

BOOK TWO - Bill's Story

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE: Peoplework



The next day he followed the instructions on the index card to Bill's work. To his surprise, it was not a church but a sheltered workshop. The large plant was a beehive of activity for developmentally disabled people, combining a community center with a place of employment. The receptionist paged Bill, who quickly arrived at the reception area with a smiling welcome.

"I thought I was going to a church."

"I used to pastor a church, but I finally had to admit that I couldn't stand the people. Half of them were for me, and half were against me. I felt like I was in the middle of a tug of war and the sides were continually shifting. I had no idea who I could trust, and my energy poured out like water trying to make all of them happy. Couldn't be done - I know that now. I didn't then, and it got very sick. Some of their demands were ludicrous, and I knew that, or thought I did. Other demands were subtle and seductive. Nothing I did was ever enough."

"I've been there."

The two men stepped into a conference room just off the foyer and sat at the table.

"I finally realized that I had sold myself into slavery to these people. My first

response was to complain about being forced to make bricks without straw, and get them to ease up on their demands.”

“I’ll bet they didn’t care for that.”

“They did not. They asserted their right to control me; after all, they paid my salary. That’s when I became more aware of the more subtle dynamic: they insisted that I put them first in my life, above my health, above my wife, above my family, and above me. I shifted my focus and began talking about health. They insisted I see a counselor.”

“Did you?”

“Yes, and it helped tremendously. But their desire of the counselor was that he would fix me so that I would be able to return to the slavery of meeting their demands. They were disappointed.”



“What happened?”

“At the counselor’s suggestion, I began to take a Sabbath day.”

“I have trouble taking a day off.”

“There is a big difference between a day off and a Sabbath day. A day off is free time granted you by an employer, who controls the work day and could call you in to work on your day off. A Sabbath day, however is a commandment of God.”

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy....”¹

¹ Exodus 20:8.

“The Sabbath day is a gift from God to the people. It is for their benefit, as Jesus said.² And a Sabbath day is a commandment.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Consider the other commandments. Would your denomination object if you lied from time to time?”

“Perhaps not.”

“Would they object to you coveting a church member’s property, or stealing or murdering someone?”

“Yes.”

“Would they object to you coveting someone else’s wife and committing adultery?”

“Of course.”

“Then they should object to you breaking the Sabbath day. If the commandments are numbered in priority, it’s more important.”

“I once read that when our activity exceeds our character, burnout and blowout are the result.”³

“You could say that. You could also say that unless character is replenished, excess activity consumes character. It’s like drawing on your savings instead of lowering your expenses; eventually there is none left.”

² Mark 2:28

³ Terry Walling



“So what did you do?”

“I took a Sabbath day. The original Sabbath was from sundown on the previous day to sundown on the next. Mine was simpler - midnight to midnight. I got a friend to cover for me and told my people to call him rather than call me during those twenty four hours. Their response made it very clear that I had no right to do that - that I belonged to them, and I had no right to control their right to control me.”

“So what happened?”

“It led to a showdown. Either I stop this nonsense or there would be ‘trouble’. And eventually it became clear: I could not work for them as their pastor unless I broke the Sabbath commandment. And that’s when I learned a deeper truth.” Bill took a deep breath. “I had lost touch with God, with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. My calling was to follow Jesus Christ and serve him. I had instead sold myself into economic slavery - and at near minimum wage when you consider the hours I worked - to put others on a daily basis in God’s place as ruler of my life. Their ultimatum on the Sabbath day made that choice very clear: choose God or choose your paycheck. I chose God.”

“That’s rather noble.”

“You would think so, but by then I understood that this other arrangement was killing me, starting with my soul and working its way through to my heart and body.” Bill smiled wistfully. “To me it was crystal clear; they found it very confusing. In fact, they would have negotiated changes with me, but they would not truly have been able to

keep their part of the bargain. The old ways are too hard for people to change, and halfway change would still be killing me. I had to get out of that toxic environment, and I did.”

“What did you do?”

“I took a leave of absence. I have 20 years of service, so I am eligible to retire, but I think I will start a church. I’m reading about it now, but even more importantly, I am praying about it.”

“When will you know?”

“We never really know when we will know,” he laughed. “When you pray and plan, you just put the facts together into a whole. Moses knew what he was to do when he was very young; God did not activate the plan until Moses was very old. Jesus had the knowledge and skills at age 12 but his ministry did not begin until he was 30. The important thing is to concentrate on what is important now: bringing God’s plan into focus in the context of my life. That’s the heart of *Journal Clarity* and prayerwork: we write until it becomes clear.”

“Getting back on course.”

“Right! One minute at a time. And we always start with prayer, because God is priority number one. And what tells us that?”

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.”⁴

“Exactly. And that is the first secret. The second is like it.”



⁴ Mark 12:30-31.

“Oh, I see it now. Jesus said: “And the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.”

“That’s the second secret: *people are important*. The first concept is this: *when I spend a minute with God, I learn what is important*. The second concept is this: *when I learn what is important, it usually involves people*. When we live the second concept, we take time for people. The three important concepts with the second secret are (1) not to get it out of order with the first, (2) not to forget it and (3) keep a balance between care for neighbor and care for self. If people are important to God, then they should be important to us.”

“I guess the biblical response is for me to say next, “Who is my neighbor?”⁵

“It’s a good question but it’s premature. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a parable about people in crisis. It’s trained us to look around for people in crisis, in trouble, people who are bleeding to death and who desperately need us. Have you seen anyone like that today?”

“Well, no.”

“If we don’t see someone like that, then we have two choices: either we are off the hook for the day, or we have to look harder. If you look hard enough, you can always find someone in crisis to rescue. Focusing on human crisis can lead to codependency, and that leads to burnout.”

“What do you mean by ‘off the hook’?”

“The other approach is one where, just because there is no crisis yet, you don’t

⁵ Luke 10:29.

have to pay attention to the people around you. It's safe to ignore their needs and feelings. What is the result of this approach?"

"If nothing is addressed until there is a crisis, then there will be more crises."

"Exactly. Problems that don't solve themselves will inevitably become a crisis and then demand our attention. Practicing the second secret is not about crisis management, it's about people management, or as we say, peoplework."



"Peoplework." The minister tried out the new word.

"In the midst of any crisis, there is a person. Problems are about people. Can you find an exception?"

The minister thought for a moment. "Paying taxes?"

"In my universe that involves accountants and tax collectors, and the person who signs the tax form. You, in other words."

"Pollution?"

"Polluters."

"Divorce?"

"Husbands and wives, children and parents, lawyers and judges."

"Bankruptcy?"

"Spenders, bankers, bill collectors, lawyers."

"Burnout?"

"You are the problem, together with the people you surround yourself with and

what you allow them to do. The key idea is to identify the people involved and work with them prior to the problem becoming a crisis. Any solution that ignores the needs of the people involved will fail.”

“Win-Win, then?”

“Absolutely. What goes around, comes around; when other people are harmed, eventually we all pay the price for that. Stephen Covey’s work is very helpful here.”

“From *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.”

“Yes, Habits 4 through 6. And that wonderful concept of the Emotional Bank Account. Everything we say or do, or don’t say and don’t do, is either a deposit or a withdrawal in the emotional life of everybody around us. Eventually there is a price to be paid for ignoring the commandment to love our neighbor as our self.”

6

Bill took out more of the ever present index cards. “Let’s make a list on cards; we call it a People Inventory. Tell me who the most important people in your life are.” The minister began naming names, and Bill wrote each name on a separate card, on the blank side, stopping when they had a couple dozen. “Now put the cards in order of their importance to you.”

When the minister was done struggling with this task, Bill took the cards in order and numbered them in the top right hand corner. “Now we see the priorities. Now take the cards and put them in order based on the amount of time you estimate you spend on each person each week.”

That part was easier. Bill numbered the cards in order, writing the number representing time spent in the lower right hand corner.

“Do you see the problem now?”

“Yes.”

“Now next to the number, write the amount of time you spend interacting with each person during a typical week, and in parentheses after that the time you would guess you spend thinking about them but not interacting with them.”

“Why would that be important?”

“Suppose your son gets in trouble at school. You fume off and on all day about it at work - say 4 hours worth - and spend five minutes yelling at him when you get home before he storms off to his room. From his point of view, how much time did he get?”

“Five minutes.”

“And the quality of that time?”

“Very poor.”

“But from your viewpoint, how much time did you spend on this?”

“Four hours and five minutes.”

“See the problem?”

He did. The minister began to write his time estimates on the index cards.



“This is even easier to see in our relationships with people outside the family. Take your church people. Is there anyone in the church that you are constantly obsessing about? A thorn in your side? A real pain?”

“Yes!”

“Let’s write those names on cards.” They did.

“Now, think about the time spent in interaction and the time spent in thinking about it.”

“I see the same principle; lots of time thinking and very little time interacting. And the quality of the time spent interacting is very poor.”

“That’s the pattern for unhappy relationships. Eventually we begin to avoid unpleasant people, but we can’t stop thinking about them, and we just feel worse and worse.”

“I can see that.”

“That’s a principle for us: *a crisis gets worse if we spend more time on the problem than we spend on the people involved.*”

“That’s a different approach to problem solving.”

“There is an old story of a harried father who kept being interrupted in his office by his little daughter. Remembering a page in magazine with a map of the world on it, he tore out the page, tore it into smaller pieces and gave it to his daughter with some tape and said, ‘Daddy’s very busy now, go put this map of the world together and then

we will talk.’ Not very many minutes later the little girl was back with the whole world put together again. ‘How did you do this so fast?’ the father asked. ‘Easy. On the back was a picture of people - I just put the people back together.’”

“That’s a good story.”

”If you put the people back together, problems often resolve quickly.”



“Here’s the hard part. In our quest for a meaningful, rewarding life,” Bill said, “we need to understand that God comes first and that people come second.”

“What’s hard about that?”

“The hard part is remembering that everything else comes third.”

“Somebody once told me that the letters in JOY stand for *Jesus, Others, Yourself*, and in that order.”

“That’s good, but the commandment Jesus said was to *love your neighbor as yourself*. Discussions about who is our neighbor aside, this commandment calls for a balance between the two. The world attempts to pull people out of balance, either to care for themselves more and others less, or to care for others more and themselves less.”

“Or not at all.”

“That’s my problem. I never took care of myself, and when I protested the need to take care of myself, people didn’t understand and support me. Do you hear what the problem is in that statement?”

“No.”

“Other than a few truly selfish people, most folks assume that I know how to take care of myself and trust me to do that. Instead of just taking care of myself, I did something else instead: protested. And when I complain about needing to take care of myself, it’s for one of three reasons: I am looking for someone to do it for me, or I am asking for permission to go and take care of myself, or I don’t know how to take care of myself. And so I spent my life looking for rescuers, or for validation from others, or for someone who knew the answers.”

“I’m not sure I know how to take care of myself.”

“Who knows the answer then?”

The minister looked confused. “I don’t know.”

“The first secret: we turn to God first, to Jesus first, for every need. With every question. Jesus is *smart*. God is *smart*. It only takes a minute to pray and get back on course. God is the first place to look for answers. If we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, body and strength, we will also be taking care of ourselves; God desires our wholeness.”

“I can just imagine myself telling someone that God has ordered me to take a nap because I am tired.” The minister laughed.

“You could say it like that,” Bill said seriously, “but that is the whole point. If you have God’s permission to take a nap, then who else would you need to check with? God is more likely to ask you why you need a nap on your day job time, and talk with you about what you were doing at night when you should have been sleeping. One of the reasons we need to get permission from others to not do our day job is that we are

not doing our night job well, and that's taking care of ourselves. So peoplework includes taking care of ourselves."

9

"Peoplework," the minister said, trying out the new word.

"That's the second secret, actually the second priority. Peoplework always balances the need to take care of yourself with the need to take care of other people. Stephen Covey teaches this as *P* for *Production* and *PC* for *Production Capacity*. If your life is focused on taking care of others - which is *P* - you will burn out and break down. If your life is focused on taking care of yourself, you will build a great capacity for production, but it will remain unused, and you will waste your potential and rust from underutilization. While most of us would rather burn out than rust out, machinery that is well taken care of does neither. That's the importance of balance. Peoplework is the embodiment of Win-Win."⁶

"So how do we keep the two balanced?"

"Prayerwork keeps us on course. It clarifies. And when we take the data to God in prayer, reality teaches us, and so does the Bible."

"How does reality teach us? What do you mean?"

"It's not hard to figure out that you need to sleep every day, and that each person needs about 8 hours. Studies show that we are usually under rested. Problems are a guide to get us back on course. They reveal the reality that we would often prefer to

deny."

"And the bible?"

"Back to the commandment: work six days - *P* - and one day entirely without work - *PC*. The Sabbath. You need that time to reflect on your life, with the help of God.

I notice you're carrying a journal."

"I've been trying it Angel's way."

"It's a great way to reflect. Is it working for you?"

"I've noticed since I've been writing in the journal every day, my mind is calmer and more focused. I seem to have a clearer picture of what is in the vital 20% and the trivial 80%."

"Don't let Frank catch you calling it trivial."

"Why not? Isn't that what it is?"

"Not to him, but he'll explain it."



"I notice you seem to do everything on index cards. Is that your system?"

"That's right. But I started with a journal, and still use one for reflection. But cards are better for me to achieve the goal of the second secret: *Network Elements*."

"What does that mean?"

"Everything in creation is a part of an interlocking, interactive system; everything and everyone is linked together in a network. We often lose sight of the system, however, and it seems that our life is a messy pile of disconnected problems and

unconnected people. We lose sight of the underlying *network* and we need to clarify the discrete individual *elements* in the network. Then the pattern of their interaction becomes clear, and also - usually - a solution becomes clear. Problems are self-reinforcing patterns in a network. Change to one small thing can change everything when we know all the network elements and how they function as a self-organizing system.”

“That’s true,” the minister said.

“When I write down what happens to me in my journal, the details of my day, I can see the patterns; we call that *Network Elements*, when we clearly see both all the individual elements and the big picture of how they connect together as a network. And when you change one element, the network changes because of those connections.”

“That’s also true,” the minister said.

“When you recover from the addictive behavior that leads to burnout, you first have to recognize patterns; journaling is good for that. Then you have to deal with it, item by item; that’s identifying the *network elements*. Cards are good for that: no more than one element per card. People on the blank side, anything else on the lined side.”

“What would you say are the advantages of using cards as your time management system?”

“What makes one system or another better for you depends on your situation. The best system of time management addresses both your current reality and your preferred future, or your vision. Come on in my office and you will see my whole system.” The minister followed Bill through a maze of hallways to a small but comfortable office.

11

An otherwise clean desk held a bible and a single row of cards across the top of the desk and two stacks of cards and a cardfile to the right side of the desk. The cardfile was made of walnut and it gleamed from long and industrious polishing.

"Angel is different from me, and her situation is different. She is a pastor of a church, and works without a professional staff. She is at the center of most of the activity of her parish, and her choice for time management is the journal. She uses the journal to keep focused on her vision and track her progress day by day toward her goals. Her path forward is relatively clear and consistent, as are her activities each week. Information she puts in her journal has a value that would last for weeks at a time. Because *prayerwork* is Angel's specialty, each of her tasks is shaped and focused on paper through prayerful journaling."

"OK."

"My situation is very fluid, and I maintain many relationships at one time. There are all our employees and also all our clients. Change is constant, and I have to keep track of a large number of details at one time. So many that I would be overwhelmed, literally snowed under by all the little things I have to do. Each of these tasks is short, and might last only a minute. But at a minute a task, that is 60 tasks an hour, and 480 tasks in an eight hour work day. Eighty percent of these tasks deserve the least amount of time I can spend on them and still get it all done."

"So your tasks are more complex?"

"The tasks are not complex, but dealing with the complexity is. Everything is simple when you break it down into elemental components; each card is a single task, a discrete *element*. Each card is basically a reminder to me to do something. Most of what I do is routine. The routine cards come out of the box once a week when I do my planning. When the routine task is done, the card goes back into the box. People around me are used to my routines, and a good routine is an important time saver."



Bill opened the cardfile and showed the minister the index dividers. "My calendar is in this box. You see the first set of dividers is numbered 1-31 for the days of the month and then the 12 months of the year. The ABC dividers are for people. Time and people. These two are the basics of any system."

"I'm getting confused," the minister said. "How do you keep track of all the cards?"

"By a system, a routine. Customs. If you follow your system, your system will take care of you. I only use 3x5 cards, lined on one side, blank on the other. People have the blank side, tasks are always written on the lined side. Consistency. People play with cards all the time." Bill made motions of shuffling and dealing a deck of cards.

The minister pointed at the neat row of cards across the top of the desk.

"Those are my vital 20% cards for today. They are spread out individually because there are fewer of them and this helps me keep them in line."

The minister picked up one and found his name and address printed on it.

"That's right. That's you. You are an important task for today. That's the same card you filled out a week ago Wednesday." Bill took the card, opened the cardfile and tucked it in the numerical section. "I put the card away when I start the task, and consider it done. If we were interrupted, I would take your card back out and put it on the desk so that I would come back to you. It irritates me to have to find it, so that encourages me to keep with a task until it is done, or I have to hunt for the card."

"Where did you put my card? I noticed you didn't put it in the alphabetical section."

"In the day of the next Porch, which is our next meeting."

"Do you keep every card?"

"I keep cards for people long term."

"What about tasks? There are a lot more of them."

"If I need a record of our interaction, I keep the card. Most of the time I just need to verify that the task is done; then I can throw the card away."

Bill pointed to the neat row of cards across the top of the desk. "Vital 20% cards are all important. They answer two questions. The first question: people or task? That's determined by the side of the card; blank for people, ruled for task. The second question is urgency: now or later. The sign for that is a "Q" and a number in the top left hand corner for either Quadrant 1 or Quadrant 2."

"That sounds familiar."

"It's a basic concept from Stephen Covey.⁷ You'll notice that the number is in the

top left hand corner and it is followed either by the name of the person or the task. That allows me to fan a hand of cards, see the value of each one like a hand at bridge, and sort them accordingly." Bill took the stack of cards on his right and did just that, showing the minister the numerals and the names.

"These are all Q3's and Q4's. Is that Covey's Quadrant 3 and Quadrant 4?"

"That's right. Important tasks are worth noting individually." He pointed at the row of individual cards on the left. "Unimportant tasks need to know their place. They just need to be done on time, if possible. If they are not done on time, well, they are unimportant. So they are piled up and waiting for batch time."

"What is batch time?"

"You always want to do unimportant tasks in batches. All the phone calls, together. All the letters, together. All the errands, together. So you stack the cards in a batch and sort them by type, just like sorting cards in a bridge hand by suit and value. You work your way through the suit until you are done. If you can't get them done, then no big deal as they are unimportant. They'll wait."

13

"Does a Q3 ever become so urgent that you can't put it off?"

Bill's face looked stony. "Your question is, does a Q3 ever become so urgent that it becomes a Q1? It's possible that I might decide to put a Q3 from the stack over here on the row at the top of my desk. But that would indicate an error in judgement on my part."

"How is that?"

"There are only two possibilities. Either I named the card wrongly - named a Q1 as a Q3 - my mistake, or my boss rearranged the priorities. That rarely happens, as knowing my boss wants something makes that something a Q1 or a Q2 when I sort the cards. The problem is *crossing categories*. The One Minute System is about staying on course, and it demands that we become able to distinguish between what is important - the vital 20% - from what is not important; *prayerwork* means we do that first, as a priority."

Bill took a roll of masking tape out of a drawer and tore off a two foot long piece. He carefully put it on the desk just under the row of cards at the top. "This tape may help you visualize the categories. We draw a quality line in prayerwork and put the 20% that is important above the line, and the 80% that is not is put below the quality line. Whenever I make that error in assigning a network element to the proper category, it is worth some thought. However bad it is to waste time on trivialities, it is a sin to miss what is important by consigning it to the batch pile. Any time this happens it is a major error and needs to be studied."

Bill tapped the line of tape for emphasis. "The other problem with crossing categories is a lack of balance in my day. Remember, the One Minute System suggests that 80% of your time is wasted in terms of profit and loss. Beginners think that they can avoid this reality. Every day, every day, without exceptions, is filled with activity that is incredibly important and also with activity that is wasted. I need to allot time in my day for each ... to deal with the important and unimportant. There will always be a slot in my schedule every day to deal with Q3s; the hard thing is to let them wait for that time so

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as to have more time for Q1 and Q2. To move a Q3 to the other side of the line would indicate that my day is so out of balance that I ignored a trivial item until it became an important emergency. Treating an important task like it was a Q3 or Q4 is at the root of almost every crisis. Crossing categories indicates that I have lost touch with my reality ... or that I am procrastinating, which is more likely."

14

"Procrastination is a big problem for me."

"And all of humanity. A good time management system won't let you do it. Come and see how it works."

Bill scooped up the stack of trivial cards and began quickly sorting them as he walked swiftly out the door.

Bill left a stack of ten cards with his secretary, taking time to introduce the minister. As he walked down the hall, some people were standing in doorways when they got their cards. "It's eleven o'clock - they know my habits."

"What are you giving them?"

"For some the cards are work, routine tasks. They do what the card says, initial it and date it, add comments if needed and return it to my office mail slot. Some of them know the routine well enough to know what the card says, but they still like the ritual of my handing it to them."

"Who was the guy grinning from ear to ear?"

"It's his first wedding anniversary. His card was just a note of congratulations, but

he'll show it to his wife and tell her that I cared enough to write something personal. It'll probably end up on his refrigerator. I use cards to say "Well done!" also and people love getting those."

"It must take you a long time to write out all these cards."

"It would, if I did. Most of the cards originate with them. They write a note to me on a card, according to my rules."

"What rules?"

"If it's a problem card, they have to suggest a solution. They have to address both the problem and the persons involved."

"OK. What if the problem or the solution is too big to fit on a card?"

Bill whirled to face the minister. "That's the mistake in most people's viewpoint. No problem is too big to fit on a 3x5 index card. There are only a hundred or so chemical elements, which in turn are made up of a few, very small standard components, protons, electrons, neutrons. Big problems are systems made up of components, and each component would fit on a card. If you learn how to break the problems down into smaller pieces, eventually solutions become very obvious and simple. No more than one element goes on a card."

"That might be a lot of cards. Mountains of cards."

"Cards are cheap. It's the simplicity that is invaluable. The way my people use them forces them first to look at networks, at systems, how things fit together, and then simplify."

"What are your other rules when people fill out cards for you?"

"The card has two sides; cards that come to me have both the task and the

people involved clarified.”

“Both sides.”

“As often as possible, they express a problem as a question if they can. Our brains provide answers to questions, and I reward the best question writers. We keep asking questions till we get the best answers.”



"What do you mean?"

"Phrase the biggest problem you have as a question. Do it right now, don't think about it. What is the biggest problem you have?"

"Why am I so tired all the time?"

"You could write that on a card. What's your answer?"

"I'm not sleeping well."

"Why?"

"I'm not sleeping enough?"

"Better. Why?"

The minister blushed. His common complaint was about to get personal.

"I'm not going to bed early enough."

"Why?"

"I'm staying up late watching television."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do. But that doesn't matter. What's your solution?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do. It's simple. How can I prevent my watching TV late at night?"

Answer: Unplug the TV. Put it out in the garage. Cancel your cable. Pawn the TV or give it to your worst enemy."

"That would solve my problem." He thought for a second. "It would be easier to go to bed than do that."

"That works as well. Keep asking questions - Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? - and you will soon get to the heart of a matter. Ask "Why?" five times and you'll strike gold."

"Canceling the cable TV might cause other problems."

"Could. Put it on a card as a question and we'll discuss it. But not till you're seriously considering it."

16

"Important Q1 and Q2 items are worth detailed planning. Q3's and Q4's aren't. Just get it done. Try something; if it doesn't work, try something else. It's important to keep the categories straight - either it's a Q12 or a Q34."

"You must be inundated with cards calling for a decision."

"Not really. Anybody who brings me a card with a trivial question on it gets chewed out. Therefore they solve most of these without bringing them to me. The card system helps them to focus and allows me to train them on matters that are significant.

Once they define the question clearly, an adequate solution is usually obvious. I only want to see cards that define important items. Sometimes, like if someone moves the TV into the garage, they'll staple their cards together with the proposed solution on top and throw it in my box. Sometimes I read them."

"Why wouldn't you read them?"

"If it's a Q34, you don't analyze it; you batch it for later review, sometimes a week later, sometimes a month later. If there's an emergency with one of these little projects, it's their job to call it to my attention."

"How complex a problem can you analyze with this system?"

"Let's review. Complex atoms are made of simple components. Complex animals are made of simple cells. My DNA is made up of six, simple amino acids. My bookcase at home is full of mystery novels written with a few thousand words repeated in various combinations. The card is small but if it is used to define interrelated components, it can define massive complexity."

"You sound more like a scientist than a minister."

"Why shouldn't ministry be a science?"

"I'm not sure how to answer you."

"Why would someone choose to not understand the world that surrounds them?"

"I don't know how to answer that one either."

"Archimedes was looking for a long enough lever and a place to put a fulcrum.

All I need are a handful of cards."

17

The minister followed Bill along his route as the man smiled and handed out about sixty cards. When they got back, Bill handed the minister a card. "I wanted you to know where the whole card thing comes from. It started with a book I picked up at a garage sale for my wife. She hated it, but I thumbed through it and I was hooked."

"*Sidetracked Home Executives?* Subtitled, *From Pigpen to Paradise?*"

"By Pam Young and Peggy Jones. Doesn't matter where you find gold, it's still gold. Why shouldn't homemakers coping with children have something to say about being a minister? Isn't church like coping with 200 children while trying to get a thousand things done?"

"I can't argue with that!" the minister laughed.

"You'd lose," Bill said. "They wrote other books. I've collected them all. I use them proudly."

"Who is this other name? Eliyahu Goldratt?"

"A physicist who developed a way to concisely explain complex systems in a business environment. I use it a lot as well, but it's more complicated. Goldratt uses sticky notes but I find that cards are easier. Another good organizer that used cards is Peter McWilliams, who wrote the classic best seller, *Do It! Let's Get Off Our Butts*."⁸

⁸*Sidetracked Home Executives: From Pigpen to Paradise* by Pam Young and Peggy Jones. *Get Your Act Together: A 7-Day Get-Organized Program For The Overworked, Overbooked, and Overwhelmed* by Pam Young & Peggy Jones. *It's Not Luck* by Eliyahu M. Goldratt. *Goldratt's Theory of Constraints: A Systems Approach to Continuous Improvement* by H. William Dettmer. *Do It! Let's Get Off Our Butts* by Peter McWilliams.

"How would I get started with cards?"

"Just buy a brick of 500 at the nearest office supply store. Sit down at a table and list all the problems you have on the lined side of a card, and all the people you deal with on the blank side. Move them around in different combinations, and you'll discover new ways that problems and people fit together. Add more cards to flesh out the system; identify the elements that bridge from one part of the network to another; Goldratt is good for this. Let me know if it doesn't make a difference in how you see your environment. I'll be surprised if you don't agree with me."

As he shook hands with Bill at the front door, the man looked him firmly in the eye. "Remember to pray first, but after that comes people. That's the priority, and it only takes a minute to get back on course. See you at Porch."

18

At the next Solomon's Porch:

"The strange thing about being a human being," the One Minute Minister said, "is that we create environments that are toxic to people and then wonder why our lives aren't working. We create complicated systems to get work done and don't even notice how they are harming people. Or we create a good system and invite a toxic person into it, and they manipulate the system in order to get what they want at the expense of all the other people."

"Peoplework is noticing how the people fit together," Angel said. "Churches and companies and markets are networks constructed out of people. They are not

machines; when you build something out of steel or wood or even paper, it endures just as you built it. Things made out of people are constantly shifting and changing for two reasons: first, they are alive. Second, they are involved in many other networks, and each system impacts all the other systems. Prayerwork helps us with peoplework because we see how people are linked together.”

“When we identify how people link up in a human network, we can learn how to influence that network,” Bill said. “A smile at the right time to the right person, a frown at the right time to another, can pay huge dividends. When we understand the people we work with, we gain a great power to influence the entire system by influencing even as few as one or two elements.”

“Churches and companies and markets are living systems,” Frank said. “They parallel the systems we see in nature; scientists call them ecosystems. Everything is interrelated. Some people in the system are toxic, like bacteria; they harm the system in a variety of ways. Worse are the people who are like viruses; a virus perverts the system and gets the system to take care of it at the expense of everyone else.”

“A virus is like cancer, then,” the troubled minister mused.

“Exactly. Cancer cells aren’t powerful; they’re just selfish and manipulative. So are your problem people.”

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all the problem people just left?”

“Not exactly,” Frank said. “Actually that would be disastrous. What happens in living systems that survive is that they develop healthy immune systems. Part of the network becomes focused on cleaning out and ejecting the problem people. That subsystem becomes stronger by overcoming challenges. Healthy human systems have

just as many problems with people as any other system, they just deal with them more effectively.”

19

“How many people in a human system are problem people?”

They sat in silence and let the minister think about it.

“Oh, no,” he said as he began to realize it. “You don’t mean...”

“It’s not a flat world,” Frank said.

“Eighty percent?”

Frank shrugged. “It might not be 80/20. But it’s not a flat world. Consider an organization of a hundred people. Eighty percent of the good will come from the work of twenty of them. Eighty percent of that good will come from the work of four of those twenty. Eighty percent of that good will come from one superstar among the four. It’s like an arrow; it’s the arrowhead that does the work for the arrow. It’s the sharp front edge that does the work for the arrowhead. It’s the point that does the work for the sharp edge. But the point cannot do the work unless it is applied to the target by the entire arrow.”

“And the point is,” Angel chuckled, “to pray over the system to be certain that everything aligns with the point being able to do that work, and each subsidiary element as well. Smooth functioning indicates alignment. When you find turbulence, it’s a sign of a problem to be adjusted.”

“Applying the 80/20 rule works in the reverse as well,” the One Minute Minister

commented. "Eighty percent of the organization does not earn out the expense of keeping them on the payroll; it doesn't matter however because the work of the genius 20% properly supported generates enough to provide for everyone."

"How does it work in reverse?" the minister asked.

"As 80% of the problems come from 20% of the people, you have bottom segment as well of 20 people who cause lots of problems. And 20% or four of those twenty are major problems. And one of those four will be your negative superstar."

"We call that person the superjerk," Angel snickered.

"So why don't you just get rid of that person?"

"Yes, why don't you?" Frank asked. "Who is it in your church? Who are your four? And who is your negative superstar?"

The minister swallowed. "I know who it is."

"So why don't you get rid of them?"

"Because I'm afraid of them."

"Most of us are," Bill said. "But living systems maintain a balance, and they will right themselves if given the proper encouragement. But you're missing another very important problem that happens when the system ejects someone."

The minister thought for a moment. "Someone else will take his place."

"Exactly. There will always be a superstar and there will always be a superjerk in every human system. But the whole system rises in productivity because the new superjerk is more functional. Everyone benefits."

"I need to think about the concept of a human network immune system," the minister said. "It bothers me to think of getting rid of someone."

“You don’t have to get rid of them,” Bill said. “If you ask them to humbly serve the needs of the organization, they will leave. They are always about demanding that the organization serve their needs. People this unhealthy will leave before they will consider any true repentance and personal change.”

“It’s important because of the concept of redemption,” Angel said.

“What do you mean?”

“Redemption heals people. The problem that gives most organizations fits is when the stars are prima donnas. The mix star qualities with jerk qualities. The role of the network immune system is to help these people to either grow up or get out. Sometimes the future of the whole network depends on it.”

“And redemption,” the One Minute Minister said, “is what we do. We are catalysts of redemption as followers of Jesus, the great redeemer.”

That night at Frank’s house, the minister thought about the 20% of his congregation that were causing 80% of the good; they certainly knew what they were doing and seldom needed his help. It was the other 80% that were always in need of him. Obviously, how he worked with the trivial 80% made a significant difference in the quality of the organization as a whole. He wondered what Frank would have to say about it tomorrow.