

Our Emotional Intelligence:

**Wisdom from the
Jersey Girl for on the
job, our own businesses,
and more**

By Jane Genova

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

- 1. Voodoo, Yes, we are the ones casting those spells**
- 2. Everybody Watches Everybody**
- 3. We Can Wait, or Emotional Potty-Training**
- 4. Grow Up - Nothing at Work Is Personal**
- 5. Pushing Back Is An Art, and imperative**
- 6. Mirror Neurons or why we catch emotions**
- 7. Getting A More Accurate Read on People**
- 8. The Business of Imitation**
- 9. Who Has the Power, whose power is shifting**
- 10. Oldest Form Of Barter, doing/collecting favors**
- 11. A Hobby, any of millions**
- 12. No One Has To Be Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf**

Acknowledgements ... About Genova Writing & More ... This Book

INTRODUCTION

Jersey City, New Jersey was where I grew up in the 1950s. At that time, the post-war affluence had yet to come to us. The only way to make it there for us first or second Gen Americans was essentially through emotional intelligence [EI].

Incidentally, that was especially the case for those who lived outside or on the edge of the law. Their EI had to be considerably higher than ours. A few relatives were minor numbers-runners. They never seemed to get nailed.

Here's some background on my unique hometown.

Ethically diverse, Jersey City had long been controlled by a Democratic Machine. The best version of all that had been established by Frank “I’m the Boss” Hague. It’s an understatement to say he kept the trains running on time. He was a wizard.

Before there was affluence, there was only emotional smarts

For example, when you needed a job, your sidewalk cleaned, or your third ticket killed, you had to know who in the Machine to contact and exactly how to approach them. We never transacted life or business in a linear way. Yes, we were living in a Company Town. And that was wonderful, at least at that time.

This sense of control “they” had over us was reinforced by geography.

Across the Hudson River was Manhattan. Manhattan was the Promised Land. Jersey City was no where. In other parts of New Jersey – *yeah even New Jersey* – people made fun of us.

If we did pull it off to go to work in Manhattan, we were still from Jersey City. Everyone would know that because of our working-class accent, our working-class body language, our ethnic [read that Catholic] values.

No question, this pervasive sense of being less than and never really being able to escape from this position of inferiority made us hyperalert to how we should conduct ourselves with others. From the cradle, we got it that we had to be socially vigilant and know how to push back.

Actually, I can’t recall anyone I knew in Jersey City who wasn’t emotionally smart. Even Charlie from around the corner who was retarded wasn’t when it came to dealing with people. He *knew*.

Reading correctly social dynamics and making the right response meant survival and possible upward mobility.

One high EI uncle got a big job on the docks. Another high EI uncle made a bundle in newspaper stands. And gifted in reading the bookish crowd, I got everything I needed from the school system to receive a full scholarship to an out-of-state college, the first in my family to attend.

When Jersey City, like many old cities, deteriorated, its leaders had the necessary EI to lure Wall Street firms and young professionals who couldn’t afford Manhattan to move there. Other businesses and Gens followed and are still following. What a renaissance.

The 227 Bay Street tenement in downtown Jersey City where I grew up is now a condo that even has an awning and a name: Bay Street Commons. The “teacher’s college” is now a university. The mall can rival anything in any pricey suburbs across the nation.

This book explains what I a Jersey Girl had learned back in the shadow of Manhattan, what I had forgotten, and what I had to re-learn in 2003 when I was at a professional bottom.

As part of my new lines of business in the communications boutique I operate, I sometimes pass these lessons onto clients, including leaders in business and politics. They pushed me to share these insights with others. One of the cardinal principles of EI is: When you're helped, pass it on.

Can this book be useful to you?

Before we go any further, let's determine if this experience and wisdom would be helpful to you.

You might be one of three groups.

Category One: You might have grown up to be emotionally smart. Along the way you fine-tuned all that as you and your worlds changed. You don't need this book.

Category Two: You may have grown up with a high EI but, like I did, became emotionally retarded with too much education, too aggressive a push to keep getting more of everything, and too much of success that came so easily to us in the booming 1980s and 1990s. We just didn't bother with EI. You need this book. You can regain that sixth sense about people and the best choice of action.

Category Three: You might have come of age in a family or environment that didn't value EI. Maybe there was so much money or power, EI wasn't necessary. But now with careers so volatile you realize you will continue to lose ground without a 20-point increase in EI. This book is for you. EI can be raised, significantly.

It's your brand of EI

In reading this book, remember there is no EI Bible. EI comes from what you put together. That will keep changing as you and your environment keep changing.

When Steve Jobs started Apple years and years ago, he had the necessary EI to motivate the troops to create breakthrough technology. Then the high-tech world changed. Jobs didn't. He got kicked out of his own company. Out in the professional desert he put together a Jobs who would add value to the very different Apple. He's still there. The company is going gangbusters.

Lesson: EI isn't static. Either we're applying it, increasing it or we're losing it. Emotional retardation can happen to anyone. It happened to me.

1. VODOO, yes, we are the ones casting those spells

The magic of emotional intelligence has been referred to in a lot of different ways. Among those, it's been called:

- Charm
- Charisma
- Carrying away
- Communicating
- Convincing
- Motivating

In Jersey City, it was known as “Jersey City politics.”

This ability to cast spells opens the world to us. That means possibilities can become realities.

Effortlessly, we attract mentors. Employers hire us. Clients trust us. Venture capitalists invest in us. Employees are passionate and loyal. The evil eye of envy doesn't hurt us.

And every one of us is capable of doing this, no matter how clueless we've been all these years or how negligent we've become in being emotionally smart. After all, we had many of these skills down cold when we were a helpless baby. Otherwise we wouldn't have gotten what we needed to survive and develop.

Fatal error of turning inward

How we drift away from or shut down this basic know-how is usually by turning inward. We climb into our selves and don't pay attention to the others out there. There are certainly many ways to do that.

On “Boston Legal” Clarence climbs into a wig and dress and the personality of Clarice. Oprah might be doing that by retreating into formulaic response instead of opening herself to the audience. I did that through becoming more and more angry.

So, if you haven't been casting spells lately, check out if you have fled inside yourself.

EI is about behavior, not feeling. It's how we act, not how we feel which brings or limits success. Therefore, it doesn't matter what feelings drove us inside. What matters is what

behaviors we're using to get out again. So, come on out. It's fun playing the game in the wild and crazy 21st century marketplace.

Here are a few "exit strategies" from the self which my executive coach and cognitive behavioral therapist Amy Karnilowicz, West Hartford, CT, taught me in 2003:

- Get into a professional situation that is novel to you. This throws us out of our comfort zone. We gotta pay attention to what's out there. That could be a part-time, weekend or volunteer job. It could also be a side business we start.
- Smile. That makes us accessible.
- Leave ourselves available to interact in-person by not using cell phones, not reading, not surfing the Internet, not worrying.
- Be right there in the now, not in the past, not in the future.
- Observe, don't judge.

Our behavior will change. That positions us for the magic.

Lesson: Inside ourselves, no one can find us. Soon enough they even give up looking. That's how human beings become lost, never to be found.

2. EVERYBODY WATCHES EVERYBODY

An old city with buildings mashed together, Jersey City made it convenient for everyone to watch everyone else, usually from a window.

That's why the first lessons at our mother's knee was: Everything we do, every outfit we wear, every car we drive, every pound we gain, and every word we said will be noticed and filed away in the collective and individual memory bank forever.

At the wake of my older sister Camille Genova Klinga in 2001, someone from Bay Street recounted how Camille had carried bread on her head from the bakery *when she was seven years old*. They also enjoyed telling me how chubby I used to be and how that hadn't changed.

The only difference between Jersey City and the professional circles in which we travel is the bluntness. In our careers, it isn't usually made explicit how closely we are being observed until our performance review or when some tidbit about what "they" are saying about us gets back to us.

Everything is a message

So, it's basic EI to recognize that everything is a message, everything sends a message, everything becomes part of our living resume.

What does that mean for us?

Essentially, we accept the importance of symbolism in our professional life. Few see us. They see symbols of whatever they want or need to see.

We don't have complete control over that. But we do have some control over the messages going out from us to them. Once those messages are out there they will do with them what they want. They might interpret our success messages as arrogance. If enough of them do that, maybe we might modify the message we are transmitting.

A tip. There is usually less static and misinterpretation in the messages we send out when we're in a work environment that's a good fit for us and we're a good fit for what the employer wants.

That begins with choosing a line of work and a particular firm or group of clients where we know the values and can conform without excessive agita. That's why employers doing the hiring tend to recruit those they assume are from similar backgrounds. Employers don't welcome surprises in behavior. We don't want to be where we're constantly surprising/shocking the team.

However, as we know, it's not always possible to find that fit or to choose that fit when it is available. Sometimes we have to stray out of our comfort zone. That's a challenge.

That's because we have to gear up for the rigors of adjusting to a whole new set of rules. Most of us won't get that down pat at first. There could be criticism of us, raised eyebrows, derision, and shutting us out. The EI way of responding to all that is usually to change our behavior. In "their" eyes we were perceived as "wrong." We corrected that perceived wrong. End of story.

Lesson: "They" don't miss a trick. We are being watched all the time, from all angles.

3. We CAN WAIT or Emotional Potty-Training

Emotional intelligence is all about learning to wait. That might seem counterintuitive. After all, the workplace is plenty speeded-up, right.

But not jumping wins the game. I know.

From 2001 when my executive communications boutique starting going south until early 2003, I rushed around demanding a fix from the universe. Of course, nothing happened. At least nothing good. Nothing good could happen. Good things come to those who wait.

In 2003, I reached back into what I knew as a Jersey Girl. That is, I slowed down, calmly tried out new lines of business, and let the expectations go. You got it, things fell into place. And today my new communications boutique is thriving.

Why is waiting so important? Waiting allows us to size up people in every context and select strategically what seems at the time the most effective response. That's the habit of winners. Research bares that out.

The famous Marshmallow Test

In the 1960s, at a preschool on the Stamford University campus there was the now-famous Marshmallow Test. Psychologist Daniel Goleman, Ph.D. was the author who made this test so famous. That's because in his 1995 book "Emotional Intelligence," Goleman recounted the results of this experiment.

Four-year-old children were left in a room unmonitored. There were marshmallows. The children were told that if they didn't eat the marshmallows until the monitor returned they could have two.

Some children couldn't resist. Others resisted using all sorts of strategies such as not staring at the sweets or diverting themselves with made-up games. The two groups were tracked. Those who had waited had achieved more success, ranging from grades to performance in standardized tests to popularity, than those who couldn't or wouldn't.

Why is the ability to wait so correlated with success? It's primarily because most career social situations are complex, filled with shifting variables, including who has the most power at the time, what's at stake, and what kinds of people in what kinds of their own emotional states are we dealing with.

Example: We're fired. We can react immediately. We can accept the terms and conditions of the firing just so we quickly end the ordeal. We can defend our performance. We can put the knock on the organization or our boss. We can melt down into tears.

Or, we can run the response options through our heads:

- Indicate our lawyer will contact them
- Tell them we will get back to them
- Provide an alternative set of terms and conditions
- In careful language, play a threat card such as indicating knowledge of where the bodies are buried and a willingness to reveal that.

See the difference waiting even 10 seconds can make?

Wait and sell lots more, at higher prices

Waiting is equally effective in selling situations. A client has boosted his business revenues and enhanced his brandname now that he waits when prospects call. He begins the conversation not with promoting himself but with listening, asking questions and then providing suggestions about solutions. When fees are being discussed he doesn't jump. He, yes, waits.

How can you stop jumping and learn to wait? Just do it. This is an action step. It has nothing to do with feelings or your overbearing father who demanded you click your heels. It is simply a behavior change. From now on, you will wait. I call it Emotional Potty-Training.

We teach toddlers to "hold it." We too can re-learn to "hold it." Eventually when the emotional potty-training is completed you will wait without even recalling how you used to just let your emotions out anywhere, at any time.

Okay, you might have an objection. You tell us that you work on the floor of the stock exchange. You say you can't wait. But, our answer to you is that waiting has many forms. Waiting in that situation might entail playing out scenarios in your head beforehand and then wait a second to pull out the best, given what's happening. What Wall Street guru Jim Cramer learned from his wife was just this: Waiting.

Lesson: The ability to wait makes the difference between succeeding big and chronically blowing it.

4. PUSHING BACK IS AN ART, and imperative

Life was not easy in Jersey City so Machiavellian attitudes came naturally to us.

One attitude was the assumption that folks would judge us on how we pushed back. Note, it was never an issue of whether we should push back but how.

Our rite of passage was just that: The first time that we pushed back effectively – and the world, at least our little one, knew it.

I came to look at pushing back as a type of art form. The elements of that art form are based on action, not words.

Classic example from Jersey City, circa 1955. We park in front of the neighbor's house. Our windshield is broken. We don't park there again. Neither does anyone else. Note, the neighbor didn't make up a story that he wants that space free in case he has to take his mother to the hospital. Had we gone to the police and reported the broken windshield, you got it, they'd just laugh.

When we don't push back in just the right way human nature, in its perverse way, will continue to push us.

A client I couldn't afford to lose at the time was totally abusive. One day, I just didn't respond to his request for service in an emergency. Two days later, which was two days too late, I apologized that I was away at a professional retreat where there was no email or cell phones. That client is quite respectful now.

How do we know what kind of push-back will be the high EI way?

Well, we want to stay within the law. Jersey City had its own law but there was still law. Someone could smash our windshield but not beat us up.

In professional life, the law is more conventional and a known. We don't deal with those who need to be pushed back in a manner that could be construed as harassing or threatening. We have to be more imaginative than that.

We also don't want to communicate the wrong message. For instance, we don't want to be perceived as a hot head or excessively vindictive. We want to be seen as: We mean business.

There's more.

We never explain. If those who got pushed back want to talk about "it," we simply don't talk. The action already did the talking. Silence is the ultimate communications vehicle.

We want to do the deed and then let go. Grudges get in the way of success. Yes, they can be fun but they are also all-consuming. Just read Edgar Allen Poe on that.

We know we are successful when there is simply less need to push back. People get it: It isn't wise to play with us.

Lesson: The need to push back is a use it or lose it situation. If we don't use it, "they" will take note of that and torment us. It's a barrel of office laughs to crucify the folks who won't or can't push back.

5. GROW UP – Nothing at Work Is Personal

Being in the Mafia is a difficult career path, agreed. That's why we're riveted to the professional sagas of Tony Soprano, Michael Corleone, Frank Lucas, and John Gotti. We can learn how to operate our own careers by observing how they do what they do.

Probably the most important take-away lesson from those gangsters is that everything is business, nothing is personal. Had Tony Soprano viewed his job in personal terms he could have never offed the flipped Big Pussy who was his son's godfather.

Blue collar or white, winners get that lesson down cold. No matter what kinds of people are involved, including family members, we never take anything in professional life personally.

That's the "secret" Ronald M. Shapiro and Mark A. Jankowski hammer and hammer in their 2005 book "Bullies, Tyrants & Impossible People: How To Beat Them Without Joining Them." This begins as perceptual and ends in behavioral choices.

Gaining control of any situation

The perceptual piece: We view the dynamics as would a journalist or anthropologist. That is, we observe what seems to be going on. That gives us a distancing stance which helps hold back emotion. When we observe the client complaining about our service, we don't react. We focus on what might be the underlying agenda, motivation or pathology.

The behavior options: We get immediate control when we consider a number of options.

One option might be simply to elicit more information.

A client told me "there are holes" in a feature I wrote for the shareholder newsletter. I asked him to please point them out. That ended that. He said he would get back to me with the details when he had time and meanwhile send him the bill.

Had he pointed out what he deemed "holes," I had myriad other options.

I could thank him for taking the time to explain and then disagree.

I could thank him for his input and request his recommendation on how I could fill the "holes."

I could decide that if he contacted me again with another assignment, I would say I was totally booked or raise my fee to cover what I determined was a nuisance factor.

How can we learn not to ever ever ever approach work personally?

What helps clients detach from their careers is the realization that emotion is a burden on everything – from how to do the assignment to doing the assignment to accepting criticism or praise to moving on to the next assignment. Being passionate about work is very different from overwhelming it with feelings of self.

Being in the zone, the flow

See, what we in Western Society call The Self is the main obstacle to peak performance. That's why more and more of us are studying Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism. In Eastern thought there is no separation between the world and a discrete self. It's all one, interconnected.

As I worked with executive coach Amy Karnilowicz, my bookshelves filled up with the writings of non-Western thinkers such as Ken KcLeod, Sylvia Boorstein and Andrew Cohen.

In athletics, removing this self from performance is called getting in the zone. In creative work it's called being in the flow. In public speaking it's called connecting with the audience.

My hardest challenge in surmounting the self was coming not to care about what my colleagues were thinking and saying about me as I tried, failed, failed, tried and succeeded with rebuilding my business in 2003. Incidentally, worst than their criticism and unsolicited advice was their praise for my homeruns. I had to be free to just perform, without being held back by a self others were so busily shaping for me.

How can you flee the self? Step outside it and into the world of pure performance. We are our work. The self can't come in between that.

Lesson: Excessive self-consciousness kills more careers than any other personality defect.

6. MIRROR NEURONS or why we catch emotions

We *know* that organizations hire the optimistic, energetic people who seem to pick on what the interviewer wants to hear and on the norms of the corporate culture. If those people continue on that behavioral path, they can frequently dodge the layoffs and maybe keep improving their employment situation. Now we also know *why*.

The mechanism underlying this dynamic is what's called "mirror neurons" or "emotional wi-fi."

In the 1990s, a research group in Italy at the University of Parma discovered that social animals, including us humans, are neurologically wired to get in tune with what others around us are feeling.

As a speechwriter I always wondered why audiences cringed when the speakers weren't connecting and sensed it or said something the wrong way. Those researchers explained that: *The audience felt their discomfort*. Most superiors are as uncomfortable as we are during negative performance reviews. And, we all avoid the sadsack across from our cubicle.

Intuitively, I guess I always had realized this. Although plagued with depression since I was 11, I masked it. When I might confide this now and then to peers, they were shocked. “You!” I had down cold the busy-bee upbeat employee and, later, consultant.

Messages we are sending, to sadists

What I wasn't so smart about was masking my own inner turmoil about not being “successful enough.” Of course, that message got transmitted. Sadists tormented me about the wound.

So how can we manage those emotions which drive others away or encourage others to hurt us? This is an inner job. Here we have to become self-aware. Not easy, especially if the push for perfection has made us totally defended against self-knowledge. But doable.

The two categories for inspection are:

- What attitudes or behavior seemed to lead to career disappointment, setback and disasters.
- Which ones seemed to lead to success, especially unexpected.

There are no right answers here.

The payoffs of good fits

At Chrysler they loved my brash thinking and talking. At IBM those were totally wrong. With self-knowledge we can make better decisions about where we should be working.

Eventually I did bite this bullet. What I came up with was that I would be more in tune with organizations which wanted to try new things than I would with those determined to maintain the status quo. That seems simple. But it wasn't to me. I thought that I was truly Zelig who could reconfigure myself for any organizational culture.

That doesn't mean we can't modify our emotional set. As we boost EI, we will find ourselves more able to stretch ourselves to accommodate diverse situations. A buttoned-down client wanted to be hired by a chaotic startup so that she could learn an emerging technology. She took on protective coloring without resenting it because she was committed to a goal. She got what she wanted.

Lesson: We're more flexible than we probably assumed we could be.

7. GETTING A MORE ACCURATE READ ON PEOPLE

My three cats Point Pleasant, Jason and Carlotta never have trouble reading me. They always get it right. We did too, at one time. In the old neighborhood on Bay Street we had to know who to trust, who not to, and who was definitely trouble.

But along the way we take on so many layers of education, religious training, political points of view and socialization that we no longer can tune into what that “other” out there wants, needs, is attempting to pull over, or is too socially inept to try to pull over. Call it People Illiteracy. Yeah, we become stupid about reading people.

Why we can't see a thing.

An extreme example but one becoming more common is the employee who is shocked that a confidant at work spilled the beans. This employee didn't read accurately that person in that context.

Why did this happen?

Most of the time it occurs out of neediness. We feel compelled to confide or superimpose on others noble motives or ignore a competitive factor because we *need to*. What we might consider we need is friendship, ability to vent, a sense of safety [where it doesn't exist], or hope that everything will turn out fine.

The most efficient way out of misperception is simply to approach people without projecting our own world view, assumptions about what ought to be, or emotional desires. That renders us an open vs. closed system.

People who have the ability to discard conventional lenses and accept human beings in all their raw motivations can write their ticket. That's how Lyndon Johnson went from being a nobody to a power broker in the Senate. He made it his job to zero in on what other people needed. Then he played them accordingly in order to accomplish his own agenda.

Those who can't or won't do this usually lose elections, don't get ahead on jobs, can't develop new business, and become scapegoats.

Increasing people literacy

How to keep improving our People Literacy?

My bent is language. By studying the writings of linguist Deborah Tannen, such as her book “That's Not What I Meant!” I now effortlessly can deconstruct a statement. From that I can discern what's the agenda is.

Another method is typecasting people and then moving on from that general category to the specifics. That might go like this. Many powerful people tend to be narcissists. In

fact, research bears that out. If we start there then we can decipher the more particular traits of that particular self-lover.

A third path is using the arts as not just pleasure or entertainment but as a path to insight about people. That's exactly why Shakespeare doesn't go out of style.

A fourth technique is to find ways to buy time. That's why societies encourage people to become engaged rather than marry immediately. And that's why organizations find it shrewd to do succession planning. They get a better read of the candidates over time.

Lesson: Studying human nature never ends.

8. THE BUSINESS OF IMITATION

Toddlers learn how to behave in the world by imitation. That's why the little girls flop around in Mommy's high heels and the boys carry a tool kit around the house.

Also, the best salespeople "mimic" the environment of the prospect, i.e. they take on the characteristics of that setting. When they walk into a prospect whose bearing and corporate cultures are conservative, they take on that protective coloring.

And in any new venture, be it getting the hang of blogging or setting up a clinical research experiment, we usually find a model and closely imitate it. In time, we start taking risks and putting our own imprint on the project.

Why do too many of us resist imitating when we are new to a situation? My hunch is the emphasis since the counterculture 1960s on expressing ourselves, being individuals, not buying into others' rules, seeking creativity has turned us totally against conforming.

Unfortunately, not being able to conform, especially when a newbie, can get us locked out of opportunity.

They were there before us

Here's a reality check. It's downright impossible to be a self-propelled free agent in a work environment when we're just trying to get a hang of how it and the people in it function. For that very reason, people who change jobs, companies or industries often fail. They don't stop to figure out the new game and mimic it until they're ready to make their own moves.

Okay, you object, what about if we're brought in as change agents? That was Lou Gerstner's role at IBM in the early 1990s. He was there to create an organizational culture which could produce profits in a rapidly changing tech world.

If we read Gerstner's account of overhauling one of the most rigid cultures around – "Who Says Elephants Can't Dance" – it's clear that he chose his shots. He made

strategic decisions about what was worth changing and what to leave alone. Had he come in like Attila the Hun and tore down everything, the system would have probably turned on him, making it impossible for him to accomplish anything.

So, how do we pick up on the core things to imitate, that is, what's important and what's not for our success?

Actually all that hits us in the face as soon as we enter the environment. Going to the aggressive Altria is very different than going to more buttoned-down P&G. All we have to do is be willing to see what's there rather than making judgments about it.

Think of it this way: We haven't yet earned the right or accumulated the power to modify the way they run their show.

Lesson: Only capitalist virgins assume they are somehow exempt from conforming.

9. WHO'S GOT THE POWER, whose power is shifting

In the late 1980s, power in the workplace started to come out of the closet.

Public affairs expert Bob Dilenschneider threw open the door with his breakthrough book "Power and Influence." He put it out there: Power exists. Here's how players take it. And if we want more of it, here are some of the proven strategies. Recently, Dilenschneider published an update of that "Power and Influence: The Rules Have Changed."

The tough thing about power and us is that it's not a stable entity. Power keeps changing. So, if we are going to deal with those with power, take our own piece of power, and be agile when major power shifts are taking place, we have to be alert and make careful moves.

The classic case is that our boss is losing power in the organization. That's obvious. But she retains the power to make our lives miserable, promote us and fire us. The prudent behavior is not to change our behavior around her and her loyalists. We continue to do everything in their presence that we used to. Shifts in power can mean perilous times. Scapegoating gets maxed.

Simultaneously, as we comport ourselves one way with the boss, we are also constructing strategies and tactics to align ourselves with who might represent the new power structure. How we put them into place can make or break our careers. That's called betting on the right horse.

The brilliant power players like Henry Kissinger seemed to manage to ride both horses and stay on the one who made it past the finishing line. That requires outstanding chameleon ability. But all of us can succeed in this game. Incidentally, it is useful to read biographies of the world's power czars.

Build diverse power bases

Before anything happens in organizational power, we should be building diverse networks, inside and outside the organization. This provides us with information and allies in many contexts. Yes, this requires effort. But it's a must-do.

When things start looking like they are ready to blow, here are some of the approaches in volatile power situation:

- Accord everyone respect and deference, before, during, and after the struggle. Most of us are too unimportant in this to be called upon to declare an allegiance. In gambling we call this not showing our cards. And, you bet, this is a betting situation. Reach out to those dethroned. Given the chaos in professional life, this is a prudent investment. Your support will be remembered a long time.
- As tempting as it, avoid participating in the grapevine as a talker. Listen. Spies are everywhere and whatever you say will be repeated and held against you.
- Invitations to join with a faction might be extended. For example, we might be asked if we would be interested in heading up marketing communications. Our response would best include presenting our suitability for that job, expression of gratitude for their thinking of us, no badmouthing the incumbent and maintaining complete confidentiality.
- Analyze where we can take power. Power is taken, not given. The masters of power take and solidify it before anyone notices.
- If our positions are in danger, don't panic. According to Harvard Business School professor Rosabeth Kanter, most downward trajectories start because of panic and won't stop until the panic ends. In her book "Confidence," Kanter says, "Panic is a sudden, anxious feeling of a loss of control, and panicking can make a small fumble worse ...Panic is the enemy of good decision making under pressure."
- In worst-case scenarios such as being aligned with the losers in a power struggle, being demoted or fired, or simply being shoved aside, these events are situations to be managed. Often dealing with them involves putting together an exit plan and a cover story about why we left. We are our stories.
- Avoid getting sucked up in the excitement. Too much is at stake to indulge emotions.

Lesson: Power is never constant.

10. OLDEST FORM OF BARTER, Doing/Collecting Favors

In any culture of scarcity like Jersey City – in short supply were money, self-esteem, dignity – barter is an important system of exchange. We grew up trading goods, services, compliments, reassurance, mentoring, and a place to crash when our families got over-the-type dysfunctional.

In organizations where we work or where our clients are, the high EI thing to do is identify the points of scarcity – and supply those needs. In return we will receive promotions, perks and more business.

From my 20 years as a vendor to the Fortune 500 as well as professional services firms and startups what I have picked up is that the scarce commodities tend to be idiosyncratic.

One C-level executive has no one to talk to, at least not who she can trust. She hires an executive coach but that lacks the intimacy of an unpaid relationship. She defaults to talking with me. The payback for me for listening is enormous. I get insider perspective on how business operates at that level right now. I gain additional confidence. And, of course, additional business comes my way from the organization.

A president of a professional-services firm which is in trouble needs fast, outstanding but affordable articles written and placed under his byline. I sensed that. I jump to do that. There is a key new ally on my network.

The number-two man in a startup has no corporate experience. As the startup matures I guide him about how traditional organizations operate. He gives me stock options.

All these bartering transactions have rules, of course.

Usually they are done with no explicit agreements, no mention of a meter running. They are sort of pre-verbal, pre-accounting primitive. They have no deadline for payback.

If we sense there isn't go to be any payback, then we just drift away from that whole enchilada. After all, such a negligent or naïve pro isn't really useful on our network, right. Badmouth that jerk? No. We sound stupid for getting into that pickle in the first place and like crybabies for parading in public our boo-boo.

How can we size up where to do our bartering? That's back to the marshmallows principle: Wait. Those who rush in with generosity are seen as fools. Until we have a good feel for the dynamics of the organization and the reliability/power of each individual player, we do business by the book.

Lesson: To receive we gotta give. When we don't receive, we gotta let go.

11. A HOBBY, any of millions

“Get a hobby,” one of the middle managers at Chevron yelled at a media representative in his department. She had been pestering him non-stop for a transfer back to Houston. After she nursed her wounds she probably realized he was 100 percent right: We all need a hobby.

Hobbies create our personal Paradise no one can tamper with. That tends to insulate us from the ups and down of professional life and prevents us from over-reacting. Yeah, hobbies can save our careers along with our sanity.

In Jersey City, no one was dumb enough not to have a hobby.

For some it was coming up with exotic ways to figure out what number to play. An aunt collected dream books which linked those nocturnal experiences with a supposedly lucky number to bet on.

A woman who frequented the local nut house compulsively knitted sweaters, all the same patterns and the same colors. Without that knitting she probably would have been a ward of the state much more frequently.

My hobby was and remains reading. I read matchbook covers about famous artist schools, ads on subways, two books weekly and magazines wherever they are. The post lady complains about all the magazines which she can't fit into my mailbox. Bad day or good, there are words to welcome me into another realm. I stay there until I'm able to return to work.

It's EI-dumb to ignore our treasured hobbies when we become successful

The more successful we get, though, the more we tend to lose sight of the balance hobbies provide.

We might start to play golf primarily as a networking tool versus release. We give up the fishing just because. We are talked out of collecting antique cars by a thrifty spouse preoccupied with college costs.

And one day we over-react and lose credibility and maybe it all.

Lesson: Only work is a loser's game.

12. NO ONE HAS TO BE AFRAID OF THE BIG BAD WOLF

Even those stoic Buddhists get afraid. The January 2008 edition of SHAMBHALA SUN carries a cover story “Journey to Fearlessness.” One suggestion in that article is made by noted author on spiritual matters Sylvia Boorstein. She observes, “Our own benevolence is actually the protection that renders enemies impotent.”

That is part of it.

I remember Mrs. Louis, a widow in the first floor railroad apartment on Bay Street. She was always kind, especially to us kids. Communions, Christmas, birthdays, she had something squirreled away in her flat to give us.

The powers-that-be attempted to kick her out after her husband died. They claimed no one person had the right to a whole apartment when families needed it. The tenants fought the eviction. Mrs. Louis stayed put, rattling around in her five large rooms. We kids continued to receive our goodies.

The other part of protecting against fear, which tends to attract sharks, is to recognize that just like any other situation in life fear can be managed.

It's not the fear, it's the panic

The only time fear can and does destroy is when someone doesn't manage it. Remember it's the cover-up which blows a small offense into a felony or worse. People panic, don't act strategically, and we get Watergate, Monicagate, and most recently Troopergate.

How to manage fear? Here is what my clients, who are responsible for thousands of jobs, tell me they do and, for them, it works like a charm:

- “Figure what I would do if I weren't afraid and do it. Take fear out of the situation and the problem becomes simplified.”
- “I laugh at myself: Here we go again.”
- “I observe fear as if it is a living opponent. That gives me control over it. Its hold lessens. I can act, not react.”
- “I pray. That sort of ritualistic action melts the fear. I can see clearly what's the best course of action for the company.”
- “I remember all the other times I was full of fear and that somehow I did the right thing or not enough of the wrong things and the firm was okay.”

The Jersey City I grew up in was a Catholic one. A towering church stood on every few blocks. We developed the habit of praying. It was that habit that enabled me to keep visiting my father as he was dying from cancer in Jersey City. I was afraid to see him looking worse every time I flew in from Pittsburgh. I prayed. I gained courage.

Prayer also did the trick in 2003 when my retirement savings was gone, debt was six figures and my former industry had disappeared. All I prayed for was guidance. I got that. Incidentally I'm an atheist. Atheists can have a very rich prayer life.

Lesson: Manage fear and we manage ourselves.

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I want to thank all you people who helped me to reach back into my sturdy roots when my business collapsed. You told me the solution was right there inside me. And it was. I rediscovered what my past had given me in emotional intelligence. I ditched all that over-education, the traditional success rulebooks and the tendency to panic.

Special thanks goes to Toby Bloomberg, Paul Chaney, Amy Karnilowicz, Kevin McCauley, and my late dog Molly Mittens.

ABOUT GENOVA WRITING & MORE

Through trial and error I created a disruptive communications boutique Genova Writing & More. Here we custom-make a mashup of digital and traditional strategies as well as content for branding, advocacy, fundraising, career-coaching, and actual selling. Clients range from Fortune 500 to startups to non-profits.

Specific services include:

- Strategic planning with the objective of a fast, low-cost solution. We get in and out, leaving you only with results.
- Creating content, all kinds, in all media – websites, blogs, print material, white papers, press releases, PowerPoint Presentations, scripts and formal speeches.
- Researching, writing and placing with media executive-bylined articles, opinion-editorials, letters-to-the-editors and books. Publication credits range from THE WALL STREET JOURNAL to 10 books.
- Career coaching and creation of whatever it takes to tell the story. The philosophy is: We are our stories.

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