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1.A. Situation: An employee's performance review is overdue by 4 months. The employee anticipates a pay raise which is needed due to their spouse's working hours reduced due to forced furloughs. Also wants to know if they are doing Ok or not. If not, what to improve. A pending lawsuit has resurfaced with newspaper visibility pulling leader into many meetings with different constituents; the organization's board chair recently resigned; lack of funds may close organization within 6 months. The employee asked for the review 2 months ago and now does not how to approach manager. Employee does not want to show up as greedy, self-serving or add stress to manager. The employee loves their job and how they are managed. If you only had access to the employee, how would you coach them? (My response is below, 1.B...)

Short read, Long benefits: The Four Agreements, practical guide to personal freedom, Don Miguel Ruiz

2. What are friends good for? A longer life. A post by Tara Parker-Pope, New York Times, 4/28/2009. Last year, researchers studied 34 students at the University of Virginia, taking them to the base of a steep hill and fitting them with a weighted backpack. They were then asked to estimate the steepness of the hill. Some participants stood next to friends during the exercise, while others were alone. The students who stood with friends gave lower estimates of the steepness of the hill. The longer the friends had known each other, the less steep the hill appeared. "People with stronger friendship networks feel like there is someone they can turn to," said Karen Roberto, director of the center for gerontology (study of the social, psychological and biological aspects of aging) at Virginia Tech. Who's in your rolodex?

Standing in the middle of the road is very dangerous; you get knocked down by the traffic from both sides. Margaret Thatcher

1.B. Coach's Corner: Separate what you think might/could happen (add to manager's stress) from what you want to have happen (your review, feedback). Have a f2f (not email) conversation in which you (employee) acknowledge current situation and what has held you back speaking about review (lawsuit, concerns for not wanting to add stress). Fill out employee portion of the performance review and bring it to this conversation as a way to forward the process of the review. I asked the employee what they imagined the manager might be thinking about this undone review. Guilt; being a bad manager. I reminded them to have an appreciation for what manager may feel, don't let it 'get on you'; speak your commitment and request a time within 5 days to meet, offering to come in early, stay late.

Transaction vs. Transformation. Getting the review to happen could be either a transaction or a transformation. Neither outcome is better. A conversation that was only about the review happening could have been a transaction. Just get it done and don't talk about anything else. From a different context, this situation presented the employee with an opportunity to build a more accountable relationship between the two, one that opened up communication, rather than suppress it. By speaking about the current situation and their shared commitment and agreement to complete reviews, what will begin to be repaired is the trust that has been broken by the leader not fulfilling their accountability.

When committed to being personally accountable, to appreciating but not get seduced by the circumstances, conversations that could be hijacked by excuses become, instead, committed and empowering to both parties. Speaking and listening committedly is a practice that builds trust and allows for results beyond business as usual.

3. Wake up! Maybe you just straightened up a bit, perhaps blinked your eyes, even said to yourself, "I'm awake. What are you talking about?" I'm talking about the moment-by-moment challenge you and I face to be present, not asleep, not on automatic and going through the motions. We all do it, we won't stop doing it. We are human. The opportunity is to not dwell in being asleep -- to wake up from being a zombie in a meeting, or on the road or in a conversation and engage.

Every zombie-out of work? As you pick up your briefcase to exit the office, you wonder, how'd it get to be the end of the day? What did I really get done? Did I say I would do something in that staff meeting?

We zombie while we drive, and even when we un-zombie for a moment, we often revert to zoning out as quickly as we woke up. If you've every traveled Highway 17 between the coast (where I live in Aptos) and San Jose, you've probably seen your fill of accidents. Last Friday night, a rainy night, cars on both sides of road began to slow before the summit. Lights flashed. We passed 2 cop cars, 1 fire truck, 1 ambulance and 1 Miata flipped over, on its side. On the stretcher was a blue-jeaned, black-sneakered, lanky man. We saw it all. I drove a bit slower as we passed the scene, releasing the grip on the wheel, getting blood to my white knuckles. Others sped up, boom. No Pause. I cursed them, "Didn't you just see the wreck? Didn't you see what just happened?"

Flatulence (n.) emergency vehicle that picks you up after you are run over by a steamroller. (From Washington Post's yearly neologism contest in which readers give alternate meanings for common words.)

My point – and it's not what you think: My righteous shouting at those crazy drivers going too fast after they just passed a wreck, was me reacting automatically. My mom would say I, the blackened pot, was calling the kettle black. **The lesson: If we are chastising others for not being awake, we are still on automatic.** Making them wrong for not being present doesn't support them in being present. It pushes them into reacting. Yes, it's right back in our own laps to lead ourselves first and always.

During these holidays, when our minds can wander and take us away from right now to the land of worry and concern, my wish is for each of us to return to the present, to the people around us right now, to the opportunities to connect and acknowledge each other, and to center ourselves in our good fortunes and possibility. They are all around us when we are present.

Thank you for a wonderful year.

'Til next time ... Boldly lead yourself where you have not gone before!
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