



## WEEKDAY WARRIORS

·❧ My office on the 57th floor of a midtown Manhattan skyscraper may have been lofty, but in the world of business, I still looked up to some whose power or larger offices exceeded mine. Their positions only deepened my commitment to money and networking.

Some pursued power much more than I did. I was more interested in just the money—and in the networks it brought. But is any of this surprising? What better place to put your trust than in money or networks, if you don't know what is more important?

I worked with lots of very smart people who, like myself, had beautiful Ivy League educations. We competed ferociously with each other and knew lots about yachts, designer suits, jumbo mortgages, and discounted cash flows. But our educations hadn't taught us much about real relationships—or maybe we just couldn't remember. At work, I don't remember hearing one thing about philosophical or spiritual things, either, except perhaps for some nuggets

that might get a laugh at a party. Yet, here we were, running the world. Or at least making enough money to think we were. Who knew more than we did about real life—the “good life,” that is—and how to get it and keep it, than people like us?

Yet, as I look back on those years, when I think about all that would happen to me and to our family a decade later, I’m astonished how little I knew about anything worth knowing. How poor, too, were my instincts—other than in business—about how to learn and grow in a confusing and challenging world. But, then, before I met Arthur, I didn’t know anyone else who knew more than I did.

But I do remember overhearing conversations about what was important stuff. They woke me up. They made me pay attention, knowing something important was being said. And though I didn’t know any better, I knew somehow that what I was hearing wasn’t right. But the people I was overhearing didn’t know any more than I did. Maybe money and networks were not the most important things to get through life. But I didn’t want to think about that.

A perk of my job gave me membership in a swanky health club on Park Avenue, a few blocks from my 57th floor office in Rockefeller Center, from where I had a beautiful view of Central Park. I worked out at that gym three times a week at lunch time. The place filled up with successful men, and a few women.

One day, while in the locker room, I overheard an older guy—a few years older than me, about forty—kidding a guy in his twenties about getting married. The older guy teased him: “Why pick a flower when you can enjoy the garden?” I knew the older guy only

meant to be cute. But as an “older” guy myself—in my mid-thirties—struggling in a troubled marriage, and trying to hold on, cynical wisdom like the older guy’s was just another ax blow to the tree that I’d already whacked too often myself. His joke was clever, but, I wondered, is that all marriage is—a cynical joke? Is that all we bright guys from the best schools, with great jobs, can say about marriage? Make jokes about it?

Back then, I didn’t know any better. But something in me still wanted to believe there was something more to marriage, whatever it might be. I didn’t know what. But I knew that my own view of marriage was as cynical—and hopeless—as the guy making a joke.

Another time, at the same gym, I overheard a sadder conversation, meant to be private. A guy, obviously in pain and feeling embarrassment, was telling one of his buddies he was divorcing. I didn’t think they knew I was listening. So I tried to be inconspicuous, by retying my sneakers or adjusting and readjusting my socks. I wanted to know what another bright, successful guy from my world might tell his friend about the trauma he was heading into. Conversations like this were rare in the world I belonged to. We didn’t talk about feelings or failure. Those kinds of things were woman stuff. They weren’t shared among us heavy hitters, for we knew that appearances were reality. Seeming to be out of control was as good as being out of control. We avoided letting others know a lot about us, for knowledge could be used against us. Being guarded—with charm—was best.

Even though I knew it wasn’t right to listen in, I ached for some

wisdom on divorce. But as was almost always the case back then, my listening was worthless. The older guy said nothing to his hurting buddy, except that “it was probably for the best.” And that, “Hey, we learn from such things.”

Could he be right? I wondered.

Then another time, on a Friday, I found myself at an important business meeting away from my office. I had arrived a little early. Sitting at an elegant conference table, waiting with my muffin and orange juice for the start of the meeting, I sat close to the senior executive who was going to run the meeting, the guy who had asked me to say a few words to his staff. Directly across from me and to the left of the senior executive was his director of human resources.

I had just sat down when the senior exec and his human resource guy got caught up in a very audible conversation. A sensitive one, too, I thought. It was about an executive the senior guy wanted fired. Given the guy’s level, however, the HR guy suggested it best be done on a Monday, or so research said, the HR guy claimed.

“On a Monday? Why, Phil?” the senior executive demanded.

“Well, it gives the poor guy the rest of the week to absorb the shock. He can tell his family when he’s ready. Saves some dignity. He might even keep leaving for work for a few days without his family’s knowing he’d been fired.”

Bruce, the senior guy, was unimpressed. “So what am I supposed to do? Wait to tell him and ruin *my* weekend?”

Now, neither Bruce nor the two guys giving advice in the locker room were, that I know, philosophers or therapists. However, they

were successful men, admired and highly respected by their peers as good business people. And in their own ways, they were just trying to respond to unexpected, personal, and potentially difficult, emotional situations. Still, even though I didn't waste my own time thinking about anybody but myself, what I'd overheard in all three conversations struck me, even then, as selfish, self-protective, stupidity. Mind you, at that point, I didn't have anything better to offer, had I been the go-to guy. But some instinct within me was, even then, bubbling up and whispering to me, "Not this."

I am still processing other memories from that time, other stories of very successful people I knew who had little feeling for others or for wanting balance in their lives.

In New York, I had an acquaintance, a top executive, whose first wife had divorced him and taken the kids. Now married again, this time around he wasn't going to miss his new kids' growing up. So every Friday, after school, he sent his limo over to pick up his son, a ten-year-old. The kid had time with his father, but only by coming to Dad's office to watch him work into the night.

There was another guy I knew out West—a top dog, too—who did just fine on four hours of sleep. And because he did, he expected his "direct reports," as he called them, to do the same. But to prove his underlings' mettle and loyalty, the guy held staff meetings late at night or very early in the morning—simply because, as the boss, he could. And he wanted to see how devoted his peons were.

Another guy was so driven to cultivate his kids' minds, both of whom were under ten, that he read *Moby Dick* to them—every day!

At breakfast! Each morning, for months, chapter by chapter, whether the kids wanted to listen or not, he sat them down at the breakfast table and slogged through the book. Then the kids were off to school, and he headed into New York City, where he would lawyer away deep into the night, inspired by what a great father he was.

None of this was the least bit odd to me back then. It was just the way life was, whether you were going someplace or you had already arrived. Successful people had their prerogatives, as well as their quirks; and kids, spouses, or employees had better adjust to them or learn to put up with them—or else! Because the star was not about to change. (“Are you crazy? Why would I?”) In fact, you had better change, if you knew what was good for you.

After all, we were the warriors who left our families in the lovely suburbs and rode into battle each day. We were the winners. We were the ones who’d made it in life—not our spouse, nor the kids, nor our underlings. (“What rights or privileges do others have?”) We were the successes. We were the ones entitled to the fruits of our accomplishments. Others weren’t. At best, others lived off us or received a share of the dividends from our reflected glory, *if* they behaved.

After all, at work, we were catered to. A staff member did our bidding, fetched our left-behinds, and carried coffee for us. (“And you’d better do it quickly too.”) If we weren’t always clear, then listen up. (“Get used to ‘Jimspeak’ . . . What’s wrong with you?”) Yet, at home, we weren’t always revered as we were at work. Lizzie even

talked back to me and increasingly went her own way. I resented being unappreciated after all I afforded her and the kids.

Back then, I think I was simply a jerk who didn't know it at the time.