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

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"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

THIS MONTH'S THEME: 2003 LESSONS LEARNED

May I offer an idea? Why not skip making New Year's resolutions this year. If you're like most people, you won't keep them anyway. Can you even recall today what your resolutions were last year? Let me offer you an alternative, and one that may be better suited to helping you discover and identify the ways you really want to grow – and one that builds more naturally on the lessons you really are learning and need to learn in your life. Why not look back at 2003 and think about the signature events of your year – the good and the bad – and reflect on them to see what you learned from them. Make a list of those lessons you learned. Why? Because that way, you'll solidify your learning by putting your lessons on paper. And you'll be able to consolidate your gains – the ones that flowed organically from your life – while setting the stage for the next year of lessons learned. Imagine, if you did this every year, you'd have quite a legacy to hand down to children or to anyone you choose someday. In that spirit, here are some of my main lessons learned for 2003.

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE:

"The unexamined life is not worth living." -- Socrates

"No legacy is so rich as honesty." -- William Shakespeare

"Nobody ever died of laughter." -- Max Beerbohm

1. FIVE LESSONS LEARNED IN 2003

ASK THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO TEACH YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO LEARN

I began the year by spending focused time to work on my business goals with a more senior and accomplished independent speaker and consultant friend of mine, Jim Ball. I had met Jim through a [professional association](#) we both belong to, and I had liked and admired him and his work – though truth be told, I felt a little intimidated by his great focus! He’s a terrific guy, and is very accomplished and disciplined in setting goals and working through a plan. For my part, I knew I wanted to grow in that ability myself for the sake of my own growth, so when he generously offered some of his personal coaching time at auction to help raise funds for our professional association, I bid and won (it was the single most expensive item sold at auction!). Jim helped me a great deal this year, and was more than generous with his time, energy and talent. He was not too rough on me, and I worked hard to stick to the goals we had set together. The lesson for me here is this: even when you’re afraid – perhaps, especially when you’re afraid – to learn from someone who can really challenge you to grow to another level, you have to jump in and do it. Ask the right people to teach you what you want to learn, and you will surely be enriched by the experience.

LINCOLN WAS RIGHT ABOUT MAKING SENSE OF TRAGEDY

In his Address at Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln faced a battlefield was about to become a national cemetery and challenged a nation to make sense and learn from what on its face was senseless: war and the loss of thousands of young lives. Every year brings tragedy with it – in the personal lives of friends, family members, etc., and on a planetary scale. The headlines in 2003 were about war, and there’s a vast plague of HIV in third world nations that is creating generations of orphans on a massive scale, and threatening to destroy already struggling, emergent economies. How to make sense of tragedy? I thought about those things this year as I read the papers every day, and as I encountered more dire losses in the lives of those I know. I have no glib or easy answers for how to make sense of all the great tragedies in our lives, but I also know that we must attempt to do so. “Homo sapiens,” the name of our species, roughly translates as “the ape who knows,” or who thinks, or creates meaning. We are beings that look for, respond to and make meanings – that’s what language does. So I relearned that lesson this year.

“CHOOSE YOUR RIPPLE”

Throw a pebble in the ocean, and it makes a ripple. Each of our lives is like that. Each of us makes a ripple in the sea of life, across the measure of human history. I attended the funeral this year of a client, David Bathe,

an attorney with the Board of Immigration Appeals here in Northern Virginia, after he sadly succumbed in his long battle with cancer. David was the definition of a class act, a man who had great intelligence and a dedication to public service, who never let his talents go to his head. He never sought the spotlight, but was the kind of person you always wanted on the inside making things work, and work well. When I first got to know him at the agency, he made a point of being low key, as was his style. When I attended his funeral (and finally found parking, as the church overflowed!), I sat with some of his work colleagues and saw his family and learned more about what I had already known, that his family was the center of his life, no matter how talented he was at work. David made a bigger ripple than most of us do in his forty-something years, judging by the number of people who came to mourn and celebrate his life. He'd first been diagnosed with cancer in his thirties, and fought it into remission for years and lived his life so that it stood for what he wanted it to stand for. David chose his ripple, as we all can, and ultimately do. That's a lesson I learned again in 2003.

LAUGH UNDER PRESSURE

Last August I went to the kitchen in the afternoon to have an apple, but when I tried to bite into it, I could not: my lips were in the way. I looked in the mirror, tried to smile, and saw that one side of my face was not really working! So I called my doctor – fumbling to speak over my flub-flubbing lips – and went to the hospital. The funniest thing about all this was how lopsided my smile had become, and how hard it was to speak. You should have seen me try to give my information to the admitting nurse! I reenact this story in some of my presentations about communication, customer service and negotiation, and it always gets a laugh. But at the time, I did not know what was going on. A speaker who can't speak – that's what I would call a career challenge, and a cause for a bit of worry. Now, it turns out I only had something called "Bell's Palsy," a temporary condition that all but disappeared within a month, but at the time, we had to rule out other things like a stroke or Lyme disease.

While I was going through the tests, and my face was wilting more and more (I could not even close my left eye – very spooky looking!), I did not get worried or panicked, though: I played up my new affliction for all the laughs it was worth. For all I knew, having entered the speaking profession and worked to build a business and a career in it, I could have been about to lose it. But I decided that to worry was useless. After all, if something bad is going to happen, why go through it twice? By that I mean, if the bad thing happens, you have to go through it when it happens, but by imagining it beforehand, you more or less start going through it in advance. Well, when you look at it that way, why go through it twice – once by imagination, once by the real experience? Because after all, the bad thing might not happen at all – in may case, it did not – and so there

was nothing to be gained in getting all worked up. In fact, there was much to lose: by staying loose and having fun, I actually had a pretty good time (though no one really got my MRI jokes – what a pity!), and I ended up with a decent story to use during my presentations. So in 2003, I learned again the importance of staying loose and laughing under pressure.

EDUCATION IS NOT THE SAME AS WISDOM

In the last year, I've done some programs for a client organization that was downsizing and reorganizing, leaving over one hundred office support people in a position to apply for new jobs within the reorganized company or find something new. These were not highly educated people, but many of them had so much life wisdom to help them face and conquer difficult life challenges that I found their stories and attitudes inspiring. Now, I knew my grandfather, an immigrant from Peru with barely any formal education, who was also one of the wisest people I have ever come across. He passed away in 1980 as I held his hand, along with many other family members gathered in his hospital room, and I still think of him every day. So I've known all my life that education – formal education – is not the same as wisdom. But meeting these people this year helped me see and learn that lesson again – that wisdom comes from life and spirit, and not from formal education - and I'm in their debt for having shared with me their experiences as I worked to help them and their peers make the necessary transitions that would work to their advantage. And even now, as I look at my whole list in this newsletter, it seems to me that the best lessons are the ones we learn over and over again – at least for me!

BY THE WAY, DID YOU KNOW. . .

that the articles on [Schuler Solutions web site](#) are reprintable at no cost, and may offer material perfect for your corporate publications and association newsletters? I can also edit and customize the content to fit your space requirements and the particular interests of your audience members. To take a fresh look at these resources, just click [here](#).

NEXT MONTH. . .

“What’s Up, Doc?” will go back to offering some more traditional “how to” business fare, as has been the primary focus of this newsletter over time. I try to offer a mix of “hard” business content as well as a bit of more personal growth related content to my leadership audiences, but if you have specific feedback about issues and topics you like or don’t like, please be sure to [let me know!](#)

2. UPCOMING PROGRAMS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Want to get more from Schuler Solutions than you can get from reading a monthly newsletter? Why not attend one of the following upcoming programs in the Washington, D. C. area?

NEGOTIATE TO WIN: HOW TO GET WHAT YOU WANT IN BUSINESS

January 27, 2004; 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Morrison & Foerster LLLP, downtown Washington, D. C.

This focused, high impact program is cosponsored by the [Yes Circle](#) and by [Morrison & Foerster, LLP](#). For more information about this event and to learn how to register, just click [here](#).

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOUR BUSINESS: HOW TO GROW SMART, STAY LEAN AND BEAT THE COMPETITION

February 25, 2004; 8:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Microsoft offices in at Friendship Heights Metro in Washington, D. C.

This is a focused, high impact strategic business development seminar for senior executives and business owners, cosponsored by the [Wharton Club of Washington, D. C.](#) and by [Microsoft](#). For more information about the program and how to register, just click [here](#).

3. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND FILMS

BOOK: “Never be Boring Again: Make Your Business Presentations Capture Attention, Inspire Action and Produce Results,” by Doug Stevenson, Cornelia Press, Colorado Springs, 2003.

I’ve been in the presentations business for years, and I’ve often been asked to coach clients in presentation skills. I don’t really do that in any formal way, but now I’m glad to have found a resource that I think is the best single one I’ve come across for the business leader who really wants to become serious about harnessing the power of persuasive presentation skills. I’ll add that, though Doug is a colleague, I get no fee or royalty of you buy his book. Though I could do so, I have not accepted any financial incentives for my recommendations, so you know that when I recommend a resource to you, it’s because I believe in it, pure and simple. Doug is a fantastic presenter in his own right, and his methods are a terrific orientation and guide – I’ve learned from them myself. I would even recommend the audio series that accompanies this book as a worthwhile

resource that offers some content not explicitly covered in this excellent book. You can find out how to buy this book [here](#).

FILM: “The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King,” in phenomenally wide release!

Okay, I admit there’s nothing very original about this recommendation. As the previous two movies have come and gone, I did not recommend them – not because I did not enjoy them, but because I like to offer to subscribers entertaining films that they might have overlooked, for one reason or another. But I recommend this one because I did enjoy it, because I think it represents something about movie making on a grand scale that is in its way both innovative and yet true to the classic power and sweep of film as represented by great movies in film history. . . and because it was the only movie I saw in the last month! If you’ve been living under a rock and have not heard lots and lots about this movie, then click [here](#) for a compendium of reviews.

5. CHUCKLES

FIRST CHUCKLE

Here’s one for those of you who found yourselves exasperated by holiday travel:

A student was heading home for the holidays. When she got to the airline counter, she presented her ticket to New York. And as she gave the agent her luggage, she made the remark, "I'd like you to send my green suitcase to Hawaii, and my red suitcase to London."

The confused agent said, "I'm sorry, we can't do that."

"Why not? You did it last year!"

SECOND CHUCKLE

Okay, so maybe some of you traveled recently by car, and not by plane. The following are a sampling of real answers received on exams given by the California Department of Transportation's driving school.

Q: Do you yield when a blind pedestrian is crossing the road?

A: What for? He can't see my license plate.

Q: Who has the right of way when four cars approach a four-way stop at

the same time?

A: The pick up truck with the gun rack and the bumper sticker saying, "Guns don't kill people. I do."

Q: When driving through fog, what should you use?

A: Your car.

Q: How can you reduce the possibility of having an accident?

A: Be too drunk to find your keys.

Q: What problems would you face if you were arrested for drunk driving?

A: I'd probably lose my buzz a lot faster.

Q: What changes would occur in your lifestyle if you could no longer drive lawfully?

A: I would be forced to drive unlawfully.

Q: What are some points to remember when passing or being passed?

A: Make eye contact and wave "hello" if she is cute.

Q: What is the difference between a flashing red traffic light and a flashing yellow traffic light?

A: The color.

6. PROMOTE YOUR OWN GROWTH

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.

7. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D., an expert on leadership 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.

8. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE

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9. NEWSLETTER STATEMENT OF ETHICS

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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