conversations quickly went from basketball to a variety of other topics. One day he invited me to come listen to him give a lecture in the psychology department, and my life was changed.

Doug had spent 15 years interviewing world-class performers in multiple industries. The insights he has drawn from that research have been for me extraordinary. We had been talking for a couple of years about writing a book together. When we decided to begin, it was clear to him and then to me, that outlining the book, and then each chapter and then slogging through the writing was not going to be enjoyable or rewarding for either

of us. So, he made what I thought was a brilliant suggestion. He said why don't we play pickup basketball as we write? Like we do on the court and like we do when we present.

We had taught together before, and the times when it went best were the times when we were the most organic and unstructured. Like playing catch. So we decided to try this as we wrote the book. There may be other volumes written in this way, but I have never seen them. I can say this, it was extremely inspiring and rewarding to write in this way. I found myself eagerly awaiting Doug's response to each of my chapters. When his would arrive by e-mail, typically I would read it and began writing a response immediately. This has been at the same time the easiest and most emotionally demanding volume I have ever written.

We hope that this conversation in print will help you understand more deeply and profoundly than you have about the relationship between how you feel and how you perform. We've become convinced that it is one of the most overlooked, underrated, underestimated relationships in virtually all aspects of life: especially in organizational life. At the end of the book, we invite your comments, suggestions and communications. We look forward to hearing from you and including you in our conversations.

Acknowledgments

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James G. S. Clawson
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