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## SERVANT LEADERSHIP FOCUS

A monthly newsletter to promote and stimulate servant leadership ideas & tools into the Viox culture.

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## Transformational Stories

### A Priority Confession

The event that I attended for 72 hours was difficult and challenging for me in many ways. I did not have access to my vehicle, smart phone, email, or even my watch. Part of this focus dealt with self-examination of our own priorities in life. For me, this was the most difficult because I realized that my own priorities were out of line. This was a painful discovery.

Like many people, most of my life revolves around my career. I spend a tremendous amount of time in court, at the office, and even working at home. This work pattern includes the weekend as well. Now, there is nothing wrong with hard work and dedication to your line of work. In fact, I am extremely blessed because God gave me the opportunity to work in an area of society that I truly love. Even though criminal defense is challenging and is fundamentally based on addressing very serious problems, I look forward to going to

work every day. However, I have realized that work is not supposed to be where I had placed it on my priority list. It was placed squarely at position number one. God and my family was a distant second and third and I did not even know it.

The first priority in my life needs to be developing and maintaining a personal relationship with God. This includes getting to know Him and building a trusting relationship on a daily basis. Like our earthly fathers, a strong, caring personal relationship is very important with our heavenly Father.

The second priority for me should be family. We all have different families with different family dynamics. I am blessed to have a loving wife with two young boys. Unfortunately, I have not always put my family in this important second priority

position. For the most part, I have spent too much time at the office instead of at home. My boys, ages 6 and 11 months, are growing fast. One cannot regain the time lost with your children as they grow. My 6 year old asks me to go to the hunting land almost every week. He will be an outdoorsman like his father. You can bet that he and I will be heading to the woods on a regular basis from here on out.

Thirdly, as least for me, is my work. I feel blessed to be able to enjoy the career I have chosen. I am also able to help those in need on a daily basis. I am sure that is what God wants me to do at this point in my life.

This readjustment in priorities will take some effort and time as well. I will not be 100% successful because I am human. Like all of us, I have character defects that get in the way from time to time. But, I am glad that at the age of 38, I am at least aware of what I need to do to get life's priorities in line. I am also willing.

# If You Don't Prioritize Your Life, Someone Else Will

By  
Greg McKeown

"A 'no' uttered from the deepest conviction is better than a 'yes' merely uttered to please, or worse, to avoid trouble." So said Mahatma Gandhi, and we all know how his conviction played out on the world stage. But what is less well known is how this same discipline played out privately with his own grandson, Arun Gandhi.

Arun grew up in South Africa. When he was a young boy, he was beaten up twice: once for being too white and once for being too black. Still angry, Arun was sent to spend time with his grandfather. In an interview with Arun, he told me that his grandfather was in demand from many important people, yet he still prioritized his grandson, spending two hours a day for 18 months just *listening* to Arun. It proved to be a turning point in Arun's life.

I had the opportunity to apply Gandhi's example of prioritization to my own life, hours before one of my daughters was born. I felt pressure to go to a client meeting the next day. But on this occasion, I knew what to do. It was clearly a time to be there for my wife and child. So, when asked to attend the meeting, I said with all the conviction I could muster...

"Yes."

To my shame, while my wife lay in the hospital with my hours-old baby, I went to the meeting. Afterward, my colleague said, "The client will respect you for making the decision to be here." But the look on the clients' faces mirrored how I felt. *What was I doing there?!* I had not lived true to Gandhi's saying. I had said "yes" to please.

As it turned out, exactly *nothing* came of the client meeting. And even if the client *had* respected my choice, and key business opportunities *had* resulted, I would still have struck a fool's bargain. My wife supported me and trusted me to make the right choice under the circumstances, and I had opted to deprioritize her and my child.

Why did I do it? I have two confessions:

**First, I allowed social awkwardness to trump making the right decision.** I wasn't *forced* to attend the meeting. Instead, I was so anxious to please that even awkward silent pauses on the phone were too much for me. In order to stop the social pain, I said "yes" when I knew the answer should be "no."

**Second, I believed that "I had to make this work."** Logically, I knew I had a choice, but emotionally, I felt that I had no choice. That one corrupted assumption psychologically removed many of the actual choices available to me.

**What can you do to avoid the mistake of saying "yes" when you know the answer should be "no"?**

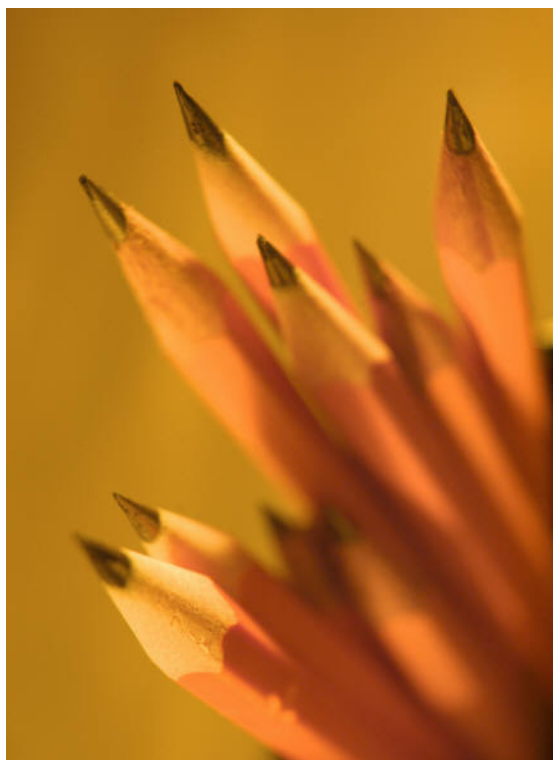
**First, separate the decision from the relationship.** Sometimes these seem so interconnected, we forget there are two different questions we need to answer. By deliberately dividing these questions, we can make a more conscious choice. Answer the question, "What is the right decision?" and *then* "How can I communicate this as kindly as possible?"

**Second, watch your language.** Every time we say, "I *have* to take this call" or "I *have* to send this piece of work off" or "I *have* to go to this client meeting," we are assuming that previous commitments are nonnegotiable. Every time you use the phrase "I have to" over the next week, stop and replace it with "I choose to." It can feel a little odd at first — and in some cases it can even be gut-wrenching (if we are choosing the wrong priority). But ultimately, using this language reminds us that we are making choices, which enables us to make a *different* choice.

**Third, avoid working for or with people who don't respect your priorities.** It may sound simplistic, but this is a truly liberating rule! There are people who share your values and as a result make it natural to live your priorities. It may take a while to find an employment situation like this, but you can set your course to that destination immediately.

Saying "yes" when we should be saying "no" can seem like a small thing in the moment. But over time, such compromises can create a life of regrets. Indeed, an Australian nurse named Bronnie Ware, who cared for people in the last 12 weeks of their lives, recorded the most often-discussed regrets. At the top of the list: "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me." Next on the list: "I wish I hadn't worked so hard" and "I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings." (Read the Top 5 Regrets [here](#)).

We may not develop Gandhian levels of courage immediately, but surely we can do better than having to look back on our lives and regret that we lived by someone else's priorities.



## Setting Life Priorities

By Marshall Goldsmith

*I am asked quite often by the executives I coach to give my best advice on how to set "big" life priorities. Here is a short synopsis of what I suggest.*

Imagine that you are on your deathbed. Here comes your last breath. But just before you take it, you are given a beautiful gift -- the ability to go back in time and give advice to the person reading this column.

What advice would the wise old you -- who knows now what's really important and what isn't - have for the you that is reading this column.

Whatever you are thinking now: just do that. In terms of performance appraisals, this is the only one that really matters. If the old person on the deathbed thinks that you're the right thing -- you are. If that old person thinks that you're screwing up -- you are.

These three themes emerge often in the advice given by older people who are actually facing death:

**1. Find happiness and meaning now** -- not next week, next month or next year. The great Western disease is "I will be happy when..."

When I have the BMW! The condo! The promotion!" Don't get so wrapped up in looking at what you don't have -- that you fail to appreciate what you do have.

**2. Love your friends and family.** When you look around your deathbed, no fellow employees are going to be waving goodbye. Understand that friends and family are important. They are the only ones who are and who really matter.

**3. If you have a dream, go for it.** If you don't go for it when you are 35 -- you may not when you are 45, 65 or 85. None of us are going to achieve all of our dreams. If we do, we will just make up new ones. People who at least tried to achieve their dreams are happier with their lives.

If you ever get confused on what really matters, just take a second and check in with that "old you" who is waiting to die. Keep listening to that person's wise advice. You won't regret it later.

### Quotes on Priorities

"Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important."

— Stephen R. Covey

"Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least."

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

"Action expresses priorities."

— Mahatma Gandhi

"The Principle of Priority states (a) you must know the difference between what is urgent and what is important, and (b) you must do what's important first."

— Steven Pressfield



This publication was produced by Michael J. Stabile, Ph.D. at FutureNow, Consulting

Coaching reminders:

Mike is available for individual leadership coaching.

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Empowering  
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...one person  
at a time.



"EVERYTHING RISES OR FALLS WITH LEADERSHIP."  
CULTIVATING THE VIOX WORK CULTURE