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----- WHAT'S UP, DOC? -----

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"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

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THIS MONTH'S THEME: LESSONS FROM A NOVEL

I mentioned last month that I was reading a work of fiction for the first time in quite a while. "The Known World" by Edward Jones is a highly acclaimed work that provides a kind of taxonomy of the world of American slavery before the American Civil War. The author takes you through this world without resorting to clichés, and in so doing, helps the reader see our modern world with fresh eyes. Though the book is not related to organizational life, it does show a lot about human nature: all sides of it. I'm going to pull some lessons from the book that I would apply to organizational life, and offer a few ideas along those lines this month. As I go through this, I may give away a few of the book's secrets, but then again, this work is not so much a plot mystery as a steady account of the moral choices people make within their "known world." So, you can still read the book and get a lot from it, even if I give away a few little plot points.

SUBSCRIPTIONS INCREASE SINCE JAN 1, 2005: 20%

NEW SUBSCRIPTIONS GOAL FOR 2005: 300%

Thank you for your recommendations!

IN THIS ISSUE:

1. LESSONS FROM A NOVEL: "THE KNOWN WORLD"
2. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND ENTERTAINMENTS
3. CHUCKLES
4. PROMOTE YOUR OWN GROWTH
5. ABOUT DR. SCHULER
6. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE
7. NEWSLETTER STATEMENT OF ETHICS

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTES:

"You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club."

-- Jack London

"The wise are instructed by reason; ordinary minds by experience; the stupid, by necessity; and brutes by instinct."

-- Cicero

"Everything that I understand, I understand only because I love."

-- Leo Tolstoy

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## 1. LESSONS FROM A NOVEL: "THE KNOWN WORLD"

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### 1. CORRUPT SYSTEMS YIELD CORRUPT OUTCOMES

In the novel, the corrupt social system was the one which supported and justified chattel slavery. Accordingly, everyone who became part of the social system was in some way affected and shaped by the predominant ideology and philosophy that supported chattel slavery. While this is an extreme case, you may say, it's really not: this is just one of the rather garden-variety social systems humanity has produced and continues to produce in our history. Still, when the operating principles of a society or an organization are sufficiently corrupted, then the behavior of the people in that system will be shaped accordingly. Corrupt systems, with corrupted or warped incentives for behavior, will yield corrupt outcomes. In the United States, we have seen this rather famously in the case of Enron or Arthur Anderson, whereby a lack of institutional systems to thwart the worst kinds of behavior actually abetted and made inevitable the occurrence of corrupt behaviors. Governing systems and principles do matter, for societies and for organizations.

### 2. CATEGORIZING PEOPLE BLINDS US TO REALITY

In this novel, the categorization of people by "race" obviously blinded people to the fundamental reality that there is no such thing as "race," except as a social construct we create and use to oppress or abuse each other through tribal power politics. People are people. We share the same genetic code, and even our individual genetic differences make up only a small percentage – less than five percent – of our genetic makeup. In the religion of my youth, the idea was expressed differently: "we are all made in the image and likeness of God," I was taught, though all major religious traditions express the same idea in their own way. Any further categorization blinds us to reality. Certainly, these categories continue to exist here in the United States and in other ways all throughout the world, and they influence organizational behavior as well as political and social behavior. But the very act of categorizing people based on what we perceive to be their group memberships or identities – as opposed to their individual actions – leads at the very least to inefficiency and organizational

weakness, when it does not lead to outright injustice, abuse or oppression. The failure to take people as individuals is the mirror image of our own inability to understand ourselves as individuals. When that happens, we fail to realize our potential. Bigotry imprisons the oppressed as well as the oppressor.

3. OUTLIERS AND “CRAZIES” CAN BE CREDIBLE WITNESSES OF TRUTH

Alice is crazy, or so it seems. She’s the woman who was allegedly kicked by a mule in the head when she belonged to another master, and as a result, she spews nonsense, sings unrecognizable songs and wanders about aimlessly at night like a “cow without a bell.” Crazy she may be, but she sees much more than anyone suspects. In any group or organization, those who seem least sensible, especially from a management perspective, may very well see and understand much more of what is going on than just about anyone else does. Many organizations and management teams spend so much time and effort to get everyone to think the same way that they discount the very credible and useful points of view of those who seem most “crazy” or outside the mainstream. I won’t give away more of Alice’s role in the novel, but the point for organizations is well taken. Good ideas and great insight can come from anywhere, and perhaps especially from those who are most discounted because they seem least credible. I see this in my consulting with organizations when very negative organizational critics are dismissed because they are habitually negative or even destructive. And yet, while these people may not be solution builders, they may often see something more clearly than management does that ultimately needs to be addressed.

4. FEW PEOPLE ARE SAINTLY, SO SET ORGANIZATIONAL CONDITIONS ACCORDINGLY

Even more than I am a consultant or a speaker or any kind of professional, I consider myself a student of human nature. . . and human nature is relentlessly mixed. We, all of us, are capable of great harm to others, sometimes thoughtlessly, and each of us possesses what former U. S. President Abraham Lincoln once described as “the better angels of our nature.” I appreciate in this novel the way the author shows understanding of the perspectives of both slaveholder and slave, without undue sentimentality, so as to catalogue the choices and lives each character leads. The point is, very few people are capable of rising above their immediate environments to behave in a consistently “saintly” manner, so those of us who design institutions or organizations must create conditions and incentives to promote the best possible outcomes, and to minimize the expression of the worst human nature has to offer. Enron failed to create and sustain checks and balances and systems of accountability to place a check on raw

greed and abuse of trust, and so Enron no longer exists. Many other organizations have suffered similar fates. The more money and power are available, the more corruption will tend to surface and take root. When you are designing an organization or even running a department, make your systems of accountability as transparent and consistent as possible, and be sure they are implemented faithfully. To fail to do so is to invite the inevitable corruption to occur. Otherwise, the question is not if, but when such behavior will occur. The corollary to this principle is that, happily, saints (and not necessarily religiously oriented ones; I refer here to those whose moral character is consistent and which can transcend the habits of a given social setting) do exist. Recognize who they are and be sure they are noticed and accorded positions of formal or informal leadership. Do not, of course, exempt them from accountability. If they are saints, in fact, they won't allow themselves to be exempted.

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“99 Negotiation Nuggets for Winners,” my new book, offers quick shots of wisdom designed to help you get what you want and need in your life, work and career. This is not a book of theory. It's a book of best practices distilled from many years of experience and from many experts in the field. The information is conveyed in quick bits, the way you might find in any edition of USA Today.

To purchase your copy of “99 Negotiation Nuggets for Winners” at a 10% Discount for “What's Up, Doc?” subscribers, just click [here](#).

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##### 5. ALL PEOPLE YEARN TO GROW AND BE FREE

I recently heard someone describe how we all remain in some sense constrained by our own points of view, and blind spots. He said, “No matter what, I'm still constrained by the act that I am myself,” or words to that effect. Now, I do not despair of the possibility of growth and learning and the ability of individuals to connect with others and achieve their highest potentials. But in a sense, we are all, at least from our starting points, trapped within ourselves and the constraints the world inevitably hands to us, and we all seek somehow to grow, to become, to be free. All the characters in the novel operate somehow from this foundation, even those the reader may least admire. This drive to grow, to become, to be free, to express the parts of ourselves that we least understand is fundamental to human nature. Now, working environments do not exist primarily to forward this drive to freedom. No one institution or organization can provide all of this

opportunity for growth to any individual. Organizations exist to accomplish their unique missions, their founding purposes. But organizations can helpfully, in the service of their missions, make use of this drive to be free that we all possess, encouraging the productive expression of creativity and ambition. The best organizations consistently do this well: they understand human talent and use this powerful drive we all possess to productive ends, and do it better than their competitors do. Institutions do not have to be crushing to the human spirit, and no institution is a good fit for every individual. In your organizational life, try to gain an understanding of the ways the people around you seek to be “free.” Each of us has a unique way we seek freedom, but if you can find a way to make my drive to grow serve the organization, and if you can do that for others, your organization is bound to grow. It cannot be helped, because this drive to grow is so engrained in our nature that it can accomplish what we may later call “miracles.”

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## 2. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND ENTERTAINMENT

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BOOK: “The Known World,” by Edward P. Jones, HarperCollins, New York, 2004

Just in case you missed this recommendation last month, I’m repeating it, since I use this book as the foundation for the content above: This is the first time I’ve recommended a work of fiction in this newsletter. I read mostly non-fiction, and have little time for fiction. But I heard some people discussing the book on a radio station as I was driving to a client’s office, and I got sucked in. The book has won a number of awards, and is essentially a complex examination of human nature and the way injustice shapes and contaminates the people affected by it. The book is set in Virginia, in the United States, prior to the American Civil War, and involves men and women living with and in slavery. The book gets past many of the known narrative clichés that one usually finds in such stories and brings that whole world to a new level of understanding – with a knowledgeable eye on human nature that resonates for the world today. You can check out the book at this [link](#).

ENTERTAINMENT: Music CD: “Relaxin’” by the Miles Davis Quintet, 1956

Early, classic Miles Davis with great session players on some legendary studio sessions. Easy to enjoy for the newbie to jazz. You can learn more

about this album [here](#). As I do a fair amount of car travel to clients in my local area, I always have a disc or two ready to calm me through traffic. This is the one in my car CD player right now.

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### 3. CHUCKLES

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Everyone loves their in-laws, right?:

A young couple drove several miles down a country road, not saying a word.

An earlier discussion had led to an argument, and neither wanted to concede their position.

As they passed a barnyard of mules and pigs, the husband sarcastically asked, "Are they relatives of yours?"

"Yes," his wife replied. "I married into the family."

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### 4. PROMOTE YOUR OWN GROWTH

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You don't have to live near the Schuler Solutions main office in Alexandria, Virginia to benefit from my coaching services. Great work can be done for your own growth and development over the phone and through document review via email. To find out more about your coaching options and available coaching plans, just click [here](#) now.

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### 5. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

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A. J. Schuler, Psy. D., an expert on leadership, negotiation and organizational change, provides consulting services, keynote presentations and seminars for client companies. His trademark is highly personalized service that leads to measurable increases in productivity, profit and growth. He also provides personalized leadership education and coaching

for highly motivated clients.

Dr. Schuler, President of Schuler Solutions, Inc., has served diverse organizations in the private and public sectors, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Sony Development, Nomura Securities and the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

A graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Dr. Schuler has successfully led the profitable growth of a dynamic, international consulting firm while serving as Operations Director, and has successfully coached over five hundred CEO's and corporate executives.

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## 6. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

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## 7. NEWSLETTER STATEMENT OF ETHICS

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NEWSLETTER ETHICS: This e-Newsletter will be sent to subscribers only upon REQUEST, though subscribers may forward this letter to anyone they wish. Subscriber identities or contact information will NOT BE DISCLOSED to any other persons or entities under any circumstances. (An attorney friend recently pointed out that, technically, I'd have to give up my list if compelled to do so by a court of law. He's technically right, of course, but let's face it: that won't happen!)

Have a great month. . .

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D.  
Schuler Solutions, Inc.

"I work with leaders who want to grow their businesses, and with meeting professionals who want to create great events for their audiences."

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“Make each day your masterpiece.” -- John Wooden

P.S. - Remember to send in your comments and successes, and to forward  
this newsletter to at least one friend! Thanks . . . AJS