

Be Good To Your Tomorrow Man (Or Woman!)

I'm reading a novel titled "Devils In Exile," written by Chuck Hogan, who is also the author of "The Prince of Thieves" which has recently been turned into a big-budget movie called "The Town" (starring and directed by Ben Affleck). I was first drawn to Hogan's writing because he set both of these novels in the Boston area, which is where I grew up. I have grown to appreciate the quality of his writing, though, both his storytelling ability and an interesting piece of philosophy that I found near the beginning of "Devils In Exile," when a character called Royce explains his theory of *The Tomorrow Man* to a character called Maven.

"It's pretty basic," Royce says. "Today, right here, you are who you are. Tomorrow you will be who you *will* be. Each and every night, we lie down to die, and each morning we arise, reborn. Now, those who are in good spirits, with strong mental health, they look out for their Tomorrow Man. They eat right today, they drink right today, they go to sleep early today—all so that Tomorrow Man, when he awakes in his bed reborn as Today Man, thanks Yesterday Man."

The Other Side Of The Coin

Others, Royce continues, "constantly leave messes for Tomorrow Man to clean up. They don't respect Tomorrow Man because they don't think through the fact that Tomorrow Man will be them. So they wake up, new Today Man, groaning at the disrespect Yesterday Man showed them. Wondering why does that guy keep punishing me. But they never learn and instead come to settle for that behavior."

A better strategy, Royce tells Maven, is to "do for Tomorrow Man what you would have wanted Yesterday Man to do for you." I think that's a pretty good strategy for printing salespeople, and especially for printing company owners. Sadly, too many are constantly leaving messes for their Tomorrow Man—or Tomorrow Woman!—to clean up, and that hurts the business in lots of different ways.

Lost Productivity

The most obvious way is probably through lost productivity. From what I see and hear, lots of salespeople and business owners start their days "fixing" things that went wrong yesterday, or at some other point in the past.

That leads to an important question. If this describes you, why are you only learning about the problem today, as opposed to yesterday? In some cases, the answer is that the problem just didn't become visible until today. In other cases, though, the problem was visible but Yesterday Man/Woman decided to leave it for Tomorrow Man/Woman, and the result was that the new day started at the bottom of a gravity well instead of on top of it.

OK, I know I'm mixing my metaphors here, but I hope it helps you to get the idea. Your productivity is bound to be down when you have to start the day climbing out of a hole that you left yourself in yesterday. Doesn't it make sense to solve today's problems today so you won't punish your Tomorrow Man/Woman/Person?

Prioritization

Having said that, it's important to understand that there will be times when leaving something for tomorrow is your best business *and* time management strategy. It's all a matter of prioritization; in other words, you have to deal with urgent and important issues according to their urgency and importance.

Let's say that you two issues on your plate at the end of the day, one is urgent and important and the other is important but not urgent. You only have enough time to deal with one of those issues, so you deal with the urgent one and let the other one go until tomorrow. Your Tomorrow Person still starts out with Yesterday Issues to attend to, but overall, that's the best that can be done.

Now, here's the whole point of all of this. How can you get yourself and keep yourself ahead of late-day problems and priority decisions? How can you put yourself in position to deal with all of today's important issues today, so you don't have to leave them for your Tomorrow Person? The answer is really pretty simple—*stay ahead of the airplane!*

Situational Awareness

OK, I know I'm mixing metaphors again, but if there's anything I remember from my flying days it's the concept of *situational awareness*. Don't fixate on any one thing for a long period of time. Keep up your scan—which in an airplane means checking on all of your instruments at an appropriate interval. In a printshop, it means checking on

all of your human resources (read that: employees) at appropriate intervals. And here's the key, don't ask them if they have any problems, ask them if they *see any problems developing!*

I hope you see the difference. Learning about a full-blown problem puts you right into *reactive* mode. Learning about a problem in its early stages of development puts you in a much more *proactive* situation. Nipping a problem in the bud is usually easier—and less painful!—than letting it grow to that full-blown state. And staying ahead of the printshop give you more time to deal with all of your important issues, minimizing the chances that you'll have to leave any messes for your Tomorrow Person to clean up.

Again, it comes down to prioritization, but please consider this. If you go through a day *without* good situational awareness, you might find yourself at the end of the day with more issues than you have time today to deal with. If you stay ahead of your day, you can make better time management decisions along the way; for example, not spending that hour doing something that turns out to be a lot less important than the thing you only find out about at the end of the day! I often ask myself: "If I had this to do over again, would I have done it any differently?" In terms of your time management decisions, you want the answer to be *no!*

Final Thought

Here's my final thought for today. You can probably categorize many of the things you spend your day on as *fun* or *not fun*. The more *fun* you have while doing your job, the more likely it is that you'll have those *good spirits* that Royce talked to Maven about. In my experience, doing today's work and working toward tomorrow is a lot more fun than doing yesterday's work and not benefitting either your Tomorrow Person or your Tomorrow Company. That's the classic dilemma—too much time spent working *in* the business as opposed to *on* the business.

Anyway, I found Hogan/Royce's Tomorrow Man theory to be an interesting way of looking at time management and prioritization, and I hope you will too.