

THE HANDS-OFF MANAGER

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Also by Steve Chandler

RelationShift (With Michael Bassoff)

100 Ways to Motivate Yourself

Reinventing Yourself

50 Ways to Create Great Relationships

The Joy of Selling

17 Lies That Are Holding You Back

100 Ways to Motivate Others (With Scott Richardson)

Ten Commitments to Your Success

The Small Business Millionaire (With Sam Beckford)

Two Guys Read Moby Dick (With Terrence N. Hill)

9 Lies That Are Holding Your Business Back (With Sam Beckford)

The Story of You

Business Coaching (With Sam Beckford)

Two Guys Read the Obituaries (With Terrence Hill)

100 Ways to Create Wealth (With Sam Beckford)

To George Addair

“So much of what we call management consists in making it difficult for people to work.”

Peter Drucker

CHAPTER 1

TAKING YOUR POWER BACK

“In everyone’s life at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the human spirit.”

Albert Schweitzer

Most management activity today is what was alluded to by the Peter Drucker quote at the beginning of this book. (“So much of what we call management consists in making it difficult for people to work.”)

Managers make it difficult for their people. They unknowingly kill the human spirit by their old school micromanaging and critical judgments.

But there is a new kind of manager emerging in companies today, a manager devoted to rekindling the human spirit by keeping their *hands off* their employees’ happiness, and allowing success to happen.

We’ll just call that enlightened person the “hands-off manager.”

All managers have these two communication styles to choose from: 1) Hands-on: They can criticize and judge their people, or 2) Hands-off: They can mentor and coach their people.

This choice presents itself many times throughout the day. Every communication with one of your people is going to be a version of this choice.

If you choose judgment (and criticism, implied or otherwise) you will provoke defensiveness and withdrawal. Not creativity and not productivity.

When we judge our people and find them coming up short we then start to criticize and micromanage them. In this age of the sensitive, knowledge-based worker, that's a self-destructive cycle. It stirs up nothing but resentment and push-back.

Also, when we judge and then "hold" that grudge, we are giving our power away. When we resent a team member we are giving our power away to that team member. We are giving that power to the very person we are angry with.

Real power in leadership comes from partnering, not criticizing.

The hands-off manager sets himself apart by retaining all his power. His practice is to understand everyone he meets. By doing this, he is reducing his own stress levels at work. He is completely aware that every time he judges someone he alters his well-being from within.

So he refuses to assign the responsibility for negative feelings to the person that he is tempted to judge. He assigns the responsibility for his low feeling to the *thought* that he is believing about that person.

Only thoughts cause stress. People do not. People can not.

But for the old school micromanager the stress never quits, and the harmony in the organization never holds.

If you are micromanaging in the old style of shame and blame, you will recognize this example: You're coming into the company parking garage and suddenly have to slow down because there's an old person in front of you going slower than molasses. If you then decide you don't like older people who drive slow, *you* start to suffer. And you will suffer every time this "happens to" you. Even though it's not really happening *to* you, it is being *caused by* you. The stress comes directly from your thought. The old person has no power to stress you out. You *think* you are suffering because this oldster is driving poorly, but the truth is you are only suffering because of your judgmental thought about him.

We all want to be powerful and in control of our own well-being, but we continually give away the very power we seek by our inability to forgive and let go. The only way out of this trap of constant suffering is to cultivate the open-minded hands-off skills of letting the actions of others roll off our backs and letting other people's negativity go in one ear and out the other.

Anything we cannot let go of has control over us. But once we *can* let go, we're in control. We can laugh and enjoy how we are unaffected by what other people might be thinking.

That's when you change as a manager.

That's when people see you as an island in the storm. A person to go to for peaceful resolutions of crises. In other words: a true hands-off manager who gets results from a relaxed and highly-productive team.

“One does not ‘manage’ people.
The task is to lead people.
And the goal is to make productive
the specific strengths and knowledge
of each individual.”

Peter Drucker

How to open your energy field

The hands-off approach allows you to learn to take your power back and live in a world of quiet action and non-judgment. If you do so, you'll soon be living with an open mind, forgiving effortlessly and taking back control of your energy and enthusiasm for doing great work.

Discovering your natural gifts and learning your true nature is not about learning how to force yourself upon your team. It's about *allowing* success to emerge from within you, and then from inside others. It's an inside job.

And once you see that all good power comes from the inside, you can start to become powerful.

There is a story about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart that illustrates what we mean.

A young would-be composer wrote to Mozart, asking advice about how to compose a symphony. Mozart responded that a symphony was a complex and demanding musical form and that it would be better to start with something simpler. The young man protested: “But Herr Mozart, you wrote symphonies when you were younger than I am now!”

And Mozart replied, “Yes, but I never asked *how*.”

Mozart’s point was that he simply let the symphonies emerge from within. He didn’t have to figure out “how to” force something outside him to work.

Duane has a saying that he uses at work, although it doesn’t apply only to work, it applies in life in general. His saying is, “Find them, don’t fix them.” It’s a policy that encourages finding strengths in your employees that already exist, and allowing those strengths to come forward.

When they do what they love the success will follow.

Once you know what they love to do, and help them do it, they’ll do it for you all day long. Keep finding ways to match their talents with the tasks ahead.

Find them, don’t fix them.

And there will always be employees that you *don’t* find a good job match for. Nothing seems to make them happy. Soon, you know in your heart they aren’t a fit for the team we have.

Old school managers have a hard time dealing with this realization. They keep trying to fix things. They keep trying to fix people. They go through endless inept exercises to try to find ways to motivate mismatched employees to get them to do what they really don’t want to do. They try to find ways to make them change themselves into someone they are not. This is a waste of everyone’s energy!

Our hands-off manager's commitment to *finding* how our people can *fit* rather than fixing people who don't fit has been the central factor in the success of teams.

Take the case of Barry.

Barry was so stressed by his financial debts at home that he pushed hard for a sales management position early in his employment, and got it. (Barry was very persuasive and a crafty communicator.) However Barry simply did not enjoy the responsibilities of leadership. He was easily frustrated with sales people who didn't have his natural love of cold-calling and meeting new people. Even though he tried to learn our principles of coaching success instead of forcing it on people, he was still unhappy, and the results showed it.

We finally identified the mismatch and convinced the CEO Glenda not to keep trying to "fix" Barry with leadership training and negative performance reports. We asked that Glenda "find" Barry. Find the real Barry, the true natural sales person wanting (but not being allowed) to emerge.

Finally Glenda saw the light and re-positioned Barry as a senior major account sales person and turned him loose into the field where Barry loved to be. After four months, Barry's commissions were enormous, and he was able to settle all his financial crises at home while loving the job he was doing.

Glenda had just taken her hands off Barry's natural inclination to succeed.

And this powerfully effective "find them don't fix them" approach also applies to us as individuals. We benefit when we continue finding out who *we* are and letting that discovery manifest in the outside world. Rather than trying to fix ourselves.

Learning to turn in a new direction

We often enjoy going in person to hear the teachings of a dear friend, a philosopher/guru named George Adair who holds wonderful workshops on

personal evolution. (This book is dedicated to him.) One of his sayings is “You never overcome anything.” In this Adair means that anything that has been a part of your history will always be a part of your history. You can’t make it go away. However, over time, if you choose to, you can simply defuse and dismiss it and go another way. You can follow another path so that the memory loses all its power over you.

When leaders are bold and decisive throughout the day, they often make mistakes and bad calls. It’s part of being in action. It’s a big part of courage. George Patton used to say that an average plan executed *right now* is far more effective than a great plan that takes a long time to decide to put into action.

A hands-off leader can just release a mistake and let go of it. And while it doesn’t disappear, it simply becomes old news. And it’s this letting go of the need to “overcome” things that happened in the past that leads to becoming truly powerful.

The word translated as *repent* in the English New Testaments is the Greek word *metanoeo*. W. E. Vine's Dictionary says *metanoeo* literally means to “perceive afterwards.” Therefore it means to take another look, and to change one's mind or purpose, and it always involves a change for the better.

So repent then means nothing more than “turn and go another way.” While some traditions have been trying to teach us that if you’ve done something wrong you should punish yourself, feel remorse and burden yourself with your shameful behavior, what the literal translation really wanted you to do was just turn away from it and take a newer, better direction in your thinking.

When I reflect on my recovery from addiction years ago I realize that I didn’t really “overcome” my addiction. I simply took another path. I repented, in the truer, deeper meaning of the word. I realize, too, that if I got back on the path of alcohol and drugs I’d have the same problems all over again.

The code is there in my brain for addictive drinking. So if I started drinking again, it would be addictive. And it doesn’t matter whether the code came from repetitive use or genetics, it’s there. So I just don’t go there. The process is to not go there. To replace the false spirit of drugs with true spirit.

I know that “overcoming” truly doesn’t work. It doesn’t have any track record of working in the workplace either. And when you hear people who are newly happy with their jobs now, they say, “I’ve moved on. I’ve just moved on.” They don’t say, “Well, I was able to come to grips with it, wrestle with it, overcome it, conquer it, defeat it.” No one who is now truly free of a problem like addiction says, “I was able to overcome, defeat my alcoholism, and it lies in a heap and I am victorious over it.” They just say, “I’ve moved on. I’ve accepted my powerlessness and taken another path. It’s not a part of my life. I’ve chosen a different way, a different form of spirit than alcohol was.”

Carl Jung said, “People do not solve their psychological problems, in my experience. They outgrow them. They grow in a different direction and just leave them in their history.” This is what the *allowing success* process is all about. It’s the heart and soul of hands-off management. It’s considered a revolutionary form of management because it breaks all the old codes of manipulation and mistrust.

Some therapists often say “In order to move on, you must reenact a conversation you had your antagonist all over again and resolve that memory that’s inside you.”

But that’s just giving more strength to the story. And we are looking to free you from your stories.

Micromanagers in the workplace do the same dysfunctional thing as those therapists do. They relive breakdowns and mistakes and go over and over them, making people wrong all day long.

Why not just leave it there and move on? Release its power over you. See it in a different light. So that you can focus on your natural talents, your God-given gifts, and bring the best of who you are to the surface.

The hands-off manager uses this principle to not carry grudges. He meets with every person in the workplace with equal trust and understanding. The past is non-existent.

Most micromanagers in old school organizations today immediately think that when things feel wrong, they have to *overcome* them. They imagine a Rambo figure who can overcome any odds and can fight off 50, 100 people at one time if he has to, because he is so strong in his ability to overcome. Our national macho mythology nurtures an image of a guy who is

really muscular and adept at fighting. So we build into our culture and collective psyches the idea that “If I’ll only become stronger, if I’ll only work out harder, that if I’ll only run more miles, or go to more seminars, or push myself, I’ll finally become strong enough that I can deal with the issues my team is facing.”

But the opposite is true. If you want a strong mind, you must learn to quiet your mind. If you want real power, you learn to let go.

Doing this will eventually make you incredibly powerful. Not so strong that you can lift hundreds of pounds of weight at one time. But strong in a different, deeper way. So strong that you can discipline your mind and discipline your thoughts to let go of anything that isn’t serving you. So strong that your people draw strength and calm from you. From just being with you! You don’t have to say anything for them to feel how peacefully powerful you are. They warm up to your vision and teamwork begins to emerge of its own accord. It’s being inspired to happen, instead of forced to happen.

No more team-building seminars

Companies often ask me for a seminar in team-building. I don’t give them anymore. I know that if people are not performing and communicating with team spirit it’s not a team-building issue, it’s a leadership issue.

I am very direct with the manager asking for the training. I want him to see that great leadership will create a culture in which teamwork will simply grow. They don’t need teamwork training. The manager himself needs hands-off leadership training so he can learn to mentor success instead of trying to impose productivity.

If you are a newly enlightened manager you have begun with a shift in awareness. You’ve pulled your power back from the external world of form to the internal world of energy. You now know how to shift your awareness up and over the bothersome event so that you can see another path to take.

You cannot be attacked from this lofty position. Even if someone says something about you, you don't end up giving your power to them. You keep it in yourself. "Negative" occurrences don't bother you so much anymore because you simply use them for practice. You actually gain strength from them.

Is it a tough discipline? Yes! It may be even harder than working out with weights. Because, at first, it's so counter-intuitive. It goes against our whole upbringing and training.

* * *

Learning the inner game

When you study people in history who knew the secret of inner allowing versus outer overcoming, you find that they usually had long, happy lives. Bernard Baruch, who died in 1965 at the age of 95, was an American financier, stock market and commodities speculator, statesman, and presidential adviser. After his success in business, he devoted his time to advising a range of American presidents including Woodrow Wilson and John F. Kennedy on economic matters for over 40 years. Baruch was highly regarded as an elder statesman. He was a man of immense charm who enjoyed a larger-than-life reputation that matched his considerable fortune. Baruch is remembered as one of the most powerful men of the early 20th century!

Asked about his long life and success, Bernard Baruch said he discovered the key when he was younger. He said, "In the last analysis, our only freedom is the freedom to discipline ourselves."

What? Ourselves? What about overcoming outside obstacles?

Here is another way to look at your new shift in inner awareness. Imagine going to the airport with a huge suitcase. You don't even consider trying to take it onto the plane with you because you know it won't fit or be allowed. So you check your bag and let the airline take care of it.

But what if you tried to board a plane the same way you try to live your life?

You'd be carrying all your heavy, inappropriate, disallowed baggage on to the plane! All your hurts and resentments and tiny betrayals get carried around with you. Imagine going through the airport and picking up other bags, not even your own, and trying to carry all of them onto the plane with you! Your spouse's baggage, your kids' baggage, and all your direct reports' baggage.

Is there even room on this plane?

That sounds like a slapstick comedy, but it's how most of us who play micromanagement roles in society today live. Just keep this in mind: If you did this with your baggage in an airport, *you would not be allowed to fly*.

And the same is true with your career. By trying to carry all this baggage (by trying to remember who has done you wrong, whom you don't trust, who disappointed you, what department you don't get along with) you are too burdened to fly.

Take your hands off your life to allow success and allow yourself to fly.

Allowing your career to take flight

When my son Bobby was a little boy he was always asking me about various sports figures and superheroes.

“Dad, who would win in a fight between Arnold and Bruce Lee?”

“Bruce Lee.”

“Who would win in a fight between Superman and Batman?”

“Superman.”

“What if Arnold and Superman fought Rocky, Chuck Norris and Spiderman?”

“Okay, time for bed!”

We are actually fascinated by questions like these. Which is why fictional heroes like Rambo and Superman endure.

And the internal power that can lift you up through your organization is more like the power that Superman had than the external power Rambo tried impose on events. Rambo was a human being who could be brought down by a bullet. And if he were shot in the heart, he'd be dead; there'd be no more Rambo.

But Superman had the ability to have things bounce off of him. So he had a power beyond Rambo. Things would just glance off of him. If someone fired a bullet, he'd just push it away with his hand and move on; it wouldn't affect who Superman was. That's why his archetype calls to us. That's why he endures and speaks to the inner hero in children and adults.

He had the power to deflect rather than overcome.

Soon you can shift your whole way of leadership thinking. You'll shift your awareness to be totally in tune with what's happening with others and what's happening with you. And whenever you see something come up that doesn't align with you, you don't fix it; you accept it, deal with it, deflect it and move in a newer, healthier direction.

Deepak Chopra recently wrote that when you get “bad news,” if you suspend judgment, it becomes good news. It was always good news anyway. It was just in disguise. “If you don't get what you expected, look at what you got,” said Chopra. “Where is the gift in what you received? Is there a way you can transform it into an opportunity to learn? In this approach, change is accepted, not denied. A sense of spaciousness enters in.”

That spaciousness he describes is exactly the shift in awareness we are talking about. It's a shift from narrow, judgmental, constricted awareness to a bigger, more spacious hands-off *allowing*.

Chopra concludes, “On a profound level, every event in life has two possible causes. Either what happens is positive, or it is bringing up something you need to learn in order to create something positive. It's the

same with the body. What happens inside a cell is either healthy activity or a sign that a correction is needed. Although life can seem random, in fact everything is pointing to a greater good. Evolution is not a win-lose crapshoot, but a win-win journey to transformation.”

You’ll learn your true nature this way. By being free from the effects of everyone else’s nature. It’s a way of giving yourself space. Of giving yourself the freedom to live out your true professional potential. To discover what’s possible for you! Because once you have gotten rid of all of this limitation, weakness, anger and sadness, you’re back into possibility. You’re enthusiastic once again about ideas and innovation and the very things that move this organization forward.

Soon you’ll have a different definition of personal power. You’ll realize that if you are truly powerful, you can let go. You can forgive. You can release. You can deflect. That’s the real power.

Greatness is within you. There is nowhere you need to look to find it. It is already inside, waiting for permission to express. If you knew you already had something, then why would you go looking for it? The only trick is to remember. Remember to let go of all of the negative ways of thinking that are obstacles and toxic to your success. Remember to allow your success to take its natural course and happen for you. And the success you find will be greater than you ever imagined possible.

Steps to Hands-Off Success in your life:

THREE ACTION STEPS

TO TAKE AFTER READING THIS CHAPTER:

1. The next time you feel a conflict with someone write down two things you appreciate and admire about that person and sit down to resolve the conflict by telling them these things first.

2. Take mental and physical notes about everyone who works with you so that you become more and more aware of each person's LOVES and STRENGTHS. Start a notebook about this, and don't forget to include yourself in it.

3. Begin noticing your own thinking throughout the day as you lead and communicate: Which thoughts bring you down? Which thoughts lift you up? By practicing this step you will begin to understand that it is always your thinking that creates your feelings, never other people.

CHAPTER 2

Redefining success for yourself

“To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children...to leave the world a better place...to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Your first job as a hands-off manager is to manage your inner life. It is impossible to mentor others toward success if you haven't done it with yourself.

Hands-off management begins at home in the mind of the mentor.

So, how do we make sure we become successful? Most people never succeed because their definition of success always includes some change in the outer world and the outer world is so hard to change.

So you might begin by redefining success for yourself. And you might find that the definition itself is already inside you...not in some book or audio recording.

Sometimes you do read or hear something that seems profound. It feels like it could make a difference and shift your awareness about how life could work for you. But you also have a funny feeling about it. You are thinking, "This is something I already know."

If you are reading a book and a certain paragraph rings true, you may underline it to read it again. Then you get that familiar feeling again. "This is something I already knew."

This is a sign that your life's purpose is already in there! You don't have to seek it out. If you had no awareness in you of what your life's purpose was, how would you have known that those words could apply to you? If you didn't have an innate and natural understanding of your potential, how would you have been touched by those words?

When a group of people is all reading the same thing, they'll each respond to different passages differently. Reading groups always experience that. People think it's just because they just have different tastes and preferences. They don't think beyond that. They don't realize that what calls to them is resonating with something already there. Already inside them. It's the energy, spirit and force that's *in them* communicating to them: *What you've just read aligns with who you are.*

Once you wake up to this inner resonance, you will know when things have meaning for you and how you can use them in a way that will benefit your life.

This inner-tuning and intuition is at the heart of hands-off management. You don't need to get your hands on the world to shape and manipulate what's already perfect inside you.

You can even go one step beyond that if you're open to it. You can realize, "If I can recognize it by reading it in a book, then I'm not learning it from the book, I am being *reminded of it* from the book. And if I'm being reminded of it, then at some place in me, it must already exist."

So if it already exists, would it not be possible without the reading and without the external exercise, to just let it come through?

That's the key to a hands-off life.

Find a way to let what's in you to naturally come through.

Rather than racing around learning all kinds of new managerial systems, procedures and trendy formulae, you just get better at knowing yourself and the person you are managing.

You'll then learn how to get your old ideas out of your own way. You'll learn how to find what's already there, rather than going looking for what you think you're missing.

Napoleon Hill said "Think and grow rich." But we are saying, "Bypass thinking and grow rich."

When you manage yourself and someone else it is only the thoughts you have that are in your way. If you believe negative, limiting thoughts about yourself and the other person, then those thoughts are what's in the way of your success.

Radical? Contrary? Let's start here: Think about how you use your mind. Why do most of your ideas, inspirations, concepts and solutions come to you when you're singing in the shower? Or when you're just relaxed and being quiet? Or when you're driving down the road not really thinking about anything?

Many surveys and almost all anecdotal inquiry show that managers get their best ideas in the shower, or doing easy yard work or while on vacation. Why is that?

It's because you've stopped trying to control your thinking. You've taken your hands off your mind and allowed the wisdom within to emerge.

It always will.

At a mental level, this is similar to the difference between talking and listening. People have taught for years that if you will listen, you will learn more than if you're talking. But people have always assumed that "listening" means listening to another person.

That's an all too narrow interpretation of listening.

Hands-off management starts with listening to yourself. Tuning in to your own heart and mind.

Because if you will learn to listen to *your inner being*, you will learn more than when you're always trying to talk to yourself about how things should be.

Most of your thoughts create fears. Don't you notice that? Especially if you believe them without question. They are centered on your survival as a manager, so they are worried thoughts, scanning the future for possible problems and catastrophes. You become a human scanner all day. The problem with that approach is that it leads to an attempted hands-on micromanaging. It leads to trying to manipulate your people out there in the external world. It also leads to a life of living in your own future, and therefore a life of always feeling anxious and worried.

And the person in front of you can feel that you are not there. And you feel it too. It is the very definition of stress. It is the very *source* of workplace fatigue and burnout.

To try to get relief from all this anxiety, a micromanager will often dip back into the past. But that's not much better, is it? When you're in the past you are spending the majority of your time thinking about what you feel guilty about. Shift to the future and you're back to what you're afraid of. How can you mentor someone from that sort of bipolar mood swing? How can you be present to the task at hand and the person in front of you?

To truly mentor someone you must be at peace. When you are not at peace the other person will be contaminated by your stress.

So find the peaceful place inside you that tells you what success really is. Then go forth and mentor the same peaceful efficiency and creativity to others. That's the beauty of hands-off management in a nutshell.

Steps to Hands-off Success in your life:

THREE ACTION STEPS

TO TAKE AFTER READING THIS CHAPTER

1. Make a list of all the external, material goals you have in your life. Then ask yourself---about each object (a car, a boat, a vacation home?): WHY do you want it? What will it make you feel to have it? And write that feeling down as the true goal, with an openness to the possibility that the feeling can be achieved without (or prior to) the material goal.

2. Write down your financial definition of success. Give it a number. What does success mean to you financially? Then ask yourself WHY you want the money. For what purpose? What feeling do you want that you don't have now? A feeling of security? A feeling of power and freedom? When you've written it down, allow yourself to be open to the possibility that you can have that inner feeling with---or prior to---receiving the money into your life. Then open yourself to the possibility that wealth may even flow faster into your life when you are at peace and feeling secure, powerful and free.

3. Write down your relationship and family goals. Why do you want these goals? How much of what you have written down depends on other people acting in certain ways? Then re-write them focused only on what you want to contribute to others regardless of how they behave or their "loyalty" to you or their "appreciation" of you. Have these goals be within your own capacity to reach now, meaning NOW, and not at some future time when the world corrects itself.

Chapter 3

Using the power of neutral

“Balance is the perfect state of still water. Let that be our model. It remains quiet within and is not disturbed on the surface.”

Confucius

Kerry was a division leader obsessed with creating a new incentive plan for her major telemarketing teams. This obsession was causing her anxiety and stress.

All her focus in the past had been on negatives. She wanted certain guarantees that her people would not betray her. She resented certain past behaviors that she was now trying to eliminate. The more she fretted, the more she micromanaged, and every time she tried to negotiate a new plan there was a war between the two sides. She couldn't see that she was creating the war. She was splitting the atom every time her irritated voice proposed a new plan.

I met with Kerry for a coaching session prior to yet another meeting she was to have with her top people.

“I'm worried about this meeting,” Kerry said.

“Why?”

“I know they'll argue against this plan and ask for more guaranteed salary which I don't want to give them because they will all get lazy on me if they don't have to work for commissions.”

“You don't trust them.”

“They haven’t earned it.”

“People have to earn your trust?”

“Of course. I’ve been burned too many times not to know that.”

“I’m not surprised that you’ve been burned so many times.”

“Really? Why?”

“You don’t trust your people.”

Kerry was silent. She said nothing.

I took more time in the coaching session than normal because I wanted to introduce Kerry to a new concept called hands-off management. I wanted to teach her what I’d learned from Duane Black---that if she didn’t trust her people it was because she didn’t trust herself. Her entire mind was filled up every day with stressful thoughts about worst case scenarios. No wonder she was struggling and filled with anger.

Her first step in the journey from hands-on to hands-off would be to meet with her people for two hours with *no agenda* on her side of the table.

“No agenda?” said Kerry. “You can’t have a meeting with no agenda. We learned that in our leadership training.”

“Right. And that training was first developed in the 1940s for companies run on the old school military model of management. It counted on a workplace of people hoping for 30 years of loyal service and a pocket watch at the retirement dinner at the Holiday Inn.”

“What would I look like having no agenda?”

“Someone who cared what their lives were like as telemarketers. Someone who wanted to listen. Someone who was *neutral* about how this final arrangement would look.”

“Neutral?”

“Neutral.”

It took Kerry a full year of coaching to make the trip from micromanaging to mentoring. A full year of internal reprogramming. But

she did it. It was a great year for her and her self-esteem as a leader. And listen to her today, in her words from a recent email: “It’s funny how much I look forward to work every day. It’s such an adventure not knowing. I’m so happy to explore and open up in new ways every day. There’s no rigid way I have to be anymore, because I’m no longer obsessed with doing it right. Or not getting in trouble. I think our society does that to little girls. Little girls fear getting in trouble. Making daddy mad. Little boys are given more leeway. Boys will be boys! They get to fail a lot and make tons of mistakes growing up. Girls better get it right the first time! You’ve showed me that as true as that scenario might have felt in my past, it’s just a story now. I can cling to the story or let it go.”

“What I like most about the past
is that it’s over.”

Byron Katie

Organizational life is a constant process of negotiation and sales. It’s an ongoing opportunity to promote a particular perspective in order to accomplish a purpose you are working toward.

There’s no way around it: you’re always selling.

Whether it’s selling ideas to your team, a concept to your own supervisors, or a new service to a customer, your day is spent selling. As the author Robert Louis Stevenson said, “Everyone lives by selling something.”

But not everyone sells the same way.

Not everyone sells from the same position. In fact, what really sets a hands-off manager apart is that position that Kerry learned to take: neutral. Managerial mastery is simply an unusual mastery of the neutral position.

Not positive. Not negative. But neutral.

“If you and I were negotiating a land acquisition structure, my strategy, my way of being, would be not to resist anything that you bring to the table,” Duane says. “It would be to accept it, to acknowledge you for having brought up that issue and then to focus our mutual attention on the benefit of the position that I came to sell in the first place. And that way, you have an invitation to shift your position. If I *resist* your position, then my challenge to you is to defend it, not look at an alternative to it. Because we can’t operate completely outside ego, it wouldn’t be human. We each have a little bit of a tendency to want to defend whatever position we have taken.”

Reality dances best with someone who is flexible. Success flows toward an open (neutral) position. The best negotiators have an open, neutral mind, not a closed mind.

Sales and negotiations will occur internally, too. Inside one single mind at war with itself.

We were communicating with a friend this morning who’s a professional golfer, and he was having such a hard time getting into tournaments and doing well even though he’s a great golfer. Because negative thoughts keep coming into his mind as he’s about to hit the ball.

And throughout his career he’s been trying to force them out and force positive thoughts into their place.

What I recommended was that he step back from both positive and negative thoughts to what he might call a neutral position. Simply observe the thoughts, let them pass by, and then hit the ball from no mind whatsoever. Not by forcing a positive, “I can do this, it’ll be great, it’ll go in.” And not by being worried about, “Oh, no, I’m fastened on I’m going to blow this,” but to just step back and allow thoughts to pass like clouds. And when there’s an opening, hit the ball. From nothing.

Everything improved. “Nothing” is powerful.

Learning negotiation from physics

As I sat in Duane's study early on a warm Arizona Sunday morning discussing the amazing power of neutral, he told me that he deepened his understanding of its power by observing the structure of the atom.

In atomic structure there are always three forces. There's an electron, which produces a negative force; there is a proton, which produces a positive force; and there is neutron, which produces a neutral force. And the neutron and the proton create the nucleus of the atom. And the electron at very high speeds is traveling around that nucleus. Electricity is a function of the negative electrons transferring through a conductor from one atom to the next. So the negative is very elastic; it's very moveable throughout all of physics. A negative force moves easily from one place to another.

The neutral force, on the other hand, and the positive force are much less moveable. When you separate the nucleus—the neutron and the proton—you unleash violent atomic energy; that was the basis of the atomic bomb.

“So that connection,” says Duane, “that bond, in my opinion, which is based on physics, simple physics and chemistry, has been proven to be where the real strength is in business. The connection between the positive and the neutral. Whereas, the negative has to be there to sustain balance, it's very easily swayed and moved and transferred to another atom. In the case of human beings that means to another person, with little effort. We're almost too open to it. But you can't, without a severe response, separate the neutral and the positive.”

That brings us back to the hands-off manager's respect for neutral *observation* as the ultimate vision. As a true and artful observer, one must be without judgment and without a position. A true observer gains power from seeing all valid positions from a neutral spot.

Those of us who are managers deal every day with opposites. We deal with up and down, success and failure, hard and easy, fast and slow and happy and sad. What we don't always understand is that those opposites go together and need each other. We can only experience easy because hard exists. We can experience up only because down exists.

Yet we're always anxious to remove the opposite of the experience we seek! And in reality it's not possible. The experience we seek could not

exist in a relative universe (and workplace) where everything is understandable only because its opposite also exists.

So a worried, fussy micromanager's resistance to opposition and to the opposite of that which he seeks takes him away and blocks him from getting to where he was trying to go. He gets good critical feedback and instead of being open to it, he's immediately defensive.

He ends up more worried about the negative that he wants to get away from than he is about the positive that we want to move towards. And ultimately he can't get to success from there. The "there" he is stuck in has too much worry to gain traction and move.

The hands-off negotiator has power

The real power is pure neutral, in any aspect of negotiation.

When you want to achieve "good," you can't get to good by resistance to evil. When you want to achieve right, you can't get there by resistance to wrong.

You win by realizing that hot and cold are the same thing. They're just opposite ends of temperature. Win and lose are essentially the same thing, they're just opposite ends of the experience of the game. In and out are the same thing, they're just opposite ends of movement within or movement without.

In a good negotiation you'll learn to give up the resistance and the judgment of the opposite of that which you seek. You'll accept the opposite and incorporate it into your own position.

But neutral means neutral. You just don't care if no deal is made. You're not striving for one of those frantic win-win deals where you give away the farm in your desperation for success. People who do that just don't realize that attaching to a certain outcome pushes that outcome away.

Remember, *neutral* is the attractive force. (They called it “playing hard to get” in high school.) The neutral position is always the most effective.

Once you become neutral, positive and negative then become the balancing forces. When you are neutral, you’re automatically attached to the positive, if you look at it from an atomic physics perspective. The negative is brought in to create the balance, but the link between the neutral and the positive is where the power is.

The problem is that we don’t accept that. We keep trying to make the negative go away.

But that’s like trying to iron the waves in the ocean to make the ocean smooth. Or cutting the south pole off a bar magnet so that you just have north.

Futile.

The balance of all three forces reflects the nature of life. But in order to get the positive, most managers go out and fight against negative, and wonder why more negative keeps coming in.

We do this trying to manage our society, too. We hire more police to oppose gangs, and wonder why we have even more gangs. We create more government programs to fight poverty, and wonder why there are even more unwed mothers. The very things that we fight against become the things that our attention goes into and empowers. What we resist, persists. What we oppose grows stronger from the very opposition.

There are other ways to deal with gangs and poverty that address the whole, balanced system instead of just addressing what’s “wrong” with the current system.

New solutions show up as *whole systems*.

What you resist will always persist

A gifted chiropractor we know and will call Judy Smith, who became a corporate business consultant, was terrified that she would have no

credibility with clients because of her limited background in business. She feared being perceived as a mere chiropractor. So because she was so focused on “getting rid of” the negative (lack of credibility) she took the technical “doctor” that she had earned as a chiropractor and put it on her business cards and website. She was now “Dr. Judy Smith.” Clients just assumed she must be a PhD in organizational development. Which was what she hoped would happen.

But it didn’t take long for the word to get out that the “Dr.” Judy was using was for being a chiropractor, and she was made fun of. The very negative she was trying to make go away had come back at her in a bigger, more vicious form. What she opposed grew stronger, and what she resisted, persisted.

Later she stopped resisting, and told clients up front about her successful practice of chiropractic. She dropped the “Dr.” from her name. She told wonderful stories about her work as a chiropractor and the lessons she learned that she could apply in creative ways to business. People loved it. And so by not resisting reality, reality became her ally. By no longer feeling “negative” about her former profession, she could return to a powerful neutral position.

In the workplace the old school micromanager is obsessed with eliminating the negative. And by doing so, he himself becomes negative, judgmental and non-trusting, focusing only on problems (thereby making them bigger than they were.) Ignorance of neutral misleads managers into a world of overcoming, deception, dispute and control. None of those attitudes are aspects of neutral.

This is why managers who are controlling and micromanaging get so much push-back from their people. Their people feel paranoid and judged.

But when they give up dragon-slaying the negative, managers become hands-off managers. And from that place without judgment, they can focus their attention on that which they wish to create. What a relief to everyone.

“In every person, even in such as appear most reckless,

there is an inherent desire to attain balance.”

Jakob Wassermann

Alan Watts used to say that his definition of the human ego was “defense of a position.” That is exactly what the workplace ego is: defending your isolated position in the organization. But when you fight for a position instead of embracing the entire system, you contract your being into something small and weak.

The bigger part of you is that part of you which is unconditional, accepting, and without judgment. And many just don’t grasp that that’s the part of you that’s really powerful.

So the power aspect of neutral is that it allows you to be an observer who is open to all possibilities. When you meet with team members from another department you can hear their side of the story and see whole system solutions. You are not overly defensive of your position in the universe.

In negotiations neutral is a mutually inclusive concept which most businesses now acknowledge is the only real way to do business if you want longevity and a lasting network of relationships with the people you negotiate with. The old macho idea of getting over on your “opponent” in a negotiation gives people a short-term thrill and a long-term headache. Professional athletes whose agents get over on the teams for multi-million dollar contracts are often the scorn of fans when they have a bad year and leave the sport in shame and disgrace.

Neutral brings you to honest solutions, and most of all, it lets you *allow*, not force, the results to move toward a fruitful outcome.

Author and social scientist David Hawkins talks about the most powerful path to enlightenment being surrender. And in today’s world of the macho, Rambo computer game figure, people almost cannot conceive of that being the path to power.

But ironically it is what Bruce Lee taught. At only 135 pounds, Bruce Lee was, pound for pound, the strongest fighter on the planet. No one could

defeat him. Even the biggest American boxers. He did exhibitions with them. And he said, "To be a great martial artist, you become water. Water is totally accepting of whatever gets thrown into it." And the big American boxers would lose because they would punch outward and try to defeat who was in front of them. Bruce Lee said, "I'm like water and you are jumping into my ocean when you fight me. And to be like water is the most powerful way you can be, both as a martial artist and as a human being."

Water is soft and accepting. Yet it has the power to level a city.

Bruce Lee said the only American boxer who came close to that principle was Mohammed Ali, because Mohammed Ali would dance and float like a butterfly, and then do the twisting rope-a-dope. And with his amazingly flexible body, he would invite the opponent's punches all fight long, so his opponents would punch themselves out, being drawn like moths into the *neutral* fire Ali was embodying. And by the time the opponent was so weary he couldn't hold his arms up anymore, Mohammed Ali would jump in and finish his fight. He would sting like a bee. But he never actively resisted his opponent early in a fight. Non-resistance was his neutral position.

Former Secretary of State Dr. Henry Kissinger was one of the greatest negotiators of all time because no one could come up with a position that would offend him. No one could upset him. No one could put him on the defensive. He was always willing to understand the other side's position, so they could almost always find a whole system solution that would in some way work for both of them.

Duane Black has been a master negotiator for land acquisitions for many years. He says, "When you're negotiating with someone and you find things that they have to have, that they just can't live without, you can get so much in return on your side of the equation by giving them those things, it's amazing. And that happens a lot. Sometimes people will have a particular hot button, and if they can get that, they'll give you everything else."

A skilled hands-off negotiator never has to make a deal happen. He never gets so attached to a particular outcome that he can't move to the idea of higher opportunity. He can always push back from the table and say, "Gee, I would have loved for this to work but I can see it's probably not going to work in a way that will serve both of us, so I'm happy to just take a step back."

Back to neutral, the position with all power. Back to where it doesn't matter if it "works out."

"And it will amaze you how people will respond to that power," says Duane. "How people are drawn to the fact that you might want them but you don't need them."

Remember high school? The most interesting young women seemed to like the boys that could take them or leave them. And the needy boys that were desperate to have them, that couldn't live without them? The young women didn't want anything to do with them.

As human beings, we're not attracted to a needy relationship. We don't want to be involved with someone in any aspect of a relationship who needs us desperately. Needy feels creepy. Which is why stalking is a crime.

The other person's neediness takes a part of us away. It becomes a mechanism of control, and we don't want to be controlled. We want to be free. That's our very nature.

The neutral perspective allows the best possible outcome for both parties to emerge. There's no forcing. And even though you're always drawing the attention back to the benefits of the direction you would like to see things go, you're also open-minded. If the other side has a new idea about a different direction that you hadn't thought of, you can shift right in with it. Smoothly, without resistance. Because you have no position to defend. You're not attached to any particular outcome, except for the higher good.

That's the power of hands-off neutrality.

Steps to Hands-Off Success in your life:

THREE ACTION STEPS

TO TAKE AFTER READING THIS CHAPTER

1. The next time you are negotiating with someone in the workplace give yourself time in advance to enter the world of neutral.

2. Actually write down all the good things that might come from this negotiation not resulting in a “win” for you. Get comfortable with the “worst thing that can happen” so that you lose all sense of needing this to go a certain way.

3. Schedule three meetings with people in your organization that you have not had the easiest time talking to. (People you don’t like.) Then have a no-agenda meeting with each of them where your position on everything will be neutral. No position. You will be there to listen and learn and get taught by the greatest teachers you will ever have. People you “like” are not your best teachers. By valuing neutral, you’ll learn this.