



THE PLOT, WHO MOVED MY CHEESE, AND DOING LESS WHILE ACHIEVING MORE

These past few months have been such an incredible time of personal growth that I thought I would share some of the insights and strategies I've gained with all of those I care about (and anyone else who cares to listen). What I'm about to share with you can literally change your life. It has certainly affected mine.

Where It All Began

Four years ago I turned 40. Like many baby boomers I began questioning whether there was something better or different I should be doing with my life. I realized the work I did as an employment lawyer not only failed to meet my personal expectations, but also challenged me into asking if I was really "making a difference". Two questions being asked by many people today. I realized that coming up with an answer to these questions would be as much about personal growth as it would be about what I ended up "doing" with my life.

What I have learned can be broken down into three basic areas: how I think, how I feel and how I act. What I am attempting to master is an understanding of how these factors influence each other.

The Plot

Over the past number of months I have been working with an incredible woman by the name of Loy Young. Loy has studied the structure of relationships for over thirty years on six different continents. In her outstanding book, *The Plot*, Loy explains that in every situation there are at least two, and generally three, actors: the victim, villain and hero. The second I read this, I was hooked. You see, for the past two years, I have been training executives about workplace relationships. I explain that one of the biggest problems we are facing today is our culture of blame that emanates from a victim mentality. I also explain that a company accused of wrongdoing will ultimately seek to justify their conduct. For example, employers will make an effort to justify why they have an employee suing them for sexual harassment when in fact their motivation was to hire and retain a valued employee. That is an example of what *The Plot* is all about.

The result of remaining in *The Plot* is that the lessons are never learned and are hence repeated. For example the employee (victim) doesn't want to take responsibility for why they now find themselves suing their boss. The employer (villain) doesn't want to take responsibility

for a compliance program that failed. Loy explains that in order to escape The Plot, we have to take personal responsibility and become our own heroes.

What I realized was that I was trained to act as an advocate for The Plot. Over the years I was taught that in order to properly represent employees, I had to focus on blame and the appearance of pain. In order to properly represent employers, I had to focus on legal mechanics and justification. I was playing a win-lose game. In fact, it was more like a lose-lose game. What I wasn't doing was helping people and companies become more responsible. What I thought I was doing was acting as a hero when, in fact, I seldom was. Truth was, I was stuck in The Plot!

What Loy explains is that The Plot has gone on for centuries. It is represented in almost every relationship, both with other people and with yourself. It is the age-old story of goodness triumphs over evil. At any one time we could be playing the victim, villain or hero role either to ourselves or to someone else.

Loy gave another incredible reference to understand the dynamic in relationships. She said that most people are either "80 % ers or 20% ers". I've always known this as the 80/20 rule or the "Pareto Principle". However, Loy's twist is significantly different. She explained that in most relationships one person is taking up 80% of the emotional space in the relationship. Whether that person intends to do so or not, they will eventually be portrayed as a villain. The person taking up only 20% of the space in that relationship will eventually feel victimized, unsafe, and have a flight-or-fight reaction. They either go away or turn into villains themselves. (Is this hitting home yet?)

Loy asked me how much room we should be taking up in a relationship. I thought the right answer would be 50/50. In response to my answer, Loy came up to me chest-to-chest and asked me where the room is to dance in the relationship? Where is the room for co-creation and discovery? I had to laugh, realizing that there wasn't any. Loy then explained that is why it is so important for people to take up only 40% of the space in relationships, so there remains 20% for dance, innovation, discovery, play, spontaneity, and so on.

Loy explained that we tend to have relationships with people in our lives who are there for us to learn our lessons. In my relationships, I am a clear "80% er" and generally will attract the "20% er." In my relationship with my wife, Loren, I found myself making most of the decisions and then complaining why she wasn't making any. Loy explained that whether my intent in doing so is honorable or not, any time I cross the 40% threshold, I am preventing that "20% er" from blossoming into a "40% er." I will never get what I'm after because I don't allow it to happen. Over time, Loren's only choice under the circumstances is fight or flight. My intentions aside, I will eventually turn into a villain in the other person's eyes.

I don't know about you, but understanding this dynamic opened my mind and challenged my feelings. Loy told me my challenge would be to be more inclusive in life. She says that there is no doubt that I am a hero, but any time I act as an "80% er" in a relationship, I turn into "negative hero". The only distinction with being a villain is that it is not my intent to harm someone else. She explained, on the other hand, that when you are a "20% er", you will

typically seek out an "80% er" because they will provide some structure and control. Whether the "80% er" is a villain or a negative hero, the results will end up being the same – either fight or flight. What she explained to Loren is that it will be her challenge in life to step up to me as representative of all the other "80% ers" out there. I will be a true hero if I can back up, become more inclusive, and allow her to step up. Then we can both escape The Plot. Shazzam!!

When I give workshops, I discuss the concept of dialogue. I explain that dialogue creates a "*safe place for communicating*". As a metaphor, I put a blank box up on the flip chart and explain that it represents a safe place. I then explain that any time we are engaging in communication, we can put filters into that box, depending on our physical state, our mental one, or our emotional one. For example, I ask, "What type of filters can come up when a woman complains about sexual harassment in the workplace? What filters could get in the way of true dialogue?"

The first filter that can get in the way of dialogue is one's physical state. For example, it is very hard for someone to communicate to you something traumatic if you are in an imposing environment or imposing physical state. That could act as a filter. Then there's the thinking ones. You may think that perhaps she's just a "gold digger" or that "she asked for it", or that she is merely trying to protect her job. What chances do you really have to engage in active listening when there is so much noise or baggage in the way? Then there are the feeling filters. Perhaps we were once accused of sexual harassment, or had a friend who was. What other emotions might get in the way of engaging in true dialogue?

So, unless we maintain a safe place, we'll never get to the most important conduct of all, and that's engaging in a 40/40 dialogue. This dialogue should allow us to get to the feeling state. For example, if someone investigates a sexual harassment complaint, digs into the facts and never asks the accuser *how they feel* about the issue, they may be portrayed as a villain. It's that simple.

Another way to invade the "safe place" is by using the word "you." That is why we should focus on the conduct and not the person. To stay on our side of the 40-yard line, we have to use the word "I."

A few weeks ago I went to a Quantum Teaching Conference put on by the Learning Forum and further understood how our physical state affects our emotional one. Just like the word "you" can cross the 40% line, so can our physical state. For example, it was explained that when a student wasn't doing their work in the classroom, it would be a mistake to confront that student face-to-face and use the word "you." Under that circumstance, the student will either rebel or shut down (fight or flight). Michael Grinder explained that once we get the person's attention, we should approach them from the side and instead focus on the work to be done (i.e. focusing on the conduct, not the person). What a simple, yet powerful, insight.

I learned from Pat Wolfe, who studies the interrelationship between brain functioning and learning, that in order to effectively learn something, we have to own the experience. That is one of the detriments to the "80% er." I find it true in my own case. When I give presentations, I want to tell everybody everything I think they ought to know. What I am rapidly learning is that

if I cut my content in half, and have the audience own 40% of it, then the learning experience, and my ratings, are that much greater. It is much more powerful to own 100% of an audience than 100% of the content.

Now, About the Cheese

The next set of insights came from reading a very simple book entitled *Who Moved My Cheese*, by Dr. Spencer Johnson, who shares his parable about change. In the story there are four characters, two mice and two very small individuals. All go to the same place to feed on the same big block of cheese every day. One day the cheese is gone without warning or explanation.

To make a short story even shorter, (you can read it in 45 minutes) in reaction to the absence of cheese, the first mouse immediately scurries off looking for a new source and shortly thereafter is followed by the second mouse. However, both men decide to stay behind in hopes the cheese will reappear. After a period of time the two mice were rewarded with an incredibly large cheese source whereas the two humans were starving. One man, finally realizing that things would never "go back" to the way they were, broke through his fear and joined the mice. The other man could never break his chains – with the end being very clear.

What hit home for me was a question one of the mice asked one of the men: "WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WEREN'T AFRAID?" When I read the question I immediately highlighted it, and it has yet to leave my mind since. My immediate reaction was "I'm not afraid of anything." But then the question began to eat at me. I found myself asking, "What if I was afraid of something? What would that be?" As Dr. Johnson explains, what it usually is, is the *fear of change*. I had to ask myself, "What was I afraid of changing?" Then I realized the answer was "changing myself". What I realized was, that despite all of my "knowing", fear – which is emotionally based, lives within all of us. It is fear that keeps us from breaking out of the victim or villain role within. It is fear that prevents us from backing up to 40% and being emotionally inclusive. Our inner villain, who has done very well to preserve the status quo, has no interest in changing. If we're used to being a victim, a villain or a negative hero, our inner villain wants to keep us right there. It is the drama we know all too well. It is the addiction to drama that helps keep us in The Plot.

And so, what am I afraid of? Perhaps I am afraid of true success, both in business and in my home relationships. Perhaps I am afraid of becoming a true hero to both myself and those around me. Perhaps my inner villain is comfortable right where it is. Perhaps my inner victim is looking for third party heroes to save my day. Perhaps what I really need to be like is those mice, who see it and then just do it.

Loy says perhaps I need to understand the "feeling part" even better. She explained that it is pain that will prevent me (or anyone else) from moving out of The Plot. She says until I fully understand the emotional basis of that pain, I won't be able to arrive at a safe place within. A place where I am neither villain nor victim, but a hero to myself and others. A place where I am not afraid of change but embrace it as the only sane thing to do. A place where I am continually growing in mind, body and spirit.

One of my fears associated with backing up to a 40%'er is that things won't get done. Momentum will be lost. I won't accomplish everything I'm supposed to. Despite the fact I know at a mental level that *control is dead*, it's a very hard reality to accept emotionally.

Do Less, Achieve More

In this well written book by Chin-Ning Chu, issues surrounding control, effort, and flow once again become the issue. Ms. Chu states that success comes when we discover the hidden power of giving in. Of not fighting reality but of accepting it for what it is.

One of the first subjects Chin-Ning tackles is that of time management. Although time may be a figment of our own imaginations, we are still stuck with the reality that life revolves around seasons, schooling, product development cycles and 30-day payment obligations. One of the more important points she makes is to focus on what you do best and let someone else handle the rest. We have to constantly ask ourselves what do we do best, how do we stay focused and simplify our tasks.

Ms. Chu then tells us "*we have to trade what we have for what we want*". Our life is already full, and if we want to do new things we have to stop doing other things. This business of choice goes right back to the issues of control and fear. Many of us continue to do things that we don't necessarily enjoy only because we know that we can control the circumstances and we are afraid of change. As Ms. Chu says, we have to break past these limitations and may have to give up familiar but counterproductive friends, attitudes and habits.

Ms. Chu reminds us that the process of obtaining your dream state requires you to immerse yourself in positive dream visions, experiencing them as if they are actual, which will propel you into a new life orbit.

"Life's challenges are never meant to devastate you. In fact, the challenges are placed before you for your enjoyment and to remind you that life has kept its side of the bargain to keep the game fun and entertaining." Understanding this from a mental perspective is relatively easy. Accepting this on an emotional level is extremely difficult. When we are feeling ill at ease, irritated, confused, etc. it is a symbol that we need to push past our present limitations.

One way of getting past our limitations is by surrendering to them. "True surrender comes by knowing the grand design beyond the superficial, mundane level, and thus opening up to and accepting divine guidance, allowing it to affect your life in an astoundingly positive way."

In my life, as well as in yours, chances are we don't seriously think about change until we are in so much pain we have but little choice. As Ms. Chu states, "When the Creator is pleased with you, he will take a special interest in you. He will make sure your heart gets cracked open because only when the heart is broken and resistive ego cracked can we let in the light of wisdom." This is not only true on a personal level, but on a business level as well. For example, it is very hard to sell compliance services to a company that has never suffered from a serious employee lawsuit. However, all it takes is one horrible experience and they come looking for

you. This is human nature. Even though we may know it makes sense to do something, it is not until we feel we must that we will.

Ms. Chu reflects upon a subject that I have been fascinated with lately, and that is the concept of "duality". The fact is, there is a dark side (within and without), in any situation. This is true whether we are talking about astrophysics, quantum physics or our inner being. I am learning that the whole notion of running and hiding from this dark side is just a fallacy and that the surrender to its existence is true enlightenment. There is both light and dark, good and bad, yin and yang, and so on. To hide behind facades, gated communities, or insurance policies and pretend otherwise is only self-destructive. It has brought me great sense of inner peace to understand that things are not always going to be the way I would like them to be and I don't always have control over that fact. *It is what it is. So, how does it make me feel? Now, how am I going to deal with it?*

This existence of the dual nature of our personalities is an old tale. Buddhists speak in terms of the yin and the yang, Jung talks of the "dark side." Loy talks about victim and villain. However, we are gaining a new level of insight because of our understanding of the brain, genetics, and how we are affected by the environment. This is yet another step in the growth of consciousness and a step up the evolutionary ladder.

Ms. Chu states that there are three steps to this divine surrender. The first step is that of *desperation*, when everything seems to be out of control. Nothing is going the way it is supposed to be. Then, you enter into the second step, which is *detachment*. Out of desperation you want to give up. Others cave in. When you are detached, you enter into a state of witness. You start saying to yourself, "I don't care" about the outcome or the process, I will raise to a new level of excellence with clarity and ease. The final step is that of *divine surrender*, "When you surrender to the power of the almighty and embrace the true essence of 'Let Thy Will Be Done' and you perform your duty without agitation or desire, yet your actions benefit yourself and others". Amen – but easier said than done.

"The *only* reality that exists for you is in your own mind. When your mind showers its grace upon you, the whole world opens up." Ms. Chu makes the point that just as on a roller coaster ride, the only choice we have in life is to determine how we feel about the ride, but we're not permitted to stop the ride. I like that analogy.

Ms. Chu concludes the book by suggesting that we take advantage of the power of meditation and tap into our intuition. These are two things that I do on a regular basis and they have granted me incredible peace and insight. For those of you who do not practice meditation, you may want to consider doing so.

Conclusion

The reason why so many smart people (and some not so smart people) do things that get in their own way, has very little to do with what we know. For the most part, it has to do with how we feel. Feelings that affect thinking and hence action. We are realizing that the less we

control, the more we can do and the more we can be. We can think in terms of integrity, responsibility, sustainability and win-win solutions. A conversation that has been the privilege of a select few until the last few decades. As Buckminster Fuller so aptly pointed out, today's scarcity is only in the mind. There is already enough to go around, and there would be even more, if we could get past our limiting belief systems.

So, three different stories with three inter-connecting themes. Letting go of control, taking responsibility and surrender are championed as the path to enlightenment. So far, so good. They have worked to help expand my life. They have also worked for others I have seen incorporate them. Are they working for you? Will they work for you?

Only if you give them the chance they deserve. You certainly don't need my permission to give it a try.

Let me summarize a few of the essential points above:

1. The oldest story of them all is "The Plot." The Plot will almost always have a victim, villain and hero. It is the age old story of goodness triumphs over evil.
2. We are generally the "80% er" or "20% er" in any relationship. What we want to be is a "40% er" which will allow room for growth within a relationship. "80% ers" need to become inclusive, whereas "20% ers" need to step up.
3. In order to communicate with ourselves and others we need to create a safe place. A safe place is created through dialogue. Dialogue exists where there are no filters clouding communication, whether these filters are based on our physical mental or emotional states.
4. Any time you approach a person directly, or use the word "you," you risk crossing the 50% threshold. You risk creating an unsafe place where fear sets in. When fear sets in, people resort to fight or flight.
5. Remember to focus on the conduct, not the person. Use the word "I", talk about the task, talk about your experience.
6. One of the greatest challenges for people who believe in personal growth and want to do well towards others is not becoming a "negative hero". We have to stay on our side of 40%. We have become inclusive. The challenge for us is to allow the victim to find the hero within. Whether we are talking about ourselves or another person.
7. And lastly, breaking past fear is about understanding our feelings. We won't change until we understand the nature of the pain driving our circumstances. When we finally surrender to that pain, play 40/40, take 100% responsibility and become our own hero, we will be out of the plot and become, as Abraham Maslow said, "one with ourselves."