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THE BEST WAY TO BE PERCEIVED AS LEGITIMATE IS TO BE LEGITIMATE

THOSE WHO BRAG ABOUT THEIR IQ



*The elevator to success is out of order.
You'll have to use the stairs.*

—JOE GIRARD #worldchangerbook

Is your soul swelling with a big, game-changing vision just begging to be adopted by the masses? Is the biggest want, or even need, of your cause or organization that you need exposure? That you need to be heard? be platformed? go viral?

Good for you for having something of substance worth sharing—for bringing something to the world, instead of just sucking the life out of it.

Now please take a number and hop in line.

Sound harsh?

It is.

But, sadly, so is the world.

If I had my choice, I'd give you a microphone. I'd set you up with national press conferences. Pay your way into the Super Bowl ad space. Get your stuff endorsed by A-list celebrities. Start a door-knocking campaign that made sure every

resident in your area knew about the noble sort of things you're sinking your life into.

But I'm not the one in charge of doling out attention or platform in this world.

Here's the thing. As much as the average person might benefit from knowing about the causes we're fighting for, the movers and shakers in our field aren't going to line up around the block to listen to us. Random millionaires aren't going to take the initiative to show up at our door to bankroll us. Zuckerberg isn't going to personally champion our work to help us take the Internet by storm.

Instead, we're going to grapple. We're going to struggle to be heard. We'll have days when we feel like our voice is drowned out by a million others.

And when that happens—when you don't feel legitimized, when your work isn't validated, when people don't listen or seek to really understand what it is you're saying—you have two options.

The first is to wallow in the lack of resources available to you, to grieve the spotlight dancing just out of your reach, and to complain.

But here's another option worth considering.

Want to be seen as a leader in your field? Then get out there and *lead*.

Want to be perceived as being legitimate? Then, the best thing you can do is go out and *be legitimate*.

Not just for a day or a few months or for even a few years. But throw in, invest, show people you're in it for the long haul, that you're going to show up tomorrow, and next week and next month and the month after that. Be present, work hard,

and prove you can be taken seriously as a long-term partner.

Asserting your own validity, especially when you're new on the scene, can make you seem like that socially inept intellectual you run into at a party. The one who tells you the exact results of their IQ test within 60 seconds of meeting them.

But be honest! You don't really want them to tell you they have an IQ of 180, do you? *You want to discover it.*

The same is true for ideas and causes.

It's like King Solomon said—In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty!¹

Is what you're doing as an entrepreneur, a writer, a speaker, a leader in an organization, worth hearing about? Then don't tell people it's worth hearing. Don't whine that people aren't listening. Don't go around telling people how you deserve a bigger platform. Prove you have some good ideas. Write them down. Talk about them with small groups. Serve someone already in leadership. Respect those who've gone before you.

The best way to be heard is to say something worth hearing.

The best way to go viral is to produce something worth sharing.

The best way to get attention is to do something worth noticing.

There is no blank check beyond that.

YOU'RE NOT GIVEN OPPORTUNITY, YOU EARN IT

SETH GODIN'S RED CARPET



*Some critics will write
"Maya Angelou is a natural writer,"
which is right after being a natural heart surgeon.*

—MAYA ANGELOU #worldchangerbook

In my years as a high school teacher, I routinely came across students who weren't happy with the grade they received from me or another teacher.

"It's so stupid!" they would declare. "I can't believe she gave me a D."

And this is when I would give them the standard response that any teacher who hopes to survive must refer back to hundreds of times in any given year.

"Teachers don't *give* you grades, good or bad. You earn them."

Most of us can get a good smirk out of this one. Either we have an entitled child of our own or we can remember how entitled we were as children. But it's amazing, then, how quickly we sometimes forget this perspective as adults.

We see someone, Seth Godin, for example, who becomes a sought-after, nationally platformed speaker, whose expertise is quoted in thousands of newspapers, books, and blogs,

whose books shoot to the top of the bestseller list. And we think, *Wow! The planet just hauled off and gave Seth Godin a world stage.*

And I know why we often get misled this way.

Some journalist, who by the way wasn't around all those late nights Seth Godin worked grueling hours trying to make something of his life, writes a snapshot story of the author's success.

Look what he did! He started giving away his book for free and then everyone wanted it. It catapulted him to dozens of bestsellers.

How simple success was for Seth Godin.

How nice of the world to just hand respect and notoriety over to him like that.

And we fall for it. We think, yes, yes one day—after barely working at all—Seth Godin was just leisurely sitting around on his porch sipping lemonade and an idea came to him. *I'll give my book away for free.* So the next day he did and he was suddenly on the cover of every magazine and his voice mail was full of messages from news producers.

How absolutely ridiculous of us! But how true, right?

The owner and editors of every major media outlet of his time didn't just show up on Seth Godin's doorstep and say, *We'd like to give you fame!*

He earned it.

Now true, our simple success stories have more lure. They're more fun to read. Easier to remember. Why? Because they suggest that maybe the same thing will happen for us. Maybe we will barely have to work at all and then one day

the world will come knocking on our door to invite us to unbridled fame and success!

A fun story, but we can't learn as much from it, can we?

If we really read all of Godin's blog posts, if we really read everything he's said in his speeches and TV appearances and magazine interviews, we'd get a completely different picture. We'd get a picture of a man who investigated the whole world, who ate, drank, and slept ideas, who read every book and article he could get his hands on, who learned from every person who crossed his path, who tried and tried and tried many times without world-recognized success.

Now, that is sort of disappointing, isn't it? So you do have to work hard for success.

But it's also freeing!

No one gave Seth Godin accomplishment. He earned it.

With that realization, you know exactly what to do. Stop hoping the next Seth Godin red carpet is going to roll down your driveway to your door. Get up and go earn your own grade in this world.

THEY DON'T HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO AFFIRM OR NOT AFFIRM US

THE DANGER OF LIVING
OFF PEOPLE'S COMPLIMENTS



*I don't know the key to success,
but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.*

—BILL COSBY #worldchangerbook

*What good are fans?
You can't eat applause for breakfast.*

—BOB DYLAN #worldchangerbook

The cheapest way to stir up good feelings for ourselves is to collect affirmation. Store up compliments. Let “nice sweater” or “great haircut” make us walk a little taller.

Remember nice things said about us, in person or on-line. Let “he’s a brilliant thinker” or “she’s a talented communicator” make us smile with satisfaction. Glean worth from applause, from awards, from promotions or recognition . . . from all those times someone notices how smart or efficient we are; what we’ve managed to pull off.

These kind of surfacey, impulse-driven good feelings are easy to come by. Post on Twitter or Facebook about having a bad day and three dozen people you knew in high school may come to your emotional rescue.

But things often come cheap because they *are* cheap.

Good feelings derived from affirmation too often unravel at the first sign of disapproval, say when someone mocks our new hairstyle or tells us our prized hipster glasses remind them of a celebrity we can't stand. They become sinkholes in our guts when we learn people thought we rambled on too long or went on too many tangents. They feed an ache to win people over in moments when no one claps, when the room falls silent, when others attack, interrupt, or dismiss us. They subtract from our emotional state on all the days when people don't notice what we're doing or how hard we're working; when people don't like or retweet us or read our blog posts in masses.

Affirmation, it turns out, is a short-lived and shaky refuge.

Depending on it allows the masses to influence our well-being, assigning commentators validity they probably have not earned and do not deserve. It unfairly lures our pool of acquaintances or online followers into a loop where they can skim off the top of us. Meanwhile, we wait for their reactions, reacting (and sometimes overreacting) to how they'll respond, egging them on to inappropriately appoint themselves judges who get to rate and score some one-dimensional expression of who we are.

The irony is they can clap or boo as loud as they want for the three-minute presentation you just gave, without ever really knowing the truly applause-worthy or disapproval-worthy parts of you. "Good talk" or "terrible blog post" is often a sadly detached critique from someone who doesn't really know the first thing about us.

I have come to believe Jesus would pull the carpet out

from under this equation, overturning our tendency to draw worth from this kind of empty critique. When the religious leaders of his time pulled this sort of thing, he wouldn't have it!

“How can you believe,” he demanded, “since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”²

Is it any different for us? How then can we, we who try to embody the way of Jesus in the modern world, claim to hold God so high and yet still put so much worth on the words of humans?

Addiction to approval can mess with us. It can actually prevent us from knowing and being known, allowing us to get our approval fix too easily and excusing others from bothering to understand us as filled-out, living, breathing human beings. As the people who dig deep for their kids, who persevere to grow through pain, who don't quit even when life gives them reason, who put in time reflecting and growing and becoming time and time again.

To present your fullest self in friendship and draw steadiness and strength from those around you, you often have to be willing to do something pretty tough: let go of the approval of the masses.

WHEN GOD IS INVOLVED, THE BACKUP PLAN CAN BECOME THE ORIGINAL

WHEN GOD WALKED THROUGH
A COVENANT IN TWO FORMS



*Success consists of going from failure
to failure without loss of enthusiasm.*

—WINSTON CHURCHILL #worldchangerbook

I don't doubt God could lead a person to a specific place or a specific task.

I also don't doubt that if and when he prods us forward, we might—in our distractedness—miss his promptings altogether.

But here's what I do doubt: That we're supposed to be anxious about this, worrying about how we might've missed some destiny he pointed us to three years ago and now we're cursed to some lesser path.

I don't buy that God ascribes to that kind of do-or-die mentality.

Even if we miss some sort of cue along the way, I firmly believe God maintains an uninterrupted desire to bless us just as much as he would've had we been more attentive or responsive.

In our human economy, if we don't execute the ideal, the backup plan is usually lesser. It's the best and least taxing secondhand way to get something accomplished, given that we already missed the absolute best path.

It's more work, less rewarding, and may not produce an equally good outcome. But it's the best we've got.

Not God though.

God can insert the backup plan right over the original and weld them together. He can make this draft of the plan—forged from your successes and failures—so productive, so enriching, that it's as if the first plan never existed. Somehow your left turn takes you exactly to where a right turn would've taken you.

My Old Testament professor, Dr. Bailey, bolstered my confidence in this when he described the covenant Abraham entered into with God in Genesis 15.

Here's the CliffsNotes: In Jewish tradition, when two beings entered into an oath, they would split a sacrificial animal into two pieces and walk together between the two halves of the animal.

This was to signify the importance of their vow to each other. It was like saying, *If we don't fulfill our part of the bargain, then the blood of this animal is on our hands. If we fail to follow through, we shed its life for no reason. So break your promise and that abuse is on you.*

But when God made his covenant with Abraham, check out what happened in verse 17.

God appeared in two forms: smoke and fire. And those two forms passed through the two pieces of animals, while Abraham lay in deep sleep.

The Bible doesn't comment on why.

But given what we know about the tradition, it creates a powerful picture of redemptive backup plans.

God didn't have Abraham walk through the pieces alongside him. He didn't make Abraham vow to perfectly keep his covenant to God. Instead, he walked through in two forms, as if perhaps to illustrate that in his grace, and despite our failings, he would keep both parts of the covenant.

God would not only hold up his part of the covenant. But if and when Abraham missed the mark, God wasn't going to abandon his promises. He wouldn't throw down his oath and say, well, Abe, it's on you. You took a left when you promised to take a right.

No, he would still hold up his own part of the covenant.

And he'd guarantee Abraham's part of the covenant too.

He'd forge Abraham's backup plan right back into the original.