

Chapter

2

PARKER THE PERFORMER



The sales manager had her team assembled in the main conference room and was about to start their monthly meeting. It's the only time they meet as a group and the pre-meeting bantering was usually upbeat. Of course, the conversation was dominated by exaggerated selling stories and led by the same characters who chose a career in sales over stand-up comedy. When you spend your days doing all the things that lead to eventual sales there's something therapeutic about engaging with your peers in pre-meeting hyperbole.

The sales manager was proud of her team of twelve, and morale was running especially high on this day. She eagerly looked forward to the meeting in which she'd share the good news that once again they are the top performing team in the company. It's difficult to keep secrets from the good sales people. They have a need to know, and therefore, they find out. So in reality, everyone

already knew they'd just had another banner month. However, when it comes from the mouth of the boss, there is something official about it.

True to form, only eleven of the twelve sales executives were present. The meeting was to start at ten o'clock and still no Parker. This was not an unusual occurrence. But in about three to five minutes, Parker was sure to walk through the door, apologize for being late and explain how he had been tied up closing or saving the "Big One."

Like clockwork, at three minutes past the hour, in walked Parker. "Sorry I'm late. I got tied up on the phone with a guy I've been working on for the past ninety days. I've been all over this deal. I got past the committee. Meeting after meeting, lunches, presentations, e-mails, conference calls, you name it. They're going to be a huge client and they just agreed to do the deal. This, people...is a GREAT DAY!" With that, Parker sat down and was ready to start the monthly meeting.

As one of the top sales reps in the company for the past two years, Parker was showing no signs of slowing down. It was completely true to form for Parker to enter meetings in a manner such as he just did. Not only were the sales manager and the team used to this type of behavior, they also knew that Parker's little drama scene was probably accurate. He had just scored once again. It was his job to score.

The new sales people looked on in awe and felt a slight surge of adrenalin as Parker announced his victory. The veterans had come to expect it. Some were put off by his boasting, while others were happy for his success. The rest were bewildered as to how he continued to enthusiastically achieve new sales milestones. In any case, Parker was one of the best and since he knew it, he'd be happy to explain it to you.

The sales manager said, "Parker...great job. You continue to kill the numbers. Now let's get the meeting started."

Parker felt great about himself, and with that proud, magnified

grin, he briefly announced to the team, “Thank you and let me take this opportunity to say that you, oh knowledgeable one, remain a magnificent sales manager.”

The sales manager knew how to handle her top producer and she wasn’t going to ding him for being a few minutes late. Even though Parker’s ego was larger than the company logo on the front of the building, and he could be a little irritating, he remained the top producer on the team.

Parker isn’t your average sales rep. He is a Performer. He breaks company records consistently, dramatically, and with great enthusiasm. Selling comes naturally to Parker the Performer. His ability to relate to people and control a conversation, without coming across as too aggressive, is just part of his natural skill set. He’s one of the best, most productive kinds of sales people. Parker and his kind are typically found among those who are at, near, or on their way to being the top producers of their company. Performers like Parker are chameleons: they rapidly adapt to the environment and styles of their customers. It follows that when prospecting they have a keen sense of determining if they have a real customer or not. And once they do, they treat that customer better than their own family members. They’re the kind of elite sales person that has a razor-sharp ability to determine if their products and services are a match to the potential customer’s needs. In addition, they can make that determination faster than any other kind of sales person.

What’s the down side? Performers like Parker can sometimes ruffle feathers. Whether through their single-minded enthusiasm, their love of the limelight, or their goal-directed behavior, relationships around performers can sometimes be strained, in the workplace and at home.

Today, like all days, Parker had difficulty sitting through the meeting. His mind was a continuous to-do list as he reviewed in his head the things that he had to accomplish to continue his sales growth. Making little notes on his yellow pad, this man had very clear intentions: to sell more than anyone and be financially

rewarded for it, no matter what the cost. The only time that he really tuned in to this particular meeting was when the sales manager gave him accolades for his past month's accomplishments. When it came to selling, lack of confidence had never been a problem for Parker the Performer. With his intentions clear, he would do whatever it took to finish each month as one of the top producers. If it was a grind, so be it. That was part of the game.

Today's meeting lasted about an hour. At the end of the meeting, one of the new sales reps jockeyed his way to be near Parker as they left the room. The new rep had immersed himself in the business from the beginning and was having some success of his own. But his learning curve had not caught up to his desire to achieve, and he needed some help. He was just stuck, like good new reps get. He had already sought help from his sales manager and didn't want to admit to her that he was still stuck. "Why not go to the best," he thought to himself, as he followed Parker out of the meeting. While he knew Parker could provide the guidance he was looking for, getting him to focus his attention on anything other than his own needs would be difficult. Parker wasn't exactly a giver when it came to helping others — unless of course, it served him to do so. That was clear to even the new guy. But still, the kid thought he'd just throw it out there. "Parker," he said, "You had another great month. Nice job. Do you have a minute?"

With little sincerity, the Performer shot back, "Thanks kid. I'm in a hurry. What've you got?"

"Well, I'm stuck on a couple of my deals and I can't get the customer to move. I was wondering if..."

Parker the Performer interrupted the kid in midsentence. "Listen kid, I'm in a big hurry. This is what you have to do. The key to sales is 'finding the pain.' All you got to do is find the pain. Make their pain go away. When I do that, I make a sale. Call me Doctor Parker. Look, I gotta run. See your manager. That's what she's there for. Good luck." With that Parker was out of the conference room and off to his world of successful selling.

The kid took the hit because he was tough and made his way back to his cubicle. He thought about it for a second and decided he was too new to actually say what he was thinking of Parker the Performer.

With the kid out of his mind as fast as he had entered it, Parker made his way to a nice office that overlooked a large sprawling man-made pond that flowed along the outside of the office complex. The company was on the top floor of a three-story building that was one of many buildings. Parker's office was among a row of the nicest offices. He had earned his place on this row as one of the company's top producers. Parker went into his office, sat down at his desk, and began doing what he does best. His office was a sales sanctuary. He had awards dating from last month and well into the past. Awards that he had earned in his old company lined up as trophies do. Photographs of himself and his peers from various incentive trips from tropical places masked the walls. File rack after file rack held current clients, hot, warm, and cold prospects. Over in one corner of his office was a whole pile of "stuff." It looked like clutter. Call it the forgotten corner, where old phone messages and a pile of unread weekly and monthly reports lived. You could tell Parker wasn't big on reports—except for the ones that ranked him along with his peer group. Those he kept tacked in front of him on the wall by his desk with his name highlighted, oblivious or not caring how his colleagues might react.

One thing was evident. Parker had a system and he was very successful at what he did. He loved to sell and he especially loved the financial reward that came as a result of his efforts. His customers trusted him and all the customer satisfaction reports showed it.

Parker was concluding a phone call when his sales manager walked into his office and sat down on the leather couch. Parker's couch. In that split second, Parker remembered the one-on-one session he'd had with the president several months earlier. At that meeting, Parker had expressed his displeasure at some of the recent changes in the company's sales policies. The new couch arrived the next day. He was good at getting things he wanted.

When fellow sales people would drop by his office and make themselves comfortable, Parker could often be heard saying, “Now be careful, you’re sitting on the president’s couch.” It wasn’t long before the entire office knew where Parker had gotten the new piece of furniture.

“Parker, I want to talk about a subject that is very sensitive to you,” the sales manager said. She used the direct approach with Parker.

“What’s the deal? Are we selling the company?” Parker was also a fisherman.

“No, Parker. It’s about your office. As you know, one of the company’s initiatives this year includes an aggressive expansion plan. We’re adding four new sales teams that will bring our sales organization to nearly two hundred strong.”

There were twelve teams in the company, each with twelve sales reps. Even though Parker’s team was number one again, top of the current teams, that didn’t do anything to dismiss his concerns. Parker didn’t like the thought of any changes that could get in the way of his individual objectives. Expansion in the past had meant operational wrinkles that needed ironing out. Adding four teams was no small expansion. But Parker knew that arguing about the overall strategy and its effect on the existing business would be a fruitless discussion, so he opted to get right to his point. “Just tell me the part about my office. I’m buried here trying to make us both some money.” Parker was now fully attentive. His office meant a tremendous amount to him. It was his temple where he displayed all of his past accomplishments, and although his ego couldn’t fit inside his office, the rest of his mind and body were quite comfortable.

“We’re reorganizing the two sales floors and we’re going to move you down the hall. Before you react, let me just tell you that it’s a nicer office with an even better view.” The sales manager, having earned her degree in Parker the Performer, knew exactly what was coming.

“Boy, I’m taken back by all of this. Here I am, the top on our team, and in the top five in the company the last three months. Number three, year to date. Now I’m hearing that I am the one who has to move.” Parker was visibly upset as he poked his thumb in his chest. While Parker will go to great lengths to explain that change is not a problem with him, every time something changes that affects his world, regardless of the size of the change, Parker has an issue. He can be a very high maintenance individual. While the sales manager reaps the reward of his production, she earns every penny.

“Did you hear me when I told you it was a nicer office with a better view? By the way, it’s exactly sixteen paces from this one.”

“You walked it off?”

“I walked it off.” The sales manager was continuing her firm approach. She’d been through it too many times.

Parker was now in full Performer mode. “That’s not the point. I’m busting my ass for this company and moving my office is a big hassle for me. Why aren’t any of the other people on this row moving?” Now Parker was getting heated.

The sales manager took a deep breath and faced into the storm. “First of all, I appreciate your work ethic, and it appears to be financially paying off for you. Secondly, several members of the team on ‘Producer Row’ are moving. Nobody has a problem with it. Just be a team player and don’t sweat the little stuff. You’ll have a nice office. Look at it as an upgrade.”

“I’ve always been a team player and will remain one.” Now Parker had to preach. “I just want you to know that I’m not very happy about this and it would be nice if I had a little more respect from management. I hold company sales records, you know, although I do expect them to be broken.” And after a dramatic pause and another patented thumb to the chest, “By me!”

“Does that hurt?” the sales manager said, trying to make light of the situation. “Parker, it’s about a fifty-foot move. It’s an upgrade. You are appreciated. Let’s move on. The facilities team

will be by to work out the move details. I'd appreciate your full cooperation. Now we both have a lot to do. Thanks for understanding." The sales manager was out in a heartbeat. She knew he would get over it.

Parker sat at his desk. He knew that this move was not a major change, yet he still was having difficulty with that last conversation. On one hand, he felt put out that he had to move. Didn't they realize who he was? Didn't they realize that he was often recruited by the competition? He had been on such a high from this morning's sale and the accolades that he received at the meeting. During the meeting, he sat thinking to himself, "I'm Parker the Best, Parker the King, Parker the Dragon Slayer, Parker the Sniper." And now this! Suddenly, he was Parker Packing Boxes, Parker the Displaced, or simply Parker the Annoyed.

Since Parker is a Performer, his strengths can be his weaknesses. He runs so high on emotion that he can also run low on emotion. While his day started out so strong, he just let a little change get in the way of his selling day. How was he going to handle it?



Like Parker, all Performers have the following characteristics:

- They are emotional
- They are intuitive
- They are passionate
- They are very competitive
- They are extroverts
- They are impatient
- They have large egos
- They are natural-born sales people
- They are top producers



Parker went about his business, but now he felt that uncomfortable feeling that he experienced so often. It wasn't exactly anger. It wasn't exactly depression. It wasn't the annoyance at having to move offices. That would all work out. The feeling was one that he gets when things don't go well. It was an uncomfortable feeling. It made the day a little more of a struggle and occupied his mind far more than he would admit.

High-level sales productivity inherently brings its share of daily problems. The very best sales people view these as hurdles and not monumental challenges. It's the nature of selling. Sales people are almost always reliant upon other departments within a company to fully execute a transaction. Whether it's service, distribution, operations, shipping, administration, you name it, there is always a department or two involved in making it happen. That means human interaction and that means from time to time, there will be errors.

Parker was checking his e-mail when he received a phone call from the distribution manager about one of his orders. Apparently the order did not ship as scheduled and the customer would not receive it per the order instructions. Since it was month end, this glitch would affect Parker's end-of-month numbers. It was company policy not to use overnight shipment unless it was an absolute emergency. This would take the approval of his sales manager.

Parker didn't receive the news of the error well. He shouted at the distribution manager: "You guys are incredible. I bust my butt to make a sale and you guys can't even ship it. I swear you should change the name of your department to the 'Sales Prevention Team.' I want that order in overnight so my client receives it when I promised it to him."

The distribution manager was used to Parker's bullying and while he personally didn't care for Parker's self-centered ways, he recognized his passion and successful track record. "Parker, you know that takes approval of your sales manager and has to be deemed an emergency. And by the way, the 'Sales Prevention

Team' has a ninety-five percent customer satisfaction rating. Please accept my personal apology for the mix-up. We'll try to do better in the future." The distribution manager's comments were dry and to the point with a bit of sarcasm. He was all business.

Parker hung the phone up and called his boss. He was entering his full court press mode. "I don't appreciate the way I was just talked to by distribution. Shipping screwed up an order and I want it in overnight so that we don't lose the deal. Not only do I have to put up with their incompetence, I have to take their crap. It shouldn't be that way and I want it fixed. And you know what, I tried..."

The sales manager listened to a solid three minutes of Parker's one-sided venting. When he was through, she got the vitals she needed to approve the overnight and said to him. "Parker, it's done. I'll approve it and the customer will receive it tomorrow. They're a great customer and we don't want to jeopardize our relationship with them. And, your month is still intact. Buddy, we're all on the same team. Relax."

"Thank you," Parker said and he hung up the phone still stewing, at only a slightly lower temperature.

The sales manager cleaned up Parker's relationship issues with distribution as best as she could and approved the overnight. Meanwhile, Parker went about his day.



Performers are driven people with a character defect of impatience. They can be very reactionary which sometimes translates to a pompous, self-centered, and unreasonable demeanor. The very best Performers have this flaw harnessed and have learned from their experiences. They've come to realize that without a "team" effort, they would be far less successful. Therefore, the best of them consciously cultivate the habit of practicing within their own company the same relationship and problem solving methods they use while selling. After all, a Performer will never unleash negative

behavior on prospects and customers. The best ones are positive within the company as well. Parker had a lot to learn.



Later that day while driving home, Parker continued to have that uncomfortable feeling. Maybe it was of missing something in his life. He couldn't pinpoint it. He knew that sales were a grind; in fact, life was a grind. He had never known any other way. To be successful, Parker the Performer felt that he had to step on internal toes when he needed to. You had to be tough to survive and nobody was tougher than Parker the Performer. Still, he was bothered by his feeling and maybe even by the need to step on toes.

Sales can be very lucrative and Parker was living that dream. He owned a beautiful home in a new development, wore the finest clothes, and drove a beautiful Corvette that he was sure was the envy of all on the road. "Victory Red" was the color and it had four hundred horses in that V-8. While it was loaded with everything, Parker really got a kick out of the push button starting capability on the end of his key chain and the throaty growl of the engine. He drove the complete package that really impressed people—at least it seemed so from Parker's viewpoint.

He sat at a red light and thought about how his day had started out so good as he closed a deal that he'd been working on. So what if he was late to the meeting, the best sales people are kings. He would have liked to help the new kid who asked for advice but that's the sales manager's job and time is money. He was still irked about having to move offices and the whole conversation he'd had with his manager about the move. He thought about how he had gotten the overnight approval on the shipping error.

"Operations need to get their act together." Parker wasn't big on empathy for others. He reflected on the "grind" of the day and said quietly to himself, "Nobody ever said it would be easy." With that, he maneuvered his prized possession into the gas station to fill up.



Performers are passionate people whose emotions can be either their friend or their enemy. The better the Performer, the better they have a handle on this issue. It follows their productivity and the more they “harness the beast,” take control of their negative side, the better their chances of staying in the selling zone. You won’t find long-term top producers whose emotions are out of control during a major percentage of their selling day. Performers are challenged by this every day, however, and the best recognize the danger of running too high or too low on emotion. Parker the Performer knows this, but it doesn’t make it any easier for him to stay focused and positive consistently.

Parker grew up in the area and he has been getting gas at Steve’s Service Station since he was a kid riding with his parents. Oddly, it has had the same owner all of these years. Steve was an old man now, although he looked ten years younger than his eighty years. His service station was in mint condition. It had changed over the years, as he’d weathered all of the conversions from conventional full service stations with few pumps that included auto repair work, all the way to the forty-eight pumps on eight stalls, a car wash and mini-mart that stood today. Parker flashed back on the Steve who’d towered above him in earlier years. Then, Steve had stood over six feet tall with a build that included very muscular arms and shoulders. They weren’t the “show muscle” that was built in a gym like the physique Parker had sculpted as an adult. This was work muscle constructed from twisting wrenches, mounting tires, and whatever Steve’s previous life had brought him.

For as long as Parker had been going to the station, it was a thriving place. Steve’s work ethic was a big part of that. Location didn’t hurt either. In earlier years it was a fairly rural area and Steve made his name with the three-stall garage where he kept some of the finest auto mechanics busy six days a week. Steve built his business on honesty and hard work and he treated his customers like they were part of his extended family.

Parker was always perplexed as to why Steve hadn’t retired many years earlier; he was certain that Steve could financially do

so. In any event, Parker pulled into the stall, got out, swiped his credit card, and began filling up. Steve was repainting his white curbs and looked up to give Parker a wave. Parker walked over to say hello to Steve as he'd done for the past fifteen years whenever he had the time.

The years had been good to Steve but eighty is eighty. Today when Steve stood he was a little crooked, age had taken much of his muscle, given his hands a little tremor, and he looked over his bifocals as he greeted Parker. Same embroidered name on his shirt, same pocket protector, same tire gauge in his pocket, and the same warm smile.

"How's that Corvette runnin'?" That seemed to be Steve's first question every time.

"It's going fifty-five while it's getting gas, Steve." Parker was quick witted and it always made Steve laugh.

"Well," Steve said, "Are you making lots of sales down at that big outfit of yours?"

"Yeah, I'm doing great, Steve. Sales have never been better."

Over the years Steve knew this much about Parker. He was either sky-high or down in the dumps. Despite the words, today Parker looked like he was having a downer. Steve never probed into people's business and didn't offer advice unless he was asked. There wasn't any kind of person that Steve hadn't dealt with over the years. Kind, caring, forgiving, angry, jealous, fearful, you name the personality and the emotion, and Steve had experience in dealing with them. That's what forty-plus years in this business will bring you.

Parker and Steve made small talk about the weather, family, and baseball. As they spoke, you could hear horns honking as people either drove by or left the station. Steve would smile and wave at each driver. Parker was always amazed at the volume of exchanges that would go on in a short period of time.

Parker had to say something. "Steve, you're amazing! In about two minutes, eight people have honked and waved at you. It's

always like that every time I talk to you. What's up with that?"

"You salesmen always exaggerate," Steve kidded. "But since you asked, I'll tell you this much. I've seen a lot in my years here on this corner. I've met all kinds of people with all kinds of dispositions. Lucky for me, everyone needs gas for their vehicles. I've made lots of friends who owned stations like mine. Most of them are dead or nearly dead now." Steve chuckled without a smile. "I learned early on that the happiest people don't focus on happiness. They focus on helping other people. No matter what business they're in."

Just then, Steve saw a lady struggling to put oil in her car. "Parker, I gotta run. Say hi to your mom and dad when you talk to them," and with that, Steve was moving across the lot to the lady in need. Parker couldn't believe how fast Steve could move for his age.

He liked Steve and his station was always clean, but Parker certainly didn't think Steve was an expert on success. It was an old man in a gas station. Happiness is winning the quarterly contest and that trip to Hawaii. Parker's intentions were clear.



Weeks clicked off and Parker continued his assault on the company quota. His sales were thirty percent over the previous year and his income followed. The thing about Performers is that while they are not the most detail-oriented people in the world, they execute the life of a sale very well. They begin with the end in mind and are full of confidence. They are very visual people and have a built-in capability that allows them to project in their minds a positive outcome to their selling efforts. In other words, once they've determined that they have a "real" prospect, they convince themselves that the prospect will become another customer. From this point on, Performers' actions follow their beliefs. Clear intentions.

This thinking earned Parker his quarterly contest as he fin-

ished in the top ten during the quarter. The company's monthly sales meeting was held on a Friday and management dressed in Hawaiian shirts in recognition of the contest and its winners. A five-day paid vacation in Hawaii was a great perk, but more importantly to Parker, it was the recognition of being a winner. As the vice president of sales called up each of the winners, they were given a lei by the president to wear as a trophy. As the lei was placed around Parker's neck, he yelled to the crowd, "The thrill of the kill!" Everyone laughed, including the president. Parker was pumped as he lined up with his peers and a member of the marketing department took their picture for the next company newsletter.

Later that afternoon, when the less committed were starting their weekend early, Parker was making follow-up calls on the leads he had developed during the week. He knew people were generally in a good mood on Fridays and securing appointments for the following week would be less difficult than on Monday. As Parker concluded a call, one of his fellow sales people came in. Parker knew that this guy prided himself on receiving information before it was announced. While he wasn't quite a conspiracy theorist, he did have his share of paranoia. In any case, he loved to focus on stirring things up more than he did on sales, and he did his best to take people with him on the mental journey to the land of overreaction. The guy did, however, have a good hit rate on early information.

"Parker, have you heard the latest?" the Chirper said as if he were about to announce the most earth-shattering news that had ever hit the company.

"No, but I'm certain you're gonna tell me." Parker was half paying attention.

"Keep this between the two of us, but they're taking away our individual admin. assistants!" The Chirper should be so enthusiastic on his sales calls.

"How do you know this?" Parker was now at full attention.

His livelihood was being threatened.

“I know this,” said the Chirper.

“How do you know this?”

“I know this.”

“How?”

“I know!”

“Okay, okay. Stop!” Parker leaned in. “When?”

“Monday!” the Chirper was in heaven. Giving early news to Parker was such a thrill.

Parker grilled the Chirper for everything else he could think of but that was all he knew. “That would be one of the dumbest moves they could make,” Parker said over his shoulder to the Chirper as he strolled down toward the coffee maker.

The moment Parker knew he was out of the Chirper’s sight, he changed direction and marched directly to his sales manager’s office. He stormed in, unannounced, and said, “This is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. What are you people thinking?” Parker was worked up. He was good at letting his emotions get in the way. “I just heard that you are taking away our admin. assistants. Do you realize what that will do to my revenue?” Without pausing to allow the sales manager to answer, Parker barreled on. “I’m a top producer in this company and I rely on my admin. to do all the things that allow me to stay in front of customers. My admin. assistant completely follows the job description that you guys laid out for the position. She handles all the sales support issues and keeps the non-sales crap off of my back. She’s terrific. And so am I. My numbers are thirty percent over a year ago. The company is kicking butt. First you make me move offices and now you’re taking away my admin? What’s next, a comp cut?” By this point, Parker was in full Performer high maintenance overreaction. He was angry; in fact, he was borderline rage. He continued on for another few minutes until he had to pause for air.

“Are you done yet, Parker?” the sales manager asked with a

firm look that matched her tone. She'd been down this road too many times.

"I just think this is complete crap! What more do you guys want from me? All I do is top produce. That's all." That was his best Parker the Performer turned Parker the Persecuted. Same guy, different mood.

"Listen to me, Parker. I don't know where you heard what you heard. It's true and I'm going to ask you to keep it quiet until Monday." The sales manager let her comments marinate for a moment.

"So it IS true! You guys are amazing." Parker stood up to leave. The persecuted always create an us versus them stance.

"Sit down, Parker. I'm not finished. As usual, whoever told you this did not have the whole story. Now I'll tell you the whole story but I want your word that you will keep it between us. It affects the lives of many people. Some people will be let go on Monday, and I'd like you to think of them for a second. You and your admin. assistant are fine and staying intact." The sales manager's laser eyes were now burning through Parker.

He started to get that feeling of discomfort that he gets when he lets his emotions override his better judgment. His selfish ego was being exposed. He didn't like himself very much right now, but he was feeling some happiness over hearing what he thought he'd just heard.

The sales manager went on to explain that the top ten percent of the sales people were retaining their admin. assistants; for them, it would be business as usual. The remainder of the organization would share a pool of assistants under a new plan that had been tested and developed over the past several months. Several on the administrative staff would be reassigned and others would be terminated due to the reorganization. It was all going to happen on Monday.

Parker was humbled. He apologized for his outburst as the sales manager reminded him that they'd been down this road together

on many occasions. She asked him to think about his behavior here today. She suggested that he would never treat a customer as he had just treated her—and asked him to explore within himself why he would act this way within his own company. She emphasized his tendency to a roller coaster personality that takes him to highs and lows on a frequent basis.

“You know, Parker,” she said as she lowered her voice to a whisper. “People get in your way, and you just mow them down. A person keeps doing that, and they run out of supporters. Not to mention friends.” Now she leaned in and stared directly into his eyes. “After a while, it doesn’t feel so good.”

Parker nodded his head in agreement. He gave his assurance that he would keep things confidential, apologized again for his outburst, and left his manager’s office. He walked back to his office, carefully avoiding the Chirper, closed his office and left for the weekend. On the drive home he was embarrassed that he hadn’t for a moment considered the outcome for the people who were about to be terminated. They would not even have jobs and all he could do was think about how it would affect his sales. He didn’t like himself very much right now and wanted to shake this feeling as fast as possible. He also didn’t like the way he had once again let his emotions take control of his interaction with his sales manager. Parker was not happy and he knew that something had to change for this Performer.



Performers have large egos and at times it will appear that they are out of control. In fact, they sometimes are. This usually occurs within their organization, and is ignited when there is a change or mix-up that threatens their immediate sales success. It may be that miscommunication occurs in operations, accounting, customer service, shipping, you name it. It’s not unusual for the cause of the mishap to be traced right back to the Performers themselves. However, this is usually determined after they’ve already done the damage.



Parker pulled into the gas station at around five o'clock. Traffic had been horrific, even for a Friday. He recalled Steve's comments about helping other people that he had so easily discounted the last time they talked. "The key to happiness is helping other people, or something like that?" he said to himself.

Maybe there was something to it. Could the old man be on to something? There he was over in the corner of the lot. This time he was planting petunias under the sign that displayed the station's gas prices. It was an impeccable flower bed with multiple colors. Steve was busy adding purple and red to the mix.

"Hey Parker, how's she runnin'?" Steve was speaking of the Corvette that Parker had gotten washed at lunchtime.

"Just great, Steve. How are you doing? I see you're hard at it." Parker was often on a high at the end of a hard week. But despite his words, Steve could tell that Parker was in a little funk today. Steve turned back to the flowers. While tending to them, he thought to himself how life was a real struggle for Parker the Performer and how it was too bad that he didn't take more time to appreciate all that he had.

All of a sudden there was a tremendous screech that lasted for what felt to Parker like an eternity. Parker was so startled that he jumped back about two feet. Steve just looked up directly at the squealing tires as dark smoke and burnt rubber filled the air. Then there was a horrific sound of the impact of an accident. Metal on metal.

"That's a bad one! Parker, call 911 right now! Tell them there's been a bad accident and people are hurt!"

"But how do you know that?" Parker said.

"Just do it now!" Steve said more sternly than Parker had ever known him to be.

Parker looked at the wreck and then back toward Steve. But Steve was gone. As in, where did he go?

While Parker called 911 to report the accident, he looked around for Steve and out at the crash. Everything was so surreal at

this point. The street was complete pandemonium. Shattered glass, pieces of cars, the smell of burnt rubber, punctured radiators hissing, and people screaming.

A man in a black Yukon had run the stoplight and hit a woman in a Volvo station wagon broadside at the driver's door. People were crowded around the Volvo trying to get inside. Parker finished the 911 call, and found himself right next to the wreckage. He had no recollection of walking from the flower bed to the middle of the street. Later he would reflect on the peculiarity of Steve's disappearance and his own appearance at the actual wreck.

At that moment, an ambulance and a fire truck pulled up. It had been less than ten minutes and Parker felt enormous relief to see the emergency crew. The firefighters brought out the Jaws of Life equipment to free the woman, who was not conscious and was bleeding from the head profusely, as head wounds do. On top of that, there were children and a baby screaming in the back seat. Four people total in the Volvo.

The firefighters were struggling to pry the door off so the paramedics could get to the woman. Crushed though it was, the solid door wouldn't budge. Using their giant tool, they maneuvered it to gain leverage but the door was too mangled. Police were now on the scene and attending to the man in the Yukon. He was unhurt and two police officers were talking to him. Another officer was directing traffic amidst the flares that had been set up on the roadway. She was doing her best to get traffic to move along.

The frame of the Volvo was so impacted that none of the doors would open. The car had actually taken on a U-shape from the collision. The firefighters were continuing to attempt to get in the car when a voice suddenly boomed, "Step aside!"

Parker was surprised at how the firefighters so willingly cooperated with Steve. They stopped what they were doing and moved over. There Steve stood holding a very heavy crowbar. He was holding it with one arm, the bar perpendicular to the ground like a staff. With the strength of a man forty years younger, Steve flipped

the crowbar up to his other hand, wielded the flat end into a corner of the door, and drove the bar deep into the mutilated machine. Then he let out a loud quick exhale as he popped the imbedded crowbar with both hands and his body. With that, the door flew off the car, allowing the professionals to take over.

Parker could not believe what he had just seen. He was still holding his cell phone when one of the paramedics pulled his head out of the wreckage and said, "You! Come here!"

Parker looked behind himself to see if the paramedic had been yelling to someone else. No such luck. He was talking to Parker. They had removed the unconscious mom from the car, strapped her onto a gurney and put her in the ambulance. The firefighter and the paramedics were getting the children out of the car. A little boy appeared to be hurt, though maybe it was only cuts and bruises from the impact. The paramedics were taking special precautions with the baby who would be thoroughly examined. Luckily, the baby had been in a car seat. The child in the far rear appeared to be completely fine. When the paramedic pulled the unhurt girl out, Parker saw that she looked to be about eight years old. She was screaming for her mother. The paramedic who had called for Parker looked at him and said, "Take this girl. Talk to her while we get her family taken care of. I'll be back for her. Tell her it's going to be okay." The paramedic gave the little girl to Parker. How was the paramedic to know this was Parker the Performer, who spends most of his time thinking about himself?

Struggling to push away thoughts of panic, Parker looked around for Steve. There he was, back at the gas station. In fact, he had just gotten out of Parker's car, having moved it from the gas pump. Steve was walking over to his flower bed and did not look at Parker, who stood holding the little girl's hand. Parker needed Steve right now to help him with the little girl. But Steve knelt down in his flower bed with his body turned away from the wreckage. Parker thought about yelling to Steve but it was two hundred yards away and the commotion would drown his words out.

The little girl stood by Parker's side, holding his hand. Her

body was erect as if at attention and she was sobbing. Tears rolled down her bright red face as she stood shivering and holding this strange man's hand. She was looking at her mother, who was being attended to by paramedics. Her brother and baby sister were loaded in the other ambulance that had arrived once it was determined that so many people were involved in the accident.

Parker had no idea what to do at this point. This is the last situation that he wanted to be in and one that he had never been in before. He knelt down on one knee and put himself at eye level with the little girl. Her squinting eyes now moved from her mother and were looking directly at Parker.

"Everything will be okay. Your brother and sister didn't look like they were very hurt and they're taking care of your mommy right now." Parker was giving it his best shot.

"I don't want my mommy to die! I don't want her to die! Please don't let her die!" The little girl was frightened to death as she screamed her words through her crying.

"Listen to me. That's not going to happen," as he used his best confident voice. "I promise you that she is going to be okay." With that Parker prayed in his head like he never had before. He asked that the mother make it through her injury.

The little girl leaped into Parker's arms and put a bear hug around him that nearly knocked him over. Parker could feel her trembling and now Parker's eyes welled up with tears.

"I'm scared. I don't want to lose my mommy. I love her," she said.

"It'll be okay. Trust me." How many times in his life had he said that? "Your mommy just got hit pretty hard but she'll be okay. The doctors will take care of her." Now Parker was hugging back as hard as the girl.

"Please, God, don't let my mommy die!" The little girl was praying.

Parker started silently praying with her. He said he was sorry

for every time he was selfish and didn't think about others. He asked for forgiveness for not being grateful for the things that he had. He said he regretted how he had treated people who were only trying to help him. He wished he could take back a lot of his self-serving actions. He prayed for the mother to pull through this mess. Now tears were rolling down Parker's face, too.

At that point, the paramedic who had given Parker the little girl came back for her. "Come on, sweetheart. We have a special place for you to ride and then you can be with your brother and sister."

The little girl released her vice grip on Parker. Just before she left, she reached up with her tiny hands and wiped the tears from Parker's face. "Goodbye," she said, now appearing to be a little stronger.

"Thanks, man. You did good." The paramedic patted Parker on the side of the shoulder.

"No problem." Parker, who was still on one knee, was dazed. What just happened? He watched as the little girl got in the ambulance with the other kids who had both been treated for minor cuts. A thorough examination would take place at the hospital. He stood up and ran over to the paramedic and found out what hospital the family was being taken to. He planned to call later that night to find out about the mom.

The cleanup crew was busy moving the metal. Traffic cops were still attempting to get a smooth flow going and the two ambulances left for the hospital. The driver of the Yukon was being handcuffed and put in the backseat of a police car. Apparently, he failed a field sobriety test. Parker flashed onto some of the many times he had driven while under the influence.

Parker the Performer used his shirttail to wipe his eyes and face as he made his way out of the street and onto the lot of the gas station. His shirt was soaked through from sweat, his tan pants were dirty, and his shoes were filthy from the whole event. He walked over to Steve who was just finishing planting his petunias.

Steve looked up over his glasses and stood up. It took him a while. He was smiling at Parker. "You alright?" Steve said.

Parker nodded and asked, "How did you take that crowbar and...?"

Steve interrupted Parker midsentence. "Here are your keys," he said, as he reached in his pocket and handed them to Parker. "I just moved your car. I didn't take her for a spin." Steve tried to lighten Parker up.

"Thanks." Parker was talking slow and his mind was still on what had transpired. "I'm gonna go home and take a shower. I'll talk to you later, Steve." He turned and made his way to his Corvette.

He was about ten feet away when he heard Steve say, "Hey, Parker!"

Parker stopped and turned around. He was still very much dazed.

"You took fine care of that little girl for a minute and gave her hope. That was good work. I'm proud of you." Steve's demeanor turned to serious.

"How did you know that from here? You know what? Never mind that question." Parker had enough for one day. "I'll talk to you later, Steve. Thanks."



Later that night Parker phoned the hospital and learned that the mother was going to make it. She had suffered a severe concussion, a broken collarbone, and required some stitches to her head but would make a full recovery. Additionally, the kids all were fine. They had the standard cuts and bruises that an impact of that nature delivers. They were all very lucky.

Parker was overjoyed with the news. He hung up the phone and let out a "YAAAAAAHHH" at the top of his lungs, as if someone had just cheated death. He lay in bed later that night and was

very thankful for the day's outcome. In fact, he felt better than he'd felt in quite some time. He couldn't pinpoint his newfound feelings except that he was overjoyed by the news that the little girl still had her mother. He spent the weekend reviewing the events of Friday afternoon. The sound of the crash, Steve telling him to call 911, the crowbar incident, the paramedic, the little girl, the drunk, and the mother's positive outcome. Especially fresh in his mind was his interaction with the little girl.

"Thank God, she still has her mother!" Parker said to himself.



Monday morning rolled around and Parker was back at the selling game. Today, however, Parker the Performer was different. For the first time in as long as he could remember, nothing was bothering him. Usually the weight of the tasks that were in front of him completely consumed him: target list of potential clients, presentations to prepare, follow-up sales calls, and all the detail required to successfully close deals and maintain a large customer base. Victories, headaches, and disappointments, it was all part of the selling game. But those things were not eating him like they had in the past. Granted, he was focused on them, but they were not weighing as heavily as they had just last week.

He was pouring coffee in the break room and still somewhat puzzled by his newfound attitude when the new kid who had approached him weeks ago for advice walked in. The kid did not acknowledge Parker and this time Parker understood why.

"Hey kid, about before. I was pretty busy at the time. But if you want, I can spend some time with you later today on your deals. I have about an hour at around four o'clock. You interested?"

The kid thought aliens had taken over Parker and he let it show. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yeah, I'm talking to you."

"Man, Parker, that would be great. I'll come to your office at four o'clock." Parker could see the kid's whole demeanor change; the kid was happy.

Parker went back to his office and before he attacked his morning he wrote the following e-mail to his sales manager:

“First of all, I know that your job is difficult and you’re constantly being pulled in many directions. I also know that I’m not the only sales rep on your team, although sometimes I act like it. I want to apologize for the hard time I gave you about the move last week. I know you’ll take care of me. Also, I could have approached the admin. layoff discussion with more empathy for others. Once again, you showed that you’re doing your best to take care of me. I’m going to continue to put up great numbers and I just want you to know that I’m also going to work harder on the things that seem to cause internal conflict. I recognize my part in all of this. Thanks for everything you’re doing.”

He reviewed what he had written and before he hit the send button added one final sentence: “By the way, record month coming our way! YES!”

Then he hit the send button.

While Parker was a high energy person, like most Performers, today was different. He genuinely felt good about himself. His intentions had always been to sell more than anyone at any cost. Empathy for others had never been high on his list. His success came from focusing his energy on using his natural ability to sell. It’s what all Performers did. But something was changing in Parker the Performer. Yes, he wanted to be the best, and during some months he was. His number three ranking in the company had him well into the six-figure income annually. On paper, he was a tremendous sales success.

Parker knew that as a Performer he was emotion driven and at times struggled with the highs and the lows of the sales environment. Being a victim of his own emotions could cause some time management difficulty. Functioning in one of his “lows” was usually caused by a negative experience during the workday. Perhaps he lost a customer. Perhaps he didn’t get the customer he was expecting to close. Those were minor in comparison to his reac-

tion when things internally didn't work out like he had expected. In any event, a negative experience could damage his short-term productivity. Too often he ran the risk of sinking into that "low." When this would occur, productivity would plummet and his day would come to a halt.

Parker had always been aware of his emotional ups and downs. Like the best of Performers, he had learned to guard against staying down too long and was experienced at dealing with the difficulties in returning to the selling state of mind. He was where he was because he had learned to battle through this emotional roller coaster. But the battle was making him tired.

Does the job have to be such a grind? Am I the cause of almost all of my issues? These were the questions he pondered as he thought about his recent interactions with the shipping department and his boss. For the first time, he thought about how they must feel when Parker the Performer's ego is going crazy. He was constantly boxing everyone into a corner with his words. This was perhaps what made the job such a "grind."

Now, for the first time, Parker was rethinking his intentions. He had a new concern about how he was treating people and his personal struggle with the emotional "roller coaster." While maintaining balance in his life had always been a challenge, Parker recognized that he was going through too many highs and lows for no reason. Parker was realizing that he could get awfully worked up over little issues. Compared to what he had just gone through with a little girl who had nearly lost her mother, his issues were nothing. On top of that, it never occurred to him to think of the other people around him and what they might be going through. His only focus had been on getting the sale, taking care of his customer, and getting more sales. He was true to his intentions.

He went through his day in much the same manner as he had in the past. He was completely focused on sales growth. However, he made one slight change. Parker the Performer was going to consider the feelings of those with whom he worked. When issues

arose that in his opinion impeded his sales goal, he would take a lighter approach. He would replace his aggressiveness with assertiveness. He would keep the same focus on problem solving but with a touch less of the reactive, maniacal Parker. He would make a concerted effort to really weigh the impact of all the issues, and communicate in a less attacking manner. He would focus on having empathy for other people and to the best of his ability not let his ego and strong will get in the way. He wanted to continue to feel better about himself, as he did when he helped the little girl. He would help others whenever he could—and with no agenda other than to help. He expected nothing in return. He just wanted to continue to feel good. He would make sure that he remained focused on his mission of selling.

At four o'clock, the kid came into his office. He had a list of five questions for Parker that he wanted counsel on. The kid took a cautious demeanor as he laid his issues out. Parker could tell that the kid had the potential to be a solid producer.

Parker was entirely focused on the kid's feelings and needs. Amazing in itself, since this may have been a first for Parker. He was not just paying attention to this kid, but he was consciously focusing on someone else, someone who wasn't a potential sale, and someone who couldn't help his financial bottom line. It was all new to Parker and he did his best not to let his mind work its way back to his own to-do list. It dawned on Parker that he had spent his entire sales career using his intuitive skills to close sales and had rarely put these skills to use outside of this effort. Having spent most of his time concerned about himself, his sales, and his victories, he now felt good helping someone. It got him out of himself for a minute. These feelings were new to him. He was feeling happiness without chasing happiness.

Parker took one question after another and the kid made notes throughout the discussion. As they were talking, the sales manager walked by Parker's office. Within seconds, she reappeared outside the window with a puzzled look on her face. Parker flashed a smile; she returned the same and moved on.

"I'm half crazy!" Parker thought to himself. Then Parker spoke and gave the kid his full attention. "This is what I'm seeing and hearing. I believe you have tremendous potential in this business. It really all boils down to what your true intentions are. I thought I was clear on mine, and for the most part I am. I'm going to make a few tweaks to my intentions. Kind of a new and improved me, if you will."

The kid was all ears. He wanted what Parker had. He wanted to be a top producer. Parker continued. "This is what I would do if I were you because this is what I do. I would manage by dollar opportunity. I try to be a perfect manager of OPPORTUNITY. It looks like you've learned to qualify a prospect rapidly, which will save a tremendous amount of time. It didn't take me long to learn that either. Some people it takes forever. Some never get it."

Parker was getting animated now. "Once I've determined that I have a real opportunity to work with, I focus my time on the gatekeepers and decision makers that will turn my efforts into actual sales. Too many people have fear around this. Have no fear. Rejection is your friend. If you're not getting rejected, you're not making sales." Parker was in full Performer mode now.

"I use a very simple system. Some people subscribe to a complex time management system. I'm sure it works for them. But I'm not a real detailed analytical person. This is what I do. Which opportunity is hot? Which opportunity is warm? Which opportunity is cold? I simply focus on hot until the deal is closed or until it is determined that it should be in one of the other categories. Then I try to move warm to hot or cold as fast as possible." Parker went on, "This one is big, kid, so listen up. Do everything that you can every day to advance your deals into sales. If you're not advancing your opportunities to a potential 'yes' or even a 'no,' then you're not selling."

"Also, I sparingly work the cold pile. The reason for this is, if I have a cold file, it is truly cold. That's how good I am." A Performer's big ego is never going to go away. Parker was rolling now. "Three simple buckets categorized as hot, warm, and cold."

Nothing keeps me from working the hot and warm piles or it's a bad day. Are you with me?"

The kid looked up from his yellow pad that he was feverishly writing on and nodded his head. Parker could tell he was really taking the information in. Parker the Performer emphasized the importance of not getting bogged down by non-sales activities. "For me, if this starts occurring, everyone will hear about it. But that's me. You have to find your own style that works for you."

After an hour they wrapped up their discussion. The kid was beaming. "Thanks for your help today, Parker." He was genuine with his appreciation.

"Remember what I said. Manage by opportunity. Three piles. Focus on hot and warm piles. Advance them every day. You do that and you'll keep your focus, make great money, and win some awards. Got it?"

"I got it. Thanks again." The kid left to attack his sales opportunities.

Parker sat back in his chair and thought about what had just occurred. Just last week he didn't have time for anybody or anything that didn't help his personal cause. Had this last hour away from his personal business hurt or helped him? How important was that hour to him personally?

He looked at his screen saver that had his intentions scrolling across. It read:

"My intentions are to be the top producer on my team and in the top five in our company, qualify for every bonus and incentive program, and increase my income by thirty percent over last year. Nothing will keep me from my intentions."

He pondered the power of clear intentions. He had lived and breathed this intention and considering his status year-to-date, he was very confident that he would realize his intention. "Amazing stuff," he said to himself.

He thought again about the little girl and the accident last week. He thought about Steve's actions and behavior: his fast

movement at the time of the accident, the crowbar, and the way he returned to his flower planting while Parker dealt with the little girl. He wondered what Steve's intentions were. He laughed to himself that he was even thinking about these things.

Parker then reviewed his e-mail, as was his standard practice at the end of each day. It didn't matter if he was in the office or on the road, it was the last thing he did each evening before trying to shut things off for the night.

His admin. assistant had gone home for the evening and Parker discovered that he had an issue with the billing department that had upset one of his customers. Normally, he would delegate this to his assistant, but this was one of his best customers and he wanted some resolution immediately, if possible. He had thought this problem was solved after last month's billing, but apparently not.

He made his way over to the accounting department and was disappointed to see that the place was almost empty except for the accounting manager and one of her staff members. This is where Parker usually did his Performer thing and would bring out the "Do you know who I am?" attitude that originated from his massive ego.

As he walked into the department, he felt that surge of impatience that so often overcame him. This time, however, about as fast as he was picking up his walking pace he began to slow down. He thought about what he was about to do. Did he really have to resolve this issue right now? Would eight-thirty tomorrow morning work out just as well? Couldn't he direct his admin. assistant and then follow up with the billing supervisor later? Most importantly, wasn't he about to take a "go to war" attitude to resolve the problem? While he was confident he would have resolved the issue, how would he feel afterward if he took his usual Parker the Performer approach? How would the supervisor feel?

"Why am I thinking about how anybody feels?" After some consideration and with some apprehension, he realized it wasn't

necessary to revert back to old behavior over this minor issue. He didn't want that "grind" feeling to come back anyway. He decided to wait until tomorrow and kept walking by the office that the two accounting people were in. As he passed, he overheard one of them talking about his desire to purchase a new car, and that he was going to go to the dealership at lunchtime the next day to look. Parker's first thought was, "Figures, they aren't even working." Then he thought about how ridiculous his first thought was. It was after-hours anyway. "Relax," he said to himself.

He turned around and walked back into the accounting manager's office. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but I couldn't help overhearing your discussion about buying a new car."

The accounting manager knew Parker and the staff member knew of Parker. They braced themselves for a Parker-like comment or tirade. Instead, he said the following, "I happen to be friends with that dealer. If you'd like, I'll call him for you and make sure you get taken care of." The accounting manager made a rapid recovery from her shock at Parker's act of kindness and introduced the staff member to Parker.

"If you want I can call him right now for you. It will only take a minute and believe me, he loves calls like this." Parker was helping again.

The staff member was very appreciative and went on to explain that this would be his first new car and he wasn't sure if he could afford it. He had always driven used cars and his current one was on its last leg.

"Don't tell the dealer that," Parker said in a half-kidding way. He'd never taken the time to count the number of new cars he had owned in his life. The staff member excitedly told Parker the model he was interested in. Parker pulled out his cell phone, called the dealer, gave him the staff member's name, and set up a lunchtime appointment for him for the next day.

"Parker, thank you very much. This is exciting!" The staffer was overjoyed.

"Listen, if you want me to look at the deal for you real quick, I will. Get all the numbers. You should be good at that." Accounting

joke from the peddler. "I'll do my best to help you get a good deal."

The accounting manager briefly wondered what had happened to the real Parker. The staffer was nearing giddiness and Parker felt uncommonly good again. The accounting manager looked at Parker. "Was there a business issue you needed help with?"

"You know, it can wait until tomorrow. Thank you though." Then he thought to himself, "What am I saying?"

"I'll be looking for something in the morning and I'll make sure it's handled on our end." The accounting manager was appreciative of Parker's act of kindness. The staff member thanked Parker again before Parker went back to his office to shut down for the night.

As Parker walked back to his office, he thought about how the whole interchange only took five minutes. He had just helped someone in only a few minutes. Again, he felt pretty good.

His screen saver on his computer was still scrolling with his intentions:

"My intentions are to be the top producer on my team and in the top five in our company, qualify for every bonus and incentive program, and increase my income by thirty percent over last year. Nothing will keep me from my intentions."

He sat down and went into his computer to alter his screen saver. Meeting these goals would earn him well into six figures. Why change the intentions? He knew, and he rewrote his intentions to include:

I intend to help people along the way.

A few more adjustments and his new screen saver read as follows:

I intend to be the top producer on my team.

I intend to be in the top five in our company.

I intend to qualify for every bonus and incentive program.

I intend to increase my income by thirty percent over last year.

I intend to help people along the way.

Nothing will keep me from my intentions.

He logged off for the evening. He would make the same changes on his laptop when he got home later that night.



For the next several weeks, Parker the Performer consciously operated with his newly added intention in mind. His sales continued to climb but this time his career didn't feel like such a grind. Big egos and emotional balance are the challenges of all Performers. Parker found that if he took the time to help people along the way to achieving his goals he had better control of his ego. If he had better control of his ego, he wasn't experiencing the emotional "roller coaster" that he'd been victim to so many times in the past. When he got out of himself, he felt better about himself. When he felt better about himself, his emotions were intact. When his emotions were intact, he stayed in the selling zone longer. With these changes, life wasn't such a struggle for Parker the Performer.



Another week ended and Parker was heading home. The Friday traffic didn't seem to bother him as it once had. It was time for a fill-up and Parker sat idling in his Corvette at the light across from the gas station. He had not seen Steve the last few times that he had gotten gas. In fact, he hadn't seen or spoken to Steve since the accident.

He looked across the street and was happy to see Steve at the station. This time he was sweeping up cigarette butts, little wrappers, and the other small debris that gathers on the busy property of a station of Steve's size. Steve had manufactured his own version of a dustpan with a handle on it. He had cut a one-gallon aluminum gas can so that it was opened at an angle at one end. Then he nailed it to an old broom handle so that he could hold the dust-

pan by the handle in one hand. In his other hand he had a broom. Without bending down, Steve could move across the lot, sweeping small pieces of garbage into the can. Parker was certain that some manufacturer made long-handled dustpans for just that purpose, which you could purchase at most hardware stores.

"That's Steve," he said to no one.

The light turned green and Parker made his way across the street and onto the lot. As usual, the place was jamming. There was a pump open and Parker pulled in. He wasn't sure if he was going to tell Steve about the changes he made or his newfound happiness.

Once he had the fuel flowing into his car, Parker started walking over to see Steve. As he got closer, he bent down and picked up a wadded empty cigarette pack. Steve noticed the small act of kindness. When he got to Steve, he made a jab step left, acted as if he was dribbling the balled up trash, bent down and slam-dunked it in Steve's dustpan. Then he popped up, extended his right arm to Steve and they shook hands. Parker thought to himself that someone should talk to Steve about his tight grip.

"You must have had a pretty good day," Steve said with a smile.

"Actually Steve, I've been having good days." Parker emphasized "days."

Steve waved to a customer and looked back at Parker. "Sales must be pretty good."

"Sales are always good, Steve. You know, I haven't seen you since that Friday we had the wreck. That was pretty hairy."

Steve noticed that Parker said "we" when he spoke of the wreck. "Damn drunk drivers!" Steve said with a firm tone. "I understand that the family's all going to be fine. One of my customers is a nurse at the hospital the paramedics took them to." He went on to tell Parker what he already knew about the mother's concussion and broken collarbone. "The kids just had some cuts and bruises. All of them were minor."

Parker jumped in with, "Yeah, I'm glad to hear that. I called the hospital that night and got the same story."

Steve was impressed that Parker would do that. He had a hunch why Parker had been having good days.

"You know Steve, I wasn't sure if I was going to tell you this, but that accident changed something in me." Parker's tone was quiet and humble.

"Is that so?" Steve asked.

"After that night, and the way I had to get involved, I took a look at my life and how lucky I really am. You know, I'm one of the best at what I do." Once a Performer always a Performer, but Parker was stating a fact.

Steve was fully focused on Parker now. He wasn't scanning his station as he usually did when they had a conversation.

Parker continued, "There's always been something missing. It felt like something was wrong. I felt that if I were going to be successful at the level I desired, I had to be extremely aggressive with people. Really, I never took the time to consider anyone but myself." Now Parker was getting choked up. "I didn't plan this." He was looking down at the ground now and Steve saw a tear fall from Parker's eyes.

"Hey, don't mess my lot up!" Steve said as Parker gave one of those choked up laughs.

Parker went on, "It really feels good to help people with the little things in life. I don't get so full of myself, and I'm still knocking the crap out of my goals. It fills a hole, Steve. I've finally realized I don't have to bully my way around to get things done in my business. I hate bullies, Steve, and I really don't like how behaving like one made me feel. Giving a little helps keep me balanced."

"Yeah, I know what you mean, Parker. If you want to go crazy, try to have everything go your way. It's just not possible." Parker listened to the old man like he never had before. "I learned a long time ago not to sweat the little things. And by the way, everything's a little thing. Things like that wreck a few weeks ago remind us of that."

Parker reflected on how he had spent his whole life doing the talking. There was much to gain from listening. The only time he really listened was when a customer was talking. But, ultimately, that was self-serving hearing.

“Anyway son, you did a nice job helping that little girl. You really helped her get through a rough moment. It looks like she helped you too.” Steve was smiling at Parker.

Parker had pulled himself together now. “So have you, Steve.”

Just then Steve noticed a woman at the air machine attempting to put air in one of her tires. Parker saw it too and said, “Go for it, Steve.”

Parker the Performer turned to go back to his car, and Steve made his way across the lot with his broom and homemade dust-pan to help the woman. Parker was once again amazed at Steve’s agility.

Steve was almost to the lady’s car when he yelled back to Parker. “Remember Parker, if you want to keep it, keep giving it away!”

That was Parker’s intention.

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