

# The Executive Gardener and the Fairy



*Insights  
on leadership for  
life and business*

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First Edition

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## Acknowledgements

Years ago when I started in the work force, my father and I dreamed that one day maybe we could start a business together. Our thoughts meandered from working as consultants to running a leadership bed and breakfast resort.

At one point, we did manage to create a craft business under the name of Going Squirrelly. My father thought that this was a big money making winner, a novelty to beat all novelties. We constructed stained cedar squirrel feeders that were designed in the shape of a feeding box and chair set. The squirrel was to sit at the chair while eating the peanuts from the box. We diligently commenced making over 100 feeders, while my mother patiently watched sawdust fly in every nook and cranny of their home. We had a video and packaged our masterpieces with peanuts, coloured plastic wrap and a decorative bow. Surprise! We sold all of twenty feeders and in the process probably drove my mother squirrelly!

Our entrepreneurial adventures went on hold until my father retired. Shortly thereafter, my passionate journey of trying to lighten up the workplace commenced. I began with my colleagues and students at school. This obsession drove me to continuously research the topics of play, team building and leadership at work. Slowly but surely I established Joie de Vivre, a company devoted to providing short thought-provoking play breaks for the workplace. When I approached my retired executive father about the concept, he looked at me as if I was crazy and responded with, “You’re being a fairy? What’s the purpose? What is the measurable objective?” My father curiously

watched what I was doing, sometimes shaking his head. In time, as he shed the linear conventional executive shell, he realized that what I was doing was what he was really about. He had taught me at home and through his professional example how to live passionately, openly and with a child-like sense of awe and wonder. Now my father has assumed the role of Sparkle, my partner in crime. Together we enthusiastically facilitate and encourage people to take steps towards bringing back the fun and laughter to work, while fostering team building. Who would have thought that our dream would be realized during his retirement as an elf and a fairy!

So thank you, Sparkle, for being a remarkable role model and sharing in the development and growth of the Joie de Vivre message. What would we do without your tailor-made business magic tricks?!

Sparkle and I thank those who constitute our foundations: my mother, my husband and my two boys. Thank you for supporting us while we “do our thing” prancing around in costumes. Boys, it takes courage to say that your mom is a fairy.

I send a very big thank you to Leslie Bell for taking the time out of her busy schedule to edit this parable. You have been gentle, kind and respectful in directing improvements and inspired me with faith and confidence. I couldn't have asked for a better literary midwife. Thanks to Kathy Lenz for scouring the text for the double/triple check edit. You have an amazing eye for detail.

Thank you to Jill Benko for developing and maintaining Joie de Vivre's website. Your artistry is filled with the magic.

Last, thank you to all who have encouraged and supported the Joie de Vivre message whether

you have hired us, or just seriously listened to us. Most importantly, we thank everyone who has tried to implement playful techniques which celebrate, serve, encourage, listen and respond to colleagues in attempts of creating more loving, supportive, positive and fun work environments.



## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to Olga and Frank who persevered in love for over 46 years and to Mark, Matthew and Andrew, the fellows in my life who show me daily how to live in loving servant leadership.





## **Preface**

In today's fast paced, stressful world, where demands in the work place are ever increasing, leaders must constantly be examining their own values and priorities while inspiring staff and maintaining incredibly high levels of productivity and quality. During this process, business life has become less than enjoyable for many at the office. A common statement can be heard echoing through the corporations of America, "Work is no longer fun!" Moreover, this is spilling over into home lives as people frantically try to balance priorities.

At Joie de Vivre, we are passionately committed to supporting maintaining balance, creativity, flow and fun at work while enhancing productivity. We believe that this can be done every day around the water-cooler. People need to give themselves permission and support each other to take the time to talk and laugh. In addition, simple gimmicks, magic tricks, art activities, jokes and other easy to implement motivating and inspiring tools can help this process.

The key to this office dilemma is: people need to give themselves permission to have fun and playfully communicate, stretching the boundaries of traditional business restraints. How? It comes from within our attitudes. Before we can truly relax and flow creating an environment of playful synergy, we must look at what motivates us. Moreover, the question becomes can we adjust our mindsets and expectations to better serve and inspire all those around us?

This thought-provoking parable was written to address the issue of attitude. So often we are asked today during workshops, how do you want to

be remembered? Furthermore, in today's world when there are increasing numbers of baby boomers approaching retirement, people are asking themselves, "What's it all about Alfie?" This story was written to address these questions. It is about a retired executive, who not only is faced with the door of retirement, but a haunting question from his daughter Olivia, "Would you do it all over again? Would you give more to your family than to the office?" The hope is that the reader will follow Frank's strategies of self-examination, fine tuning his or her own priorities, releasing tensions and inhibitions, bringing forth a sense of flow, fun, creativity, balance and above all service.

Ultimately, once we loosen the knots of tension and negativity, we can fly to great heights, supporting each other, just like the grace and sense of service found in our own Canadian Geese. Synchronicity is attainable; we just need to remain open to creating it!

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## **Approaching the Brass Ring**

“Olivia, I only have a couple of minutes to spare. I thought I would try to get a hold of you while I had a minute.” Frank quickly spoke, examining his day planner. It was nine o’clock in the morning on February first and he knew by calling his daughter in London, England, he would be catching her at a good time. She was a chip off the old block and kept a very busy, complex schedule. Like her dad she was a master of multitasking and hated to waste time. The 65 year-old executive looked out at the magnificent growing Toronto cityscape from his thirtieth story window.

“Gee Dad, what a nice surprise to be interrupted with your call. I needed the break. What’s up?”

“I have to make a decision Olivia, It is one that I’ve put off. My boss has approached me to give my retirement date. I can’t believe it’s here! I know you said you wanted to be here for the event, so what would be the best travel time for you?” While he waited for a response, Frank opened his Microsoft Outlook mail file, noting that he already had forty new e-mails which needed attention since he last shut down at eight o’clock the night before.

“What were you thinking?” asked Olivia.

“I don’t know, all I know is that I do want you there, so when can you come?” said Frank impatiently. “How about the beginning of April? It’s your birthday April first, and we’ll be able to celebrate. That will give you enough time to plan,”

“Sure, sounds good. Now I’m thinking that wouldn’t it be great if we asked all your friends over for a big retirement party. Dad, you know so many people who I know would want to be there to

share in this momentous event. We could have a cocktail party in the backyard. I could arrange for my friend to cater, let's see and the rental of party equipment could be handled by..." Olivia was almost hyperventilating, as her excitement mounted thinking about a great party she would hold for her father. They hadn't really kicked up their heels since her mother died of cancer three years previously. They were still reeling from the trauma of her illness and death. Both of them had been functioning in a rather trancelike state. This would be an opportunity to celebrate.

"Olivia stop right there! Now! I know you mean well but I'm looking forward to a quiet departure. I don't want any big fanfare. It's time to close this chapter in my life and move on. As a matter of fact, my boss wanted to arrange an intimate dinner party for my immediate working team and for any family. This is fine for me. I know you're well intentioned, but you know I haven't seen many of these people since your mother's funeral and the bottom line is I just can't handle it."

Frank always approached any issue in a pragmatic fashion. The minute things got too emotional, Olivia noticed that her dad clicked a mental switch. Instantly control reined. He turned into Spock from Star Trek, a total logic based thinking machine. Years ago, this enraged Olivia and caused her to be stubborn, defiantly initiating wars of words. She knew exactly the words that would push all his buttons and, bingo, in a matter of minutes they would be in a huge argument.

Now almost middle aged, married and experienced with the opposite sex, Olivia had come to accept this in her father. She realized his reactions were reflective of his generation and a

male problem solving style. She also realized that he was all she had since her mom was gone. Was it worth fighting? No. The bottom line was this was his retirement and not hers. If he wanted to finish off with a quiet celebration, so be it.

“Sure dad that would be fine. I’ll come out on March 26. That will give us a few days to visit, assuming that your final work day and dinner party will be March 30. I will have to leave for London after dinner. Brian and Joseph have plans for my birthday and that will give me enough time to travel and rest.” Olivia answered with efficiency.

“Great! Okay I’d better get going. I have a meeting at 9:30.”

“Talk with you soon,” answered Olivia in a childlike higher pitched voice, adding, “I miss you.”

“Me too,” responded Frank in a matter of fact tone, trying to hide his emotions. He always hated hanging up with his daughter. The click of the receiver left a hollowness in his stomach and an ache in his heart.

The weeks leading up to his retirement were exceptionally busy. Every night Frank met instant deep sleep when his head hit the pillow. He was so busy, he wondered how he was going to finish all the projects before his departure. He hated to leave anything incomplete; closure was of utmost importance to him. In the back of his mind he did speculate about why he might be exceptionally busy. The question that occasionally surfaced was: did he manufacture all this work so that he would not have to think about the looming ending?

## **The Brass Ring**

March 30 arrived with the momentum of a slamming iron door: harsh, final and shocking. This last day at the office took Frank by surprise, as he was much more drained than he anticipated. He was exhausted emotionally and physically. During the past year, his excitement rose as the “brass ring” of retirement was finally in reach. Ironically, on this day when the coveted ring was in his hands, there wasn’t the exhilarating feeling he anticipated. This was a surprise, as he was always in control and predicted outcomes accurately. He was the master of management and strategic planning. He felt like a flat tire.

At five o’clock sharp that day, Frank’s colleagues were assembled in the mahogany paneled board room for the last farewell. Frank’s usual sense of duty to putting closure to every event in his life was not as intense. People assembled with downcast eyes and forced smiles. Although there was a awkward fidgeting amongst the guests as if they couldn’t wait to be dismissed, every person in attendance managed to muster the emotional courage to approach Frank and bestow him with thanks and praise for his work ethic, leadership, enthusiasm, kindness, humour and integrity. It was obvious he was well loved by his team and they were not looking forward to saying goodbye.

Frank’s boss took charge of the tense moment by reflecting on Frank’s stay with their department over the past six years. Handing him a card, he explained that inside was something that he could use towards his two passions, traveling and seeing his daughter and grandson. He ended his presentation with “Frank, you are a true gardener.



Like a master gardener you have nurtured this department, creating a dynamic flourishing culture. You have inspired us all here with your integrity, responsiveness, ability to balance priorities and abundance of initiative. Through your servant leadership you have instilled trust and inspiration amongst all of us here. Thank you. You will be greatly missed.”

Applause and tears released the awkward tension in the room. Frank smiled and felt deep appreciation for the warm words. He looked around the crowd and realized that he had been through a lot with these people. They had initiated and implemented many innovative changes, supported him during Lilly’s illness, and offered friendship. He trusted everyone like family. Just like a family, sometimes, the members took each other for granted. This was one of those warm and fuzzy moments when everyone was a brother or sister.

Frank knew it was his time to speak. Surprisingly, he felt a sense of peace and strength. After taking a very deep breath, Frank addressed the crowd, explaining that his experience in this department was the best possible ending to an exciting career. He gave tribute to each person in the room by simply highlighting how each of them inspired or supported him over the past six years.

He concluded, “Our team was an example of synchronicity. Something you don’t always find. An experience when the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.”

People in the room smiled, nodded and applauded with enthusiasm. Hugs and hand shakes filled the room. In no time, several of the party animals were encouraging everyone to move to the next venue for supper. As everyone poured out,

Olivia and Frank were left, regrouping for the second half of the evening.

“Dad, I am so proud of you. Your speech touched everyone. Wow, you are one class act! I wish Mom was here.”

They embraced and then Frank briskly took charge with a strong and definite command, “Let’s go to the party! We have something to celebrate!”

After a full evening of a six course meal, fine wine, warm memories, and constant laughter, Frank summoned a limousine to take Olivia to the airport. They reminisced over her childhood; chuckling over all their traveling adventures. When they shared their memories of Olivia’s teen years, the conversation took a slight sarcastically humorous turn as they teased each other over who survived the ordeal unscathed.

The day ended with another farewell, hugs and kisses and a silent ride back to the suburbs. Thankfully this time he didn’t have to worry about maneuvering through aggressive drivers on the Highway 401 which sliced through the Greater Toronto area.

The driver was clearly at ease with the intense busy traffic as he wasted no time driving at high speed to Frank’s suburban retreat in Oakville. Frank looked out at the flashing lights of the city, pelting the window. For a moment he felt like he was in a time warp traveling through space. He found himself in a surreal state pondering the day. Retirement! He welcomed it with bitter sweet emotions. In his late thirties the novelty of working full time wore off. He raised a family and rose up the corporate ladder. However, he couldn’t enjoy the benefits he was accumulating due to his demanding workload. At this point he started to

wonder whether all the hard work was worth it if he couldn't enjoy the perks.

Now, he made his final exit and the feeling wasn't so exciting. Everything that he stood for during the last fifty years was over. Oh yes, he was a father, now a grandfather, husband and that had not changed, but, these roles had not given him his full definition of character. No, sadly what defined his sense of being was work. Now it was over.

He needed to regroup, redefine himself and decide what was important in his life. Something Olivia had said to him that day was resonating to his core. She approached him at breakfast and asked, "Dad if you could do it all over again would you have not given so much to the office and more to us?"

He confidently and proudly gave a curt response, "How can you ask this? Of course not! You are asking that I denounce everything that I was, my existence for that past fifty years. No I wouldn't have changed a thing!"

Now hours later, this conversation rang in his ears like a gong. He couldn't escape the incessant repetition of, "Would you do it all over again? Would you give more to your family than to the office?"

The vehicle slowed to a stop in front of his two-story home. He paid the driver and tipped him handsomely. As he walked up his cobblestone entrance, a sense of isolation crept over him. He stood alone, in front of his five bedroom upper middle class suburban home.

He missed Lilly, and he was left with a cold sense of loss and numbness. Before retirement, he washed away these feelings with his obsessive commitment to work. He could no longer hide

behind this shield. His only daughter promptly left after the retirement party, back to her family in England. She was not expected to return until the end of the summer, when her husband's work contract was over. Another layer of isolation blanketed him. The loss of his wife coupled with the arrival of the grim reaper of retirement struck a lone chord in his heart. This was the first time he noticed his home had a quiet echo.

Grabbing a scotch, he retired to his opulent bedroom. He couldn't wait to roll into the silken smooth Egyptian cotton sheets of his king size mahogany canopy bed. Sliding into his sacred retreat from the world, he picked up a business magazine. One sip of scotch, and an attempt to read gave way to a blurred stare at the glossy pages. His eyes welled and emotions percolated in the depths of his regal being. Nothing was penetrating his mind. He turned off the light. A salty tear hit the pillow.

In the solitary silence of his own humility, he lay in the dark of the night. At the end of his last day at work, one question hovered like the steady buzz of a pestering mosquito: Would he change anything if he had to do it all over? The answer to the question needed to be re-examined. Would he change how he handled his career and family life, would he, would he...?

## Renewal

The next day, he woke rested, feeling that in some way he had loosened a tight knot, but there still was a nagging pull at his soul. The question was still ringing in his ears, “Would I change anything, if I was able to do it again?”

Seeing the bright sun insistently beaming through his bedroom blinds, he opened the window to be greeted with the fresh breeze of an unusually warm late spring day. The sounds of the robins and sparrows harkened him to join them. He decided to have his morning coffee outside in his garden, hoping that the earthy spring air and bold sunshine would help clear his head. Sporting his oversized worn terry bathrobe, he trotted downstairs and made himself a coffee and toast with his favourite crunchy peanut butter. What a treat! He was always in a rush for work and could never eat a proper breakfast. Today, the first day of his new life, he could indulge in his childhood delight.

Smacking and crunching his way through his toast, he pondered how food, particularly toast, always tasted better outside in the morning air. He took a deep breath and scanned his yard. Boy, was it a mess!

He always wanted to have a well kept yard but never had the time. Year after year when spring arrived he would say, “This year is the year I am going to make something of my backyard.” He would buy several new plants, edge the borders and on some occasions buy one to two yards of top soil. After a flurry of one to three weeks of spring planting, his work and limited social life would distract him. He’d go back to neglecting his garden.

Today he felt different. Today was the day he was going to make a commitment to follow through on the broken promises of years past. This year's garden was going to be outstanding. Maybe putting his hands into the soil would help distract him from those uncomfortable feelings he was experiencing. He needed a purpose and why not throw himself into his garden?

After washing up, he threw on his oldest torn jeans and stained sweatshirt. Off he went to look for an old pair of shoes or boots. Looking high and low, he could not find any. Impulsively he grabbed his brown brogue Floresheim dress shoes and thought, "Well I guess I won't be needing these any more!" Quickly he tied them up and proceeded to march out to his disheveled garden.

His flower bed was a massive tangle of dried out dormant shrubs and perennials in a matted, muddy bed of clay soil. Where should he start?

First, he decided to cut away any dead or old growth, as this would give him the room to till the soil. Sleeves rolled up, gardening shears in hand, Frank proceeded to cut away all the overgrowth. A half hour later, he found himself in a meditative state, humming to himself, seeing that he was slowly making headway.

Suddenly, he thought he heard a squeak. Several minutes later, he heard a more distinctive high pitched "Ouch!"

Frank stopped and shook his head. He thought to himself, "What was that? Am I imagining this? Am I hearing voices?" After stopping for a few minutes, he resumed his work.

"Stop that! You keep snipping at my wings!" came from base of a dormant spirea shrub. The voice was soft high pitched and barely audible.

Frank froze. Bewildered, he bent down, squinted and carefully removed the dried branches. To his amazement he saw a glimmer of an iridescent light, followed by, “ Now that is better! You need to be more gentle. Stop rushing through this garden like a bull in a china shop!”

In seconds what appeared in front of his eyes left him awestruck. At the base of the bush was a petite figure an inch and a half high with pink milky skin and shimmering silvery wings. She was wearing a dress made from white rose petals, trimmed with tiny blue forget-me-nots. Golden threads were wrapped around her eighth of an inch waist. In her light blonde hair, was a crown of lily of the valley and touches of orange spirea blossoms. Could he believe his eyes? Was this a fairy?

Hands on her hips, bare feet planted firmly on the hard ground, this minute being started to give Frank an earful, “Don’t you know how to respect living things? Look about you, everything here has a right to exist just as you do.”

Frank summoning the courage, looked around making sure he was not being watched, whispered to the little being, “Who are you and what are you doing here?”

“I sir, am Lily. That is Lily with one l not two. I have lived in your garden for years. I am a fairy, wee folk, little person. Yes, I am what many humans say does not exist. I live here with the other wee folk. I must say that you have been quite the neglectful gardener over the years, however, that hasn’t bothered us much. You see we prefer natural wild gardens to the overly manicured, pesticide filled flower patches. Mind you, your lack of attention has caused some of our favourite delicate flower homes to be choked out by bully-plant

weeds. By the way, please do not call us fairies; we do prefer to be called wee folk”

Blinking and rubbing his eyes, Frank couldn't believe his eyes or ears. Here was a magical creature who was talking to him. What was more astounding was that she had the same name as his late wife, Lilly. This left a deep sense of longing and spiritual connectedness to this tiny being. In some strange way she even looked and reminded him of his wife Lilly. His eyes remained fixed on Lily.

Before he could say anything else, Lily took things into her own hands and started giving Frank direction as to how he should begin his garden. She was obviously sent to him for a reason.

“First, Frank, don't just stand there staring. You need to gently remove all the dried plants, roots and branches. Then I would like you to send out a mental message to my fellow little people and let them know that you are about to dig. After, I want you to very gently start digging into the soil, carefully lifting it and turning it over. The whole garden patch needs to be cultivated. After you have done this, you need to add new enriched top soil, peat moss and manure.”

Without warning he felt himself drifting off, he could feel the warmth of the sunshine on his back and the cool morning air encircling his thin bare legs, as he stood next to his mother. “Frank,” she said emphatically, “You must learn to tell the difference between a weed and a plant. The hardest part is that sometimes, at the start of growth and after the winter, weeds often look like plants you want to keep. Also, sometimes a gardener wants to keep a plant that some might consider a weed, but



the gardener may think that it has gardening artistic merit.”

He remembered responding to his mother that this gardening work was tricky.

His mother quickly retorted, “Yes, it is Frank. You need to develop your knowledge of plant attributes. You need to be observant. You also need to figure out what you think is attractive in a garden. One man’s weed is another man’s treasure.”

Momentarily he was back in his own yard, feeling confused by his flashback.

A soft high pitched voice pierced his ears, “Frank, like I was saying, you want to think of this flower bed as an inspirational treasure; a refuge that you will design and nurture. As you watch it grow, it will bring you much satisfaction and comfort.”

As quick as the pull of a trigger, Frank instantly flashed to a later point in time, the birth of his daughter, Olivia. Oh, what a magical moment, when he heard her first cry. It was that second that elicited a profound sense of love and nurturing for his new treasure. He was determined to be the best provider for her. He certainly did that financially. His business accomplishments brought forth the income that left Olivia not wanting for anything, or so he had thought. The question she posed to him at retirement came back and clanged in his ears, “Dad if you could do it all over again would you have not given so much to the office and more to us?” In a moment he began questioning his past again. Did he provide her with the emotional nurturing presence? Did he really take the time to watch and appreciate the growth of his only little flower, Olivia?

Lily observed Frank staring off into the distance squinting as if he was trying to focus on something. Shaking her head, she raised her voice

to gently disturb him, “You look so forlorn and lost.”

“Yesterday I was so sure of myself. I was the master of leadership, management and strategic planning. I controlled departments in large corporations. I was a success by all business standards. Today I am retired. I now stand here in my garden and I feel helpless. I am alone. My family is gone and my daughter haunted me with a question which has shaken my world, ‘Would I have done things differently?’ I don’t know! To say yes would be to deny my existence for all those years. To top it all off, here I have set a goal to improve my garden and I don’t really know what to do. For all my power and success, I don’t even know how to do one of the most basic things: how to plant and grow a flourishing garden. I miss my wife, I miss my daughter, I feel helpless and I am questioning what I did for fifty years. Was I really successful before? Please help me!”

Before he knew it, a large tear tumbled down Frank’s cheek and fell washing away the dirt from Lily’s delicate feet.

Instantly Lily’s frail frame glowed white with deep compassion for this distraught gentleman.

“Oh Frank,” Lily said shaking her head, “I guarantee that I will help you but first you have to promise me something. I am going to ask you some questions. You must promise to answer the questions in writing and place the answers under this old piece of driftwood. The day after, I will meet you back here in the garden and we will talk. My questions are: Frank what is at the foundation of your attitude? What motivates you?”

“You just gave me two questions! You said one!”

“I gave you two because they are linked. Think Frank. Think!”

Before he could have the last word, he saw Lily doing pirouettes in a clockwise circle around a crimson rose bush. Her glowing white light ring dissipated within several seconds. Lily was gone.

Frank was alone again. His head felt clouded with the deep emotions he had not openly acknowledged in a long time. The last time he felt this degree of heart tugging love, longing, and confusion was years ago when Lilly, his wife was still alive. He took a deep breath and questioned whether he really saw a fairy. In his state of wonder, he continued to finish cleaning up the debris in the garden, secretly hoping that the tiny being would come back.

An hour later, he could feel the hunger pains after all his physical work. His muscles were starting to ache and he craved a warm black coffee. He placed all the garden waste in the “green” paper collection bags and pulled them out to the curb. He then proceeded to go make lunch.

Entering his house, he again noticed how the hush of the spring breeze whispered a renewed fresh life into his large empty house. The ceramic kitchen floor tiles felt particularly cold on his aching hot warm feet. He normally did not enjoy making anything. For years, Lilly always took on the role as the chief chef. He was inept in the kitchen, or so he allowed himself to believe.

Today was different. He was not in a rush. He thought about how Lilly would so expertly assemble the thickest, tastiest, creative sandwiches he ever ate in his entire life. All he would have to do is follow her exuberance! He opened the stainless steel mammoth fridge, and let out a big

sigh. He was grateful to Olivia for insisting that she stock the fridge with his favourite food. Ever since he was a child, a stocked kitchen gave him a sense of security. Furthermore, Frank liked options when it came to eating, particularly when it came to the luxury foods.

Aiming at the counter, he impulsively tossed every possible sandwich item in a heap. Child-like excitement surged and he found his mouth watering in anticipation of the culinary event. Up until now, food was not a priority. After some long break-free days, he would return home starving, ferociously eating every calorie, fat filled and starchy food in sight. During these binges he would resemble a cartoon termite tunneling through a massive redwood, devoid of any consciousness. On other days, he would go to the opposite extreme and eat minimally, two quick pieces of bread with a slice of the first lunch meat in sight. No thought was placed into the making of the consumable, just slap, slap, slap, gulp. The common feature was his unconscious state while ingesting the energy source.

Yes, finally he was going to enjoy planning, preparing and eating his sandwich. He now had the time to actually “experience” lunch. Looking at his mountain of sandwich ingredients, he decided his objective would be to see whether he could include all the items he whipped out of the fridge and create the mother of sandwiches.

He commenced cutting two thick slices of fresh rye bread, a much better choice than the usual white cotton candy stuff. Next, he lined up the four packages of lunch meat, turkey, ham, salami, and roast beef. He carefully layered the turkey on the bottom slice of bread, followed by the ham. It took only a second, mouth filled with saliva, to decide

not to stop there and add slices of salami and roast beef. Havarti cheese was the next layer, covering the protein from corner to corner. Now, he needed to add the other food group, vegetables. He carefully sliced a tomato into paper thin discs, along with a dill pickle, adding some sliced black olives for good measure. The oblong green and red round garnishes added a tantalizing colour to the beast. He could not forget his favourite, iceberg lettuce; no excellent sandwich was complete without the crunchy cold of this delicate green topping. Last, he lathered on Dijon honey mustard and low fat mayonnaise and thoughtfully put away the butter. He didn't need the extra calories (it was amazing how he played games with himself sacrificing one fat item, while adding another). Voila, he crowned his luncheon jewel with the slice of rye.

He couldn't wait to dig into his creation but knew after all this time making it, he was going to take his time when savoring each salty, spicy, crunchy, grain filled bite. This was one lunch that he would not eat on the run. He made a large cup of black drip coffee, took the time to put out a place mat and finally sat at his kitchen table which was capable of seating ten. Taking a deep breath, saliva ready to drip from the corner of his mouth, he bit into his towering sandwich. Oh, nothing tasted so good!

The rest of the day was spent going for a power walk, reading the paper, watching the news and making a pasta dinner with fried garlic shrimp and a simple tomato sauce. He was content and tired on this first day off.

By nine o'clock he retired to his bedroom when the phone rang. It was Olivia, letting him know that she arrived safely from her trip back to

London, England. Her internal clock was thrown off due to the traveling and had spent the night watching late movies, so calling her father at two seemed logical.

Five minutes into the conversation, her only son Joseph, who was now sixteen, and a teenage night hawk, got on the phone. He was anxious to see how his grandfather was doing. Joseph desperately wanted to attend the retirement presentation and dinner, but school assignments got in the way. Monthly, Frank would talk with Joseph giving him advice on school business assignments and sharing stock market information.

“Grandpa, I am so sorry I couldn’t go to your retirement party.”

“Joseph, don’t worry, it would’ve been nice but I understand. Right now the most important thing is for you to get through your studies and do well. You’re just beginning to prepare for your work journey. The foundation you set now must be strong. Your education will help you do this so that you will have more options in the future.”

“Grandpa you know you have had a great career. I only hope that I can do half of what you did. It must have been hard for you to say good-bye to everything that has taken such a large part of your life.”

“Yes Joe, I do feel kind of odd right now. I’m not too sure how I feel. I guess time will tell how I cope with the change in routine. Oh well a new chapter in the book of life.”

The rest of the conversation revolved around the latest stock market news and the latest cars on the market. Joseph’s bond with his grandfather was deep as they shared the same interests and had almost identical personalities. He admired his

grandfather's accomplishments and made it clear his main goal was to be as successful a businessman.

Twenty minutes and the call finished. Frank was back in his solitude. Normally he would grab an office file and fall to sleep brainstorming work issues, but tonight the click of the receiver reminded him of how much he missed his only daughter and grandson. His daughter's question again rang in his ears and seconds later he was pondering his surreal experience in his garden. Was there a fairy? What about those flashbacks? The little person's question: "What motivates you?" All these thoughts swirled in his head.

Tossing and turning he decided that this was not the way he was going to get a full night sleep. His daughter had given him some exquisite parchment paper, a clipboard and a well weighted pen. She suggested he might want to start journaling. So, in the interest of not wasting time and getting tired enough to fall asleep, he started his writing journey. He decided to answer Lily's question.

## **Preparation: Attitude**

The next morning he awoke to find he had fallen asleep with his pen and paper to the side and the lights still on. He read his previous night's work. He'd created several papers with diagrams, and sketches. Upon examination, Frank could see what he had done was responded to the fairy's questions with more questions, excavating the roots of his attitudes. He followed a similar approach which he used in the office when trouble shooting with his staff.

Looking at the last page, he began to shade the areas which most pertained to his attitude while working. Although he would have liked to have thought he was the most positive leader around, he now had to be brutally honest and he could see that he only purely displayed two of the positive attitude traits. He certainly acted in a professional manner and had tons of initiative, but he tended to be a task leader who inconsistently supported or gave to his staff. Instead, he was more concerned that his staff continually gave to him.

He took his four sheets and slipped them into an envelope. Throwing on his robe and his brogue dress shoes, he opened the sliding doors off the kitchen, and stepped out into the biting morning air. He squinted in the glare of the sun as he looked out at his work in progress, his soon-to-be-masterpiece, his garden. Peering beyond his fence, he noted all the neighbours were either at work or busy indoors. Yes, he was going to place his envelope under the driftwood in hopes that he would see the fairy again. He really questioned his sanity for a moment but quickly dismissed his doubts. Even if yesterday's meeting in the garden



was a figment of his imagination, it was getting him to think through his present issues.

He slipped the envelope under the large piece of artistic wood, took a deep breath and sent a thought to the garden, "I am back and have written a response Lily. I hope to see you again!" He gave a sigh and shrugged his shoulders, before heading back into the house for breakfast.

Later that morning he returned to the garden sporting his old jeans, stained sweatshirt and his brogues. He was most anxious to see if the letter was gone. He went to the driftwood and noted that neither the envelope nor the letter had moved. He was disappointed, but then a thought crossed his mind, what did he expect? He began to question the events of the day before, mumbling to himself, "Fairies aren't real, they are a figment of our imagination." He heard the dry remaining branches snap under his feet and secretly, from deep in his heart, he searched for Lily among the remaining dormant leaves.

Giving a big sigh, he decided to get to work. The morning was half over and he had already distracted himself enough with the fairy nonsense. He had a task to accomplish and that was to create the best garden on the block. Lifting a shovel, he turned over a clump. Before long he realized that what he thought was soil was a matted mass of mud. He needed to add new topsoil and peat moss. He could remember his mother and father having a yard or two yards delivered every year. Ceremoniously, they would commence the pilgrimage of wheel barrel load after load from the front of the house to the back garden. His father was always careful not to waste a morsel, scraping and

sweeping every nutritious particle onto shovels which were placed on one of the beds.

Frank went in to phone in an order of four yards of top soil. He managed to get a promise of delivery by the afternoon. In the meantime, he decided to go to the local nursery and pick up several bags of peat moss.

By three o'clock that afternoon, the delivery had been made. Four yards of top soil were dumped on his front driveway. He was taken aback at the size of this mountain of dirt. He wondered if he would have the stamina to move all the black mound. Taking a deep breath, he firmly planted the memories of his parents' as inspiration. He kept repeating, "If they could do it even when they were eighty, so can I."

At ten o'clock, the evening dusk was giving way to the thick black of the night. Frank scraped and swept the last of the black gold into the wheel barrel, following his parent's ritual. Every muscle in Frank's body ached. He found small blisters and calluses from his six hours of work. He hadn't physically worked that hard in years. He was also starving because he had only taken a quick fifteen minute break for a cup of tea and a couple of biscuits at six thirty.

He wheeled all the tools to the back and looked at his freshly turned garden. Taking a deep breath through his nose, he smelled the cleansing freshness of the dark loam. It was too early for the crickets and Frank took in the delicate stillness of the spring evening.

Cravings for a large barbequed steak and beer invaded Frank's being. He remembered how he and Lilly would occasionally have a late night

barbeque. Frank went into his refrigerator to find all the items necessary for his feast.

In minutes he had the barbeque fired up and was enjoying an icy cold beer in a frosty glass. He threw a couple of vacuum packed frozen fillets on the grill, frozen corn in the microwave and fries with garlic bread in the oven.

Collapsing in his lawn chair, he listened to the sizzling steaks as he savored the tingling and slightly bitter taste of his beer, while the pleasant glow of the alcohol embraced his exhausted body. He felt satisfied after his full day of work.

In no time the food was ready. He set his place at the large kitchen table. Tonight he needed to listen to music. For many years he used to soothe his soul after work in the car or at home with blaring classical or jazz tunes, but during the couple of years just prior to his retirement, he seemed to prefer silence. Now his thirst for the smooth, playful sometimes sultry sounds of jazz re-awakened as he placed the latest Diana Krall CD in his stereo. Yes this was going to be a savory feast to remember.

At the end of the CD Frank found himself full and tired lounging on his over sized leather sofa. He left the dishes on the counter. He thought back at how Lilly was always insistent that all the dishes were done and put away before retiring. Frank chuckled at how he would tease her about giving up on her ritual. Taking a deep breath, he swung his legs over the couch to gain momentum to head for his bedroom.

Minutes later, he peeled his clothes off at the base of his bed, then dove into the smooth sheets, nude. He couldn't even think about the effort needed to put pajamas on his aching body. Seconds

later he was snoring with the sheets pulled up over his head.

## **PIRI: Priorities, Integrity, Responsiveness, and Initiative**

The next morning, he woke with a start to find his skin being stroked by the satiny smooth cotton sheets. He felt a sense of freedom. There wasn't the familiar binding he felt from his night clothes. He momentarily wondered where he was and what happened the night before.

His bewilderment was short-lived as the ache of his muscles prevented him from jumping out of bed as usual. In addition, he felt a slight headache from last night's beer. However, even though the rigorous work of the day before certainly left him feeling drained, he was also filled with a great sense of accomplishment.

He slowly moved to the bathroom to conduct his usual morning ritual. A friend of his called it the man's "S" routine: Shit, Shower and Shave." It always amazed Frank how this routine was so important in setting the tone of his day. If he put it off or did not complete each task he did not feel himself.

Once dressed in his old jeans and a sweatshirt, he made coffee and toast. Breakfast in hand, he went out to his garden to examine his previous day's work. The grass was covered with morning dew which dampened his leather house slippers.

As he approached the driftwood, he noticed the envelope he left the day before was moved. His heart fluttered as he wondered if Lily had looked at the sheets he had left in the envelope. Oh, how he hoped that the little creature was not a figment of his imagination. He desperately wanted to show off

his work to someone. He needed to connect with the beautiful creature, if only one more time.

Looking down at the driftwood piece, he could tell it was an illusion and that nothing was touched. Giving a sigh of disappointment, he closed his eyes and from the depths of his heart he imagined a bright light, Lily's frail image, and sent a wish out to the universe that he might see her one more time. Then he took a deep breath and slowly let it go through his mouth, counting to ten.

When he opened his eyes, he saw a sudden flash in his peripheral vision. Closing his eyes and shaking his head, he opened his eyes to see the same flash. In seconds, several more flashes happened, followed by a high pitched humming sound. To his wonderment, there at his feet, Lily dressed in her white rose petals, trimmed with tiny blue forget-me-nots. Frank grinned enormously and felt a child-like energy pulsing through his body.

"Lily, it's you!" Frank yelled. "I didn't think that I would see you again."

"Frank, really, do you think I would abandon you? Remember that I said I would see you the day after you placed your answer under the driftwood. You placed your package yesterday and today is the day after," Lily impishly responded with a grin.

"Yes, you are right. I guess I am so used to having people answer me immediately that I've become rather impatient."

"So you sent me drawings. Interesting. Let's go back to my initial question, what motivates you? Your first diagram looks like a motivation flower, rooted in attitude. What do the petals on your flower represent? You didn't tell me that. You answered

my question with more questions. You are a playful sort!”

“Well, Lily, when you asked me those questions I couldn’t help but go back to my roots which were really nurtured through my business experience. Moreover, as a long time manager I would often ask these questions of my employees. So I decided to ask these questions of myself.”

“I see,” responded Lily nodding. “Tell me more.”

“I have always seen four elements that comprise a person’s attitude: priorities, integrity, responsiveness and initiative. PIRI!

Frank continued, “Each of these elements can be broken into two polar issues which in turn can be identified by a simple question which asks a person to choose between two choices: Are you either a or b?”

“Interesting,” said Lily, “So are you saying that each attitude element can be determined by asking a question of choice between two characteristics?”

“Yes, precisely.” Frank nestled his mug of coffee on the soil and started to feel an energetic enthusiasm brew. He took the package of damp paper and pulled out the first page. Using it for reference, he showed Lily the four questions with the corresponding topics.

## Priorities

“You see Lily, under the topic of priorities the question is: Do you place more importance on tasks or people?”

“So Frank what about you? How would you answer this question?”

Frank blinked, momentarily stopping his bulldozing commentary. “Ummm, I hate to admit this I tended to be a ‘black or white’ thinker throughout my life. In addition, I was so caught up with accomplishments that I was usually a task person. Oh, sure, I was known as a relatively pleasant charming person around the office, but if I am honest with myself, I see that often the grooming of relationships was for the sole purpose of achieving a task. I guess you might say I was superficially interested in people. If emotions or friendships started to interfere with the positive outcome of a task, then I turned off my people switch and pushed for the results, no matter what it took.”

“Now that you’ve had time to think this over, have you changed your perspective?” asked Lily.

“Yes. Yes I have. You know, as I ended my career I was finding my priorities were changing. Now that I am out of the work force and taking a hard look at myself, I have to say it isn’t a matter of either/or. It’s all about balance. It’s all about “and”. Companies are run by people who identify, create, plan, organize and implement tasks which meet the specific goals outlined by the staff and owners. The people are there to steer the cart and the horse (the task). You can’t put the task before the people; they must work together in synchronistic harmony to

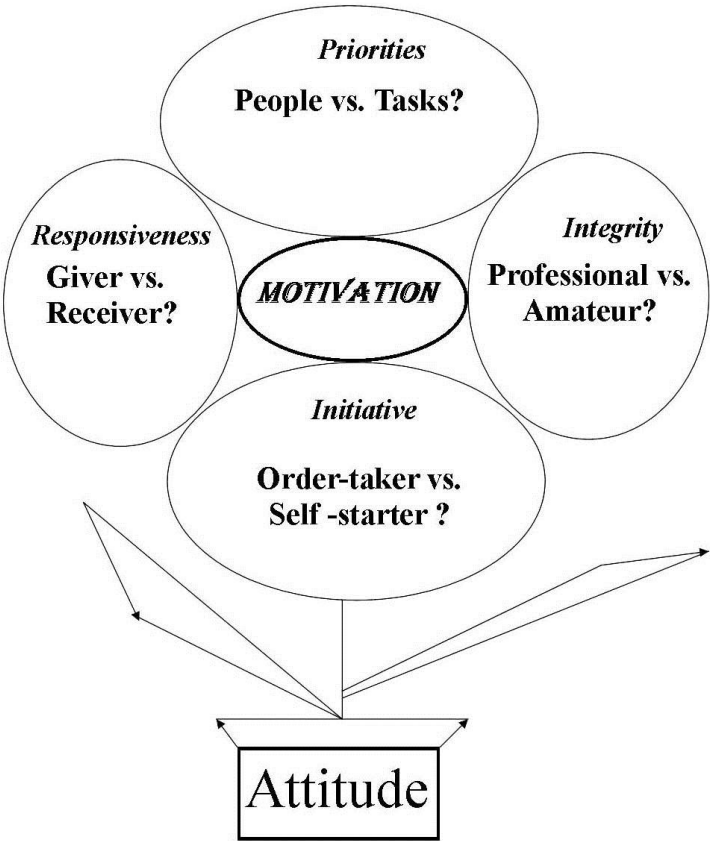


cover any ground. Too often people forget that a company or an organization is inanimate and, as a result, they lose perspective. The task or results become most important and the needs of the individual are sacrificed. Often this ends with depleted morale and lower productivity.”

“Really Frank, that’s interesting. So do people end up acting against their wishes or losing their passion and commitment when just the task is considered?” asked Lily with a very puzzled look.

“Yes, Lily. As a matter of fact, this often shuts down any creative problem solving and leads to very linear dry answers to questions which can cause further difficulties for a company. Actually, I can remember a story that addresses this issue. Would you like to hear it?”

“Sure Frank, let me take a seat on this rose petal.” Lily spread her iridescent wings and flew up to the nearest rose petal, leaning up against the stem.



“Lily I call this story **A Round Peg in a Square Hole**, began Frank.

A very competent and dedicated technician excelled in his work. Unfortunately, he had reached the top of his pay scale and there was absolutely no room for a financial increase without being appointed to a manager’s position. After some discussion with the individual, it was agreed that he would accept a manager’s position and was awarded a salary increase. The technician was rather hesitant but wanted the increase in salary. After several months, the individual became less productive and depressed. His negativity was affecting not only himself but all the staff who had any communication with him. He was also afraid to say anything to his superior for fear of losing his job. Finally, his superior discussed the situation and managed to change his classification back to that of a technician. But before finalizing the situation, the superior convinced the Human Resources Department to increase the level of classifications and remuneration for the technician by explaining how the position was of far more importance than originally perceived. This was a new precedent for technical positions throughout the company.

Productivity went up, as well as morale, throughout the department.”

“I see. So in this case, initially it would appear that there were attempts at trying to solve the problem by simply following the standard procedure: promote with a change to a management position and increased pay. Unfortunately, this job was not appropriate for this employee, so there were negative consequences. It was only after management thought about the employee in a profound way, that they realized they needed a creative solution which would accurately address the needs of the technician,” Lily summarized with a sense of confidence.

“Yes, initially ignoring the person in this case was a disaster,” said Frank nodding.

## **The Apple Orchard Matrix**

“So you see, Lily, when you look at my next page, I had a brainstorm last night thinking about you and the garden and came up with my own matrix classifying organizations based on the degree of people versus task focus. When examining the top right quadrant, you have a group or organization which is driven by the ego; I call it the Bad Apple Orchard. It is a place where the bad apple, ego motivated person ends up tainting the whole group with his or her self-centered concentration. The mission of the company is ignored and people are acting out of their own agendas without concern to anyone else. Once this starts, this egotistical mentality often permeates the whole organization. The result is a group of bean counting, competitive SAPs (Self Absorbed People). The ultimate motivating result is the win for the ego.”

“Frank, did you ever find yourself in this quadrant?”

“Over my career, yes, I can honestly say that I did find myself getting suckered into this mindset on occasion. Actually, Lilly, my late wife, also used to see the changes in me and listen to my stories around the dinner table. She was wonderful at pointing out when I started to turn into a SAP! Her intuition and wonderful gentle way, inspired me to take action and nip this in the bud.”

## Apple Orchard Matrix

	Low People	High People
Low Task	Bad Apple Orchard <b>Ego</b>	Country Club Apple Orchard <b>Elitism</b>
High Task	Lone Apple Orchard <b>Dictator</b>	Premium Apple Orchard <b>Team</b>

Lily watched Frank stare off into the distance in a light trance state. She imagined Frank desperately missed the love of his life. Several minutes passed and Frank was back looking at her with a funny, here-I- am-again look.

“The quadrant to the right shows the Country Club Apple Orchard. It is an environment that is elitist based. Here, people have low regard for the task prescribed by the organization. The most important aspect of working here is that everyone has a good time. Unlike the ego driven environment, people are concerned with each other and their well-being, which is good, but they sacrifice productivity in exchange for the path of least resistance or pampering. Usually, what happens here is that the group insulates itself and becomes this collective ego, forming a mass of SAPS. It encourages the “have” versus “have not”

mentality. The result is that staff win, but to the exclusion of management. It often places the staff in opposition to the owners of the business.”

“And you? Have you been in this type of environment?” asked Lily.

“Yes, I have. It’s awkward as the collective ego bears great peer pressure.”

“It must be a fun environment! A playful place just like what we cultivate in our gardens,” exclaimed Lily.

“Yes, but remember, Lily, the fun starts to get boring when there is little purpose and a minor sense of accomplishment,” cautioned Frank. “The novelty of working in a fun workplace wears thin when there is no direction. I have found these environments frustrating and when in these circumstances, I tend to react and to want to lean towards the third type of quadrant, the Lone Apple Orchard.”

Lily looked pensive with her hand on her knee propping up her head. “I guess you are really a task person and find this environment frustrating.”

“Yes, Lily. Unfortunately, I swing the other way to react to the excessiveness of the good time. In the Lone Apple Orchard there is little regard for people but high regard for the task. Here a sole dictator runs the ship, leaving everyone quaking in fear. I call this the Lone Apple Orchard, because this type of leadership generates a tone of isolation, defeat, competition and frustration. Everyone ends up acting in isolation. The result is a win for the company to the exclusion of any feeling or regard of the employees.”

“My goodness Frank, if you counteracted the elitist attitude with the attitude of a dictator, you must have been received with resentment from the

country club members and there would have been high levels of tension!”

“Yes, Lily, you are right. During these times I would come home and be exhausted. It was not the most effective way of working. It would often feel like there was a constant push and pull game going on in the office. I would also come home with bags of anger which I would tend to release at home by being grouchy or withdrawn. I often reached a state of silent simmering which my family could not penetrate.”

“So, Frank, did you ever work in the Premium Apple Orchard Environment?” asked Lily as she readjusted herself on the leaf.

“Yes, Lily. They were the best times in my career. I am sorry to say that it didn’t happen often. This last quadrant represents the type of environment where people look beyond themselves and prioritize others, while staying true to the tasks at hand. It gives an equal balance towards the task and the staff, ensuring that the results achieved are good for the company and the individuals. To use the Steven Covey term, it is a win - win situation for everybody – employee to manager to shareholder. This type of workplace fosters Robert Greenleaf’s servant leadership management style. Leaders support, listen, nurture, encourage and share with their team. Members on the team feel a sense of equality and unconditional acceptance. As a result, everyone is relaxed while working with a degree of healthy tension. Creativity abounds and productivity exceeds the sum of the parts, creating a flowing synergetic momentum.”

“Frank this sounds like a fabulous, fun, inspiring workplace! Gee who would want to leave?”

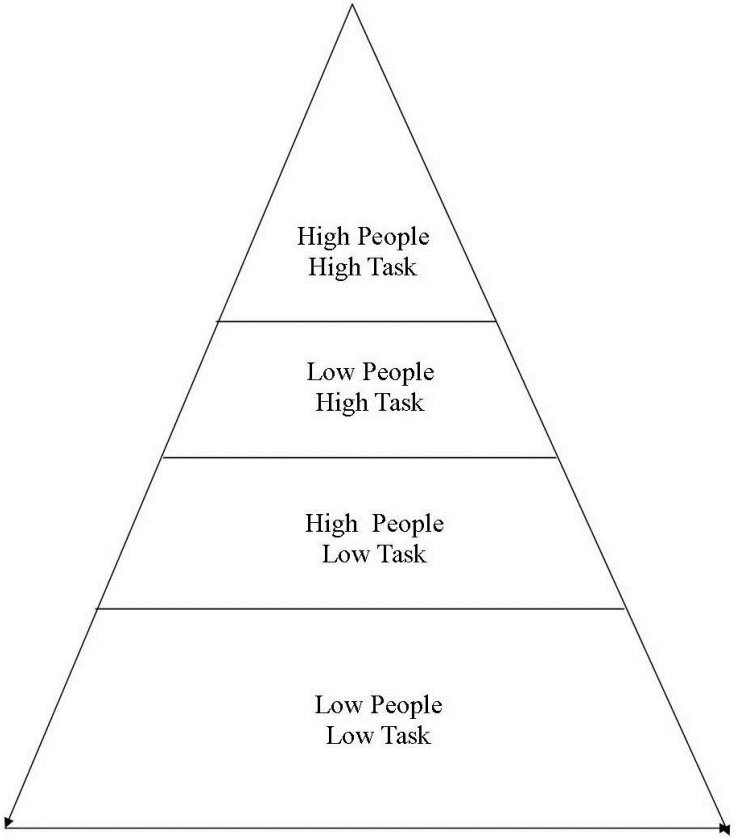


“Actually, in this type of environment, people keep their work in perspective and make sure that they get the proper rest and relaxation so that they are working effectively. There is not the stress and the backbiting that is found in the other three environments, so that people are accomplishing more in a shorter period of time. The wonderful fall-out is that when the employees return home to their families they are happy. This promotes more support and positive energy at individuals’ homes. I can remember Lilly and I were our happiest when I was working in these situations.” Frank had a big smile and a dance to his eyes, as his warm memories returned.

“Lily, if you look at my hierarchy of desirability, you can see what is most desirable is the high task high people driven quadrant; the Premium Apple Orchard. The least desirable is the Bad Apple Orchard founded in the Ego mentality.”

The morning cloud cover started to dissipate. Frank could feel the hot sun shining on his face. Lily’s gossamer wings twinkled and reflected prisms of colour throughout the drab garden.

## Hierarchy of Desirability



## Integrity

“Lily the next question I would ask my staff involved integrity. I would ask, Are you a professional or an amateur?”

“How did people respond? Did some think that you were speaking of their personal style?” asked Lily, showing her wisdom.

“Yes, you are right. Many wanted to say professional because that is what looks good and is expected, but, this point is not superficial. It isn’t just the “talk”, it’s the “walk”. This element boils down to integrity.”

Lily with a bright look on her face chimed in, “I guess this element deals with the ethics of action and thought.”

Frank grinned, “Exactly. It is an attitude based on the following values: honesty, trust, respect and fairness. Moreover, all these values need to be consistently present to reflect a professional attitude.”

Lily looked perplexed saying, “Gee Frank, is this not hard when many people are in competition with each other?”

“Yes you are right again! Sometimes what is most difficult is when people see others as a threat. A true professional is secure within his or her being and instead of putting another down, he or she goes out of the way to support and celebrate the strengths of others.”

“My, Frank, that takes a lot of maturity!” piped up Lily.

“Maturity... you’re not kidding! It took me a while to learn this lesson! Let me share with you a story of what happened to me many years ago at Chrysler’s. I call it, **Dissolving The Threat:**

I had just joined a new group of 10 to work on system designs and improving efficiency in the corporation. I noticed that there was a lot of reluctance to sharing information and people were generally rather cold and indifferent. One day, the manager called a meeting and said to the group that we were not working to our maximum efficiency and effectiveness. More important, the manager said that it appeared that no one was enjoying their job. After asking a few direct questions, it was revealed that there was a fear throughout the group that the other guy was out to get his job or was trying to hold back so that he would look better than his peer. It was then agreed that we would share our ambitions, fears and objectives openly and honestly. A remarkable thing happened. To everyone's amazement it was discovered that no two people had the same goal and aspiration. It was further discovered that each was able to help the other achieve his goal because of overlapping skills and interests. The team bonded and pledged to help one another achieve their goals in the most expeditious and professional manner possible. The group soon gained a widespread reputation of

being very professional and service oriented. Promotions came rapidly and each person prospered financially and personally. Many years later, I followed up on each of the team members and found that every one of them became very successful senior individuals in their respective corporations. Many of them continued to be life long friends.”

“Wow, Frank and to think that this synergy was built on a simple session of honesty! It’s amazing all the subplots and misconceptions people can dream up in their own heads,” responded Lily. “Now, what about you, Frank, do you think that you acted as a professional or an amateur?”

“Lily, I tried every day to act with integrity. I am sure there may have been times when some people’s interpretation may have been to question my sense of professionalism, but I can honestly say that I made every attempt to be as honest, fair, trusting and respectful in all my circumstances. The tough question is, Lily, whether there were times when I may have tried to use the human techniques of rationalization to justify my actions. That is the slippery slope that many of us humans find ourselves sliding on.”

Lily looked deep in thought. She continued to intently look up at Frank.

“You know, Lily, the topic of trust makes me think about another story from my career. It happened many years ago and it is a terrific example of trust from a manager after an employee

had unfortunately made a bad decision and broken the trust,”

“Yes, I guess that is another big issue how to deal with people who break your trust. Forgiveness is very difficult and sometimes it feels nearly impossible to rebuild. What happened?”

Frank took a deep breath. “Yes, sometimes we have to look beyond the surface and ask why trust has been broken. An old friend of mine used to say that every person’s action is based on either love or fear. By looking beyond the surface one can see that more often than not the person who has broken trust is not trying to be nasty but attempting to help or protect himself/herself or those he or she loves. The manager in this story, with patience and forgiveness allowed for the rebuilding of trust. I call this one **Love and Management.**”

“A manager in a large corporation embezzled funds. The employee was finally caught. Now you would think that the person would have been immediately fired. However, the president of the company took the individual aside and asked why he stole the funds. The president continued with further probing and discovered a number of things. The fellow was having serious financial problems at home which were out of control. He was also very unhappy about his job and did not like the work that was assigned. The president then decided that the individual needed help. He transferred the staff member to a

different position, one which was clearly more in line with his skill qualifications and interests. This employee was given a raise in salary. A pay back scheme was worked out so that all the money taken was eventually paid back with interest. The president also provided him with consulting advice on how to get his personal finances back on track. This person, who had stolen from the company, went on to be one of the most senior persons in the company and a most reliable, trustworthy and respected individual in the company.”

Frank squinted into the distance, pondering the story. He would always remember these two individuals, and how their situation gave him a working example of the meaning of trust.

“Lily, professionalism doesn’t stop with integrity. It also involves high levels of competency. If you are incompetent the trust level between you and others decreases. A true professional knows his or her limitations and does whatever he or she can to continuously develop the necessary skills. An important element of being a professional is judgment. A person needs to know where and how to obtain the necessary skills and support to compensate for his or her shortfall. Together, competency and good judgment fosters reciprocal confidence among employees and between employees and customers. I can think of a really tough day in my career when I had to fire a

young man because of his lack of judgment. Let me tell you, **The Haunting Story of George:**

I was working with a renowned management consulting firm in the early seventies, responsible for a consulting team that would provide management and technical solutions to a variety of clients. George, an up and coming young consultant was assigned to develop solutions for several clients over a period of a year. Each project and client was different in nature but all required computer expertise. George was a highly qualified individual. He had a university degree and an extensive background of computer courses, and a warm personality which conveyed a positive presence. George was articulate in all forms of communication, but had one problem, he could never complete an assignment. He would procrastinate and give excuses to both the client and me, the manager, as to why he could never complete the full project. I continuously gave him advice on how to develop time management techniques and apply closure skills. Yes, he worked very hard putting in hours of overtime and he was so amiable, but, in case after case, my advice went on deaf ears and I would still have to sit with him and virtually complete every job. We



were losing money on the costing of the jobs. After a full year of coaching and encouraging George, I finally had to make the dreaded decision to fire him. It was so difficult for me as I really liked this chap and wanted him to succeed, but unfortunately I had no alternative. George was so shocked and devastated, that he spent the next year not knowing what to do. A deer caught in the headlights.

Frank took a deep breath and stretched his arms high, trying to shake off this memory. He always felt he had failed to properly manage and inspire George. From that situation on Frank always tried to anticipate the shortcoming in any individual and take proactive steps to correct the problems.

Simultaneously, Lily stood on her leaf, and slowly spread her two tiered wings, gracefully rolling her shoulders back in a circular motion, causing her delicate wings to flutter. The sun hit the crystal-like film that covered her wings and sent hundreds of light prisms dancing in six inch diameters, around this now flying child of the garden. Lily flickered and quivered as she circled around the rose bush, stretching her arms and legs, turning and jumping like a dancer from the Royal Ballet, until she finally took an enormous elegant front flip and softly landed back on the rose leaf. She looked up at Frank with a playful giggle and said “I bet you can’t do that!”

Frank chuckled, “No I don’t have the magic to fly, but I can do this!” Before Frank knew it he was caught up in the magic of playing. He very gradually waved his hand around Lily several times,

then tapped his hand three times and said, “Abracadabra!” Presto, Frank revealed a penny in his hand!

Lily giggled and clapped. “Bravo!”

“For you my dear! A magical coin, may your garden always be filled with abundance.” Frank bowed to her.

Frank had a light headed feeling and energy radiating from his core. Normally he would be thinking about staying on task and watching his schedule to ensure that he was optimally using his time and being as productive as possible. Now he just had a floating feeling that his conversation with this miniscule being would continue forever.

## Responsiveness

“The next question in my motivation flower pivots around responsiveness. The question is: Are you a giver or receiver?” asked Frank. “Before you can ask me what I am, I will tell you that I have been both. The strange thing is that I have probably given more to the people outside of my own family and taken more from those closest to me.”

Lily closed her eyes and steadily shook her head. “Isn’t that always the way. People forget their priorities and take advantage or ignore those they know will give them the unconditional love and support.”

Frank looked downcast. Lily thought that she could detect his steel blue eyes welling up.

“Lily, I can only say that now I wish my priorities were straight all the time.”

“You are thinking about Lilly, aren’t you?”

“Yes, it is strange, when I was young I thought that providing for the family was my most important objective; the more money the better as this would mean that my family would have a better lifestyle. Lilly and I agreed to assume traditional roles; she would stay home and I would be the bread winner. The problem was that I entered the business world just as companies were decentralizing leadership. Consequently all kinds of new middle management opportunities opened up. Leadership or management style which promoted efficiency and effectiveness consumed corporate culture. Moreover, for those of us who were vying for these positions, competition was at an all time high. Companies promised advancement and loyalty to those willing to emulate an intense productive work ethic, often to the detriment of an employee’s

personal life. Our egos were fanned as we sacrificed in the name of company profits. Since long hours of overtime kept us at the office, many of us were sucked into the workaholic mentality of corporate devotions. Just by virtue of the amount of time alone that we freely gave to the company, many of us started to lose sight of our real family. We would get accolades from the office, dodge the family problems and tensions with which our wives were coping and receive all kinds of affirming recognition in society as the successful white collar managers. We had become the barons of corporate territory. We had prestige and power. We were able to avoid emotional family issues and exclusively deal with what we thought was the logic and tidiness of efficiency and effectiveness. The funny thing was although we seemed to be avoiding relationships; much of our time was consumed with corporate politics.”

“It almost sounds religious!” interrupted Lily.

“Yes, it was. Many of us became obsessed with our achievements in the corporate world. Lilly would have to endure many late dinners, single parenting, last minute cancellations and countless hours of office soap opera analysis. When it came to the homestead, I would give some superficial attention to some weekly events. As far as Olivia was concerned, I managed to connect with her on weekends. We always got along well, partly because our personalities are similar and partly because I was a novelty, given her mother did all the discipline and trouble shooting of the daily issues. I guess you would say I was like a Disney Dad, but we were not divorced. You know, for all those years, Lilly was always patient and never

complained. Then after Olivia moved out for school and subsequently work, Lilly ended up with breast cancer. The day I heard the news it was like a ton of bricks fell on my head. I was in shock. It suddenly hit me that Lilly could be gone. My foundation, my support, the love of my life might be gone! Then the guilt settled in as I questioned myself as to how much support I gave her. At first I rationalized I gave her everything her heart desired. After spending hours with her at appointments and treatments, we would talk. I began to question my priorities. I had given my family all the money and prestige they could want, but I hadn't given them what they and I really needed, attention. Lilly had given to me endlessly while I took all I could get. I was so wrapped up in my work ego I forgot about my role as a husband and father. As fast as these doubts surged, I was quick to dismiss them. It pains me to say this, but I sometimes wonder if I was a partial cause of her illness." Frank's voice started to quiver as he quickly looked away and up at the sky, hoping to keep any tears from splashing over his stinging lower lids.

Lily's heart ached for his pain and guilt. She knew that he was a man who thought he had acted his whole life out of love and service to his family. The problem was he rationalized much of his behavior to justify his own ego and need for fulfillment. He realized this too late.

"Did you ever talk to Lilly about your guilt Frank?"

Frank turned and looked over to Lily with agonizing eyes, "Yes, it was the night she died. It was tough, she was heavily medicated. She was hallucinating from the medication. Funny when I think about it now, she would tell me about all the

flowers in a garden. In between moments of deep sleep, she would describe infinite details on what they felt like, how they smelled, and their beautiful vibrant colours. She would also speak of fluttering and fluttering around this enchanted flower-land. Then periodically she would be lucid enough and we would manage to squeeze in a few moments of us in the present. It was in one of these moments that she voluntarily said that she forgave me. Strange, because I always spoke about how I should have been home more, I certainly conveyed guilt, but I never had the guts to ask her for forgiveness. Then in a quiet moment infinitely loving Lilly could see that I needed to be forgiven. Her ego did not need the satisfaction that I ask for forgiveness. No, with her abundance mentality she didn't need to keep score. Her unconditional love embraced me. Amazing woman! Oh how I wish that I could make it up to her. I wish that she was here to enjoy the benefits of retirement.”

Frank looked down at Lily and saw an intriguing sight. At Lily's chest of velvety white, a red glowing dot about one centimeter started to grow. In seconds this dot had grown so that Lily was encircled by a white light. It appeared that her heart was literally opening for Frank. At the same time, Frank felt warmth around his chest. It felt like his heart was opening for this tiny garden creature. For a minute he felt a euphoric energy, understanding and love exchanged between them. Gently the feeling dissipated, leaving Frank with a sense of awe and wonder.

“Oh Lily, I think you felt my pain. You felt my love.”

Lily did not say a word but knowingly smiled back. They sat for awhile in silence. Finally, Frank spoke.

“Lily, let’s get back to my initial point of whether I am a giver or receiver. Over the years I have watched people who are givers and I have determined that there are eleven key characteristics that a giver emulates. These all stem from love and are based in sharing, understanding and humility.”

“So are you saying that these eleven elements fit under one of these three headings?”

“Yes. A giving person continually shares with others through acts of kindness and the volunteering of time. In addition, a giving person maintains what Steven Covey refers to as an abundance mentality, where there is no worry that there is not enough to go around. On the contrary, this person always believes that there will be enough to be shared so there is no need to act out of fear.”

“So a giving person is kind, volunteers and has an abundance mentality. This person sounds like they keep a positive attitude,” summed up Lily.

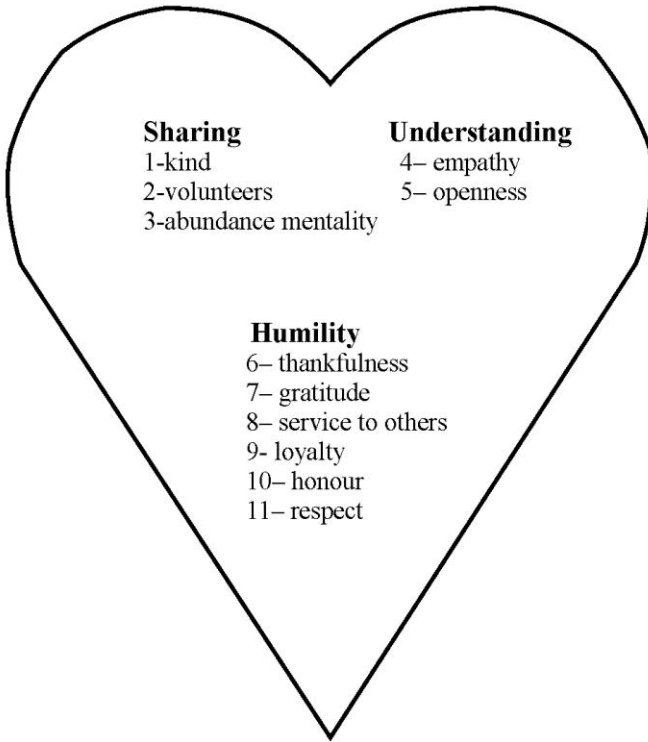
“Yes, they are understanding people. They demonstrate this through their consistent ability to show empathy, accepting and maintaining openness to others.”

“People with heart!”

Frank pulled out the next page. “Take a look at my heart diagram. You’re right! Also, givers always show humility by being thankful and showing gratitude towards others, rather than entitlement. Moreover, they place great emphasis on a sense of service to others by being loyal, showing honour and respect.”

“So, Frank, these giving people sound secure in themselves. They are highly responsive people.”

“Yes Lily you are right.”



Time continued to march, but peculiarly Frank was still oblivious. The sun was rising high in the sky. Mid-day was approaching.



## **Initiative**

“So my dearest Lily, the last petal on my flower deals with initiative. I used to ask my staff, are you a self-starter or an order taker? It was funny because while just about everyone perceived himself to be a self-starter, this was not exactly the case. Lily, this type of person radiates pride, ambition, creativity, courage, risk taking and they take action. They are the DO IT people. These people like to maintain freedom and do not like direction. They have a sense of accomplishment within themselves. They are proactive people wanting to avoid problems before they occur.”

“Are you an order-taker or a self-starter, Frank?” asked Lily, “Wait let me guess, you are a self-starter.”

“Yes Lily. The one thing I’ve always had is initiative. As a matter of fact, I have had so much initiative that at times it has been a fault. I can’t sit still. I actually make a hobby out of strategizing how to do things faster and more efficient. Some people have perceived me to be competitive. I like to think of myself as enthusiastic and passionate.”

Lily smiled. She could see Frank was getting passionate about speaking of passion. She stretched her thin legs out in front on the leaf, bending over to stretch her body. She looked like the prima ballerina in Swan Lake.

“Last night when I looked at all the petals of the motivational flower and separated the answers to my questions into positive and negative, I came up with this chart. Attitudes can be boiled down to positive and negative, or optimism and pessimism. I shaded two sides of the negative, along with the positive. I would have to say that I although I have

more of a positive attitude, when it comes to priorities and responsiveness I can be negative.”

“You have been incredibly diligent in answering my question, what motivates you. I will add, Frank, that you are a very thorough person. Furthermore, isn’t it interesting that your answers came from your years of experience.”

“Yes, you’re right, Lily. You know what else, it was very cathartic for me to express my philosophy. But, can you believe it? It looks like it’s noon already! The sun is overtop and I have yet to do any gardening!”

Lily was quick to interrupt, “Frank, out here in the garden we little people do not watch the clock. We fully enjoy each moment. We live in the present. Think about it, while you have been out here you have lost you sense of time. ”

“You are right and I feel so relaxed. I also feel like I have arrived at new insights. I feel a little reborn,” responded Frank, stretching.

“Frank do you realize what you have done to this point to help with your gardening project?”

“Well, I guess I have evaluated my attitude. How does this help me with my gardening?”

“How? Frank, now you have determined what motivates you. A person’s attitude is the single most important aspect to determine doing anything. When you answered my question, (What motivates you?), you identified what makes up your fuel.

<b>Negative</b>	<b>Positive</b>
People <b>OR</b> Task	People <b>and</b> Task
Amateur	Professional
Taker (receiver)	Giver
Order Taker	Self Starter

Now everyone's fuel is essentially based on these four factors: priorities, initiative, responsiveness and integrity. However, everyone interprets and emphasizes each of these elements in different ways. It is this attitude examination that identifies how you should plan your objectives and strategies. There is no point in setting an objective that does not motivate you. For example, since you are a task oriented person, you probably would be best always setting a reward or choosing a project that has some kind of definitive end and sense of accomplishment."

Frank started nodding his head, "I guess this self-analysis helps a person acknowledge whether his or her attitude is positive or negative."

“Yes, Frank, it is a process of being honest with oneself, recognizing one’s strengths (positive) and weaknesses (negative). We need to choose projects that are motivating. Activities should stretch us to move from a negative mind set to a positive one. It is finding the productive tension that gives us the impetus to accomplish our objectives while improving our outlook.”

“Lily, ...stretching oneself and finding the productive tension to increase positive outlooks...we are in control of our attitudes. We have the power to change our attitudes!” exclaimed Frank.

“Yes Frank, you’ve got it! It isn’t just about identification, but on changing our attitudes so that they are positive and serve others. You are in control of you, no one else,” replied Lily nodding her head.

“This reminds me of a story from years past. I call it, **Who is the Most Important Person?**

I was in a seminar. The presenter asked us the following: Who is the most important person at your workplace? After some thought we were all coming up with many different people, except for one. He then responded, the most important person is You! At first we all thought that this was quite the egotistical answer, however, after much thought and further illustration, we couldn’t help but agree with him. YOU are the only one who is in complete control of yourself. Your Boss cannot control you. It is YOU who

makes a conscious decision each step of the way. Are you in the game or will you be ignored?

“Interesting, Frank, that humbling moment of taking responsibility of one’s actions. Ironically, so often people in their pursuit of control try to control everything and every person around them, yet, the funny thing is the last place they really look to control is themselves. I guess because really looking at oneself, with all our faults and gifts, is the most painful and difficult.”

Frank put his hand to his chin, then rubbed his index finger over his nose, squinting his eyes in deep thought. “Yes, Lily, I agree. Controlling others gives one a sense of power. Controlling our own attitudes and behaviors puts us in a humble and vulnerable position. If we have the courage to take control and be honest with ourselves, we actually end up inducing profound positive influence. It gives us strength to serve others when we no longer feel threatened. We can morph into the leaders of influence, service and love, rather than leaders of control.”

Looking out into the backyard, Frank pondered his role as the facilitator of growth in resurrecting Lilly’s garden. He took a deep breath and rolled his shoulders.

“So back to gardening. I guess I need to apply my attitude inventory to my gardening objectives,” responded Frank.

“Yes, you need to match your motivational hooks with questions that will help you determine the specifics of your garden. At this point, you need to determine what you would like to plant. What do you want your garden to look like? What is your

colour scheme? Do you want the plants to be in harmony? Do you want it to be maintenance free? Do you want more perennials or more annuals? Are you willing to use indigenous plants which are often considered weeds? How much sun or shade do you get? Do you want the garden to be drought tolerant? Are you going to have a focal point? Basically you need to set your gardening objectives. Think of your garden as a business case study. Your attitude is the corporate culture.”

As she spoke these final words Frank could see that she was beginning to become more translucent. In one minute she began to slowly fade. Then in a flash, he saw a sparkling dot that reduced in size to a single sparkle which floated off behind a shrub. Lily was gone.

## The Plan

Frank whispered, “Lily, Lily, but ...” to no avail. Feeling like he was hanging on an edge moments before an epiphany, he grounded himself in reality. It was time for him to plan his new project. He’d spent a good hour while he stood in his garden talking with Lily. He looked at his watch and noted that it was heading onto eleven o’clock. Sheepishly he glanced around his yard to see if anyone was watching him. He felt a sense of relief when he realized that his privacy was ensured by the cedars which formed an eight foot green wall encircling the perimeter of his property.

He went in to get another coffee and sit on his poured concrete patio enjoying the sunshine and meditating on what he wanted for his renewed yard. He grabbed a piece of paper and pen, sat at his glass topped garden table staring at his garden. It was twenty feet wide stretching across the back right corner of his lot. The sides and front of the bed were edged in a round fashion dipping in at the center giving the appearance of a half a kidney shape. At the moment, since he removed all the old debris, he only had one nineteen foot tall spruce on the right corner balanced by another slightly shorter fifteen foot tall spruce in the top left corner of the bed. At the back in the center there was a large rose of sharon encircled by over fifty of its seedlings of various sizes. To the right of center was a three foot gold flame spirea. He could see pockets of daffodils and tulips poking through the soil and clusters of purple and yellow crocuses. There were three other shrubs or bushes interspersed through the garden, but, he could not identify them. Years ago, when they first dug this bed they filled it with annuals and

perennials. Lilly made the garden her hobby. Actually it was more of a sacred sanctuary where she would garnish peace and tranquility to sustain her busy life of motherhood. During those years the garden was full and well groomed.

Frank picked up the pen and started to sketch the garden. He seemed to remember watching a gardening show where this was suggested. He also was a visual person and liked working from blueprints. On the back of the page he made two columns, one titled Strategic Planning Questions and the other titled Garden. Lily had said to approach the garden like a case study at work. Feeling motivated he began:



<i>Strategic Planning Statements/ Questions</i>	<i>Garden</i>
<p>What is the Culture? : (My attitude based on my personal assessment of what motivates me)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Priorities: tasks and sometimes people</li>   <li>- Responsiveness: giver and receiver</li>   <li>- Integrity: professional</li>   <li>- Initiative: self-starter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ A garden in memory of Lily, a lasting tribute. But I also need a concrete goal or purpose- register in a gardening competition. It needs to be a place that can be shared with others.</li> <li>→ I need a garden which will give me a full season of visual pleasure with minimal maintenance</li> <li>→ I must maintain the foundation set by Lily while enhancing my weak gardening knowledge through books and trips to the nurseries.</li> <li>→ I am committed to working on planning and planting this garden daily for 5-6 hours until the initial design is complete. Afterwards I will maintain, fertilize, weed and prune the garden.</li> </ul>

“My, that wasn’t so difficult,” mumbled Frank to himself. “It looks like I could actually write a mission statement for my gardening project based on my attitude.”

In minutes, Frank started to write the following: **I, Frank, am committed to designing, creating, and nurturing a garden which will be a lasting tribute to my late wife Lilly. It will be a meditative refuge for all to enjoy, offering a specific rest area.**

Frank felt excited to have a formal sense of direction and dedication to this new project. He always felt that by writing his ideas down on paper in column format he was able to gain simple perspective on a problem. Usually one column stated what he had in terms of resources and the other column applied these to his goals or desires, while other times, his two column chart highlighted advantages and disadvantages or strengths and weaknesses.

He ran back into the kitchen and quickly grabbed another sheet of paper. Here he continued the chart with the same headings and began to reflect on Lily’s gardening questions:

<i>Strategic Planning Statements/ Questions</i>	<i>Garden</i>
<p><b>What</b> type of garden do I want to create? (What are my gardening objectives?)</p>	<p><b>Colourful</b> -Blooms through spring summer with colour in the fall and winter. - Reflects Lilly’s favourite colours of purple and pink and complimentary colours.</p> <p><b>Primarily Perennial Rose section</b> <b>Easy Maintenance</b> <b>Drought tolerant- (High sun area, watering restrictions)</b> <b>Shaded sitting area-</b> <b>Focal Point-</b></p>

Frank looked over his next section of his chart. He had a sense of what he wanted but now he needed to decide on the specifics. Given his limited gardening experience, he would have to find gardening resources to determine the specifics. Wasting no time, he proceeded to brainstorm where he could obtain this information: Lilly’s old gardening books, the library – books and magazines, the nursery, internet and Olivia who had followed her mother’s footsteps and was quite the gardener extraordinaire.

It was now lunchtime. Frank could not believe how quickly time flew when he was not at work. He gathered up his notes and went inside for a quick snack. It seemed like he just finished having

breakfast, and in the interest of saving time, he chose to grab a cereal bar and glass of water. Minutes later, he was dressed and heading out to the local nurseries to check out his options.

That afternoon, under the brilliantly blue spring sky, he enjoyed popping in and out of three local nurseries. He looked at sample gardens, gardening stock, brochures and spoke to a variety of sales people. Several of the nurseries had landscape services available at a reasonable cost. However tempting this seemed to Frank, he was determined to live up to his personal commitment to planning and creating the garden.

Once home, he poured a glass of red wine and proceeded to his home office. He loved this space. Many years ago Lilly had this extra room on the main floor made into a spectacular library and office space for his fiftieth birthday. She spared no expense having a carpenter build oak floor-to-ceiling book shelves on two opposing walls. These were given a deep golden brown stain, trimmed at the ceiling with a thick sculpted crown molding. On the back wall, there was a large window with an oversized stained glass forest scene. Surrounding the window was a continuation of the expert carpentry in golden oak, with a desk top running the width of the room and bookcases extending from the desk to the crown molding on the ceiling. Below the oak counter was a series of custom made oak filing cabinets. An oversized, leather, brass studded and tufted office chair was tucked into the four foot centered space under the window. The entry wall held two French doors with beveled glass panes. The flooring was of wide oak planks with a large Bengali Indian area rug in rich burgundies, golds, blues and greens. Books lined every shelf along

with some of Lilly's and Frank's special memorabilia and family photos.

Next to his office at work, this was his haven. Many nights returning home at seven, he would retreat to additional office work or reading from eight to eleven. Usually at half past ten, Lilly would come in and bring him an evening tea and biscuits, trying to lure him out to bed. He could still smell the sweet yet musky scent of her perfume and feel her gently massaging his shoulder and whispering, "Come on honey you have done enough today, let's go to bed." Chills shivered down Frank's spine as this very vivid memory rattled his mind.

Frank turned on the computer and proceeded to look up a variety of gardening sites. Before long, he found himself lost on the internet. Site after site gave him gardening tips for the novice to the expert. It was interesting but overwhelming. At six thirty he realized that he had not had dinner yet, as his stomach started to growl. He went into his kitchen, poured another glass of the merlot and put a frozen pizza in the oven.

It dawned on him that it was a half past eleven in London, England, which still made it manageable to call Olivia. Nestling back in the comfort of his office, he dialed Olivia's number.

After only two rings, a deep unknown voice answered, "Hello."

Frank was thrown off by the new voice and then realized that was his grandson, Joseph, who was quickly growing into his manly body. "Hey Joseph is that you?"

"Grandpa! Good to hear from you!" Hearing Joseph say "Grandpa," put a warm glow through Frank. It reminded him of the times the boy was

only two years old and he would run into his arms like an out of control puppy ready to bestow big hugs.

“Grandpa, you wouldn’t believe it! I’m half way through the workbook and the accounting text that you lent me. You know it really isn’t that hard. I think that by the end of the summer I should have it done.”

“Fantastic, Joseph, I am so proud of you!” rang out Frank. “You know, kiddo, I have no doubt that you are going to make a name for yourself in the business world. So what do you think, will it be a president of a bank or are you going to start your own business?”

Frank couldn’t help putting forth these little nudges of encouragement. His intuition told him that Joseph was an old soul from the moment he was born. Over his fifteen short years, his grandson had repeatedly shown many moments of profound wisdom. Moreover, he had a natural grace and strong social skills which allowed him to navigate through interactions with young and old from all walks of life. Frank wondered if Joseph’s skills were the result of all the traveling he was exposed to over his childhood, given the many moves they had to make due to Brian’s work.

“Joseph, I need to speak with your mother. Could you please put her on?”

“No problem, I’ll talk with you soon.”

In seconds Olivia’s worried voice could be heard, “Dad what brings your call, are you okay?”

“I am fine, Olivia. I am calling because I am engaging in a new project and I need your help.”

“I knew you could not sit still for long. Always planning and moving aren’t you, Dad? Man, you know kids are designated with Attention

Deficit Disorder, I think you always had it. So what can I do for you? What is the new project?" responded Olivia with levity.

"Remember how mom used to love to garden? Well, I have decided to resurrect her garden from the depths of neglect. I am going to make our mangy bed at the back of the yard into a spectacular tribute to your mother. As a matter of fact, I even have plans to enter my creation into the local gardening contest. So, given you have followed in your mother's footsteps as a gardening expert, I am calling for advice."

Olivia was shocked. It wasn't very often that her father came to her for advice; it was always the other way around, even when she had not asked for the help. Her shock quickly turned to pride, as her ego was stroked by this unusual call. Promptly, she responded with a professional, down to business tone.

"What did you have in mind?"

Frank proceeded to share his preliminary plans with great enthusiasm, "You see, Olivia, I want to create a garden which blooms through the spring to the fall with your mother's favourite colours of pink and purple. It has to be relatively low maintenance with mainly perennial flowers, a rose section, a shaded section and a focal point."

"My you certainly have organized your thoughts! Well, may I suggest that you include an arbor with climbing roses which bloom all season long. The pergola could form a gateway to the garden while also offering a shaded seating area, and what about a wild flower section. Also, Dad you might want to heavily mulch the garden. Hey and pay attention to the height of the flowers at maturity so that the tallest plants will be at the back

of the bed and the lowest flowering plants at the front, ending with border flowers at the edge.”

“It looks like we are on the same wave length. I never thought about the height of the plants. You’re right it’s important to see the full display of blossoms. I like your idea of building the pergola in the middle at the forefront. Sort of like an entry point and a focal point all in one.” enthusiastically responded Frank.

“Yes, that sounds great. Now I would suggest that you make the arbor of the same wood as your pergola. It will give a more unified professional look. I wish I could be there to help you. We are planning on coming to Canada for a holiday in August. I’ll be there once you are finished.”

“Olivia, that is wonderful to hear that you’re coming. The contest that I’m thinking of entering announces the winner in the first week of August. You will be here to see the finished product, and to possibly celebrate a first place ribbon!”

“Dad, don’t get too cocky and competitive, remember it isn’t about winning!” cautioned Olivia.

“You’re right. I can always count on you to keeping my humility in check. But, I have to go. I just remembered that I put a frozen pizza in the oven and I can smell it.”

“Now, don’t over do it. Remember you are not twenty.”

“Yah, yah, who is the parent here and who is the child missy! Say hi to Brian, love ya, kiddo.”

“Ditto, Dad.”

The fifteen minute call went like a flash, leaving Olivia with a sense of guilt and longing, wishing that she could help her father through this very difficult rite of passage that he had to travel



alone. Frank felt a slight tinge of abandonment and a longing, wishing that he could pull on the vitality and strength of his daughter.

He sniffed the air and quickly ran to the stove, pulling out the pizza just in the nick of time before the caramelized cheese turned black. He poured another glass of wine while he waited for the pizza to settle. He set the table with a placemat, cutlery and a napkin and proceeded to crank up his Study of Brown jazz CD. Lost in the music, he ate with gusto, sipping the flavourful spiked grape juice. It was a simple meal, but one of his favourites.

An hour later, he had cleaned up and was heading back to the library to pull all of Lilly's gardening books. His plan was to take them up to his bed and continue his planning. He wanted to finish his written plans before bedtime, so he could put his envelope under the driftwood for Lily. He couldn't wait to see her again and share his ideas.

By eleven o'clock, after combing through a dozen gardening books and magazines, Frank had finished his strategic garden plan. It was amazing to Frank that he was able to select all the flowers and shrubs. When he started, the whole process seemed a bit daunting. Again it reminded him of the importance of keeping a positive attitude and persistently expanding one's resources.

Frank went down to his office, found a manila envelope and without delay slid the pages of plans safely into the sleeve. He breathed a sigh of contentment and made his way to the house.

When he opened the screen, he was struck by the clear starry stillness of the night. The air was cool and fresh. Off in the distance he saw the radiant full moon, a floating pearl on the black

velvet cloak which embraced and comforted the soul at the end of a full day. He loved these quiet still moments in the night. It gave him the feeling he had the whole world all to himself while everyone slept.

Silently, he walked out in his slippers to the driftwood in the garden. He had managed to get his plan done for Lily to see. He carefully lifted the weather worn wood and placed the envelope underneath. He looked around hoping to see the little fairy, to no avail. He stood for a moment and sent out a mental message for her.

“Lily, it is me Frank. I have left my plans and garden sketch. I’ll see you tomorrow, Godspeed.”

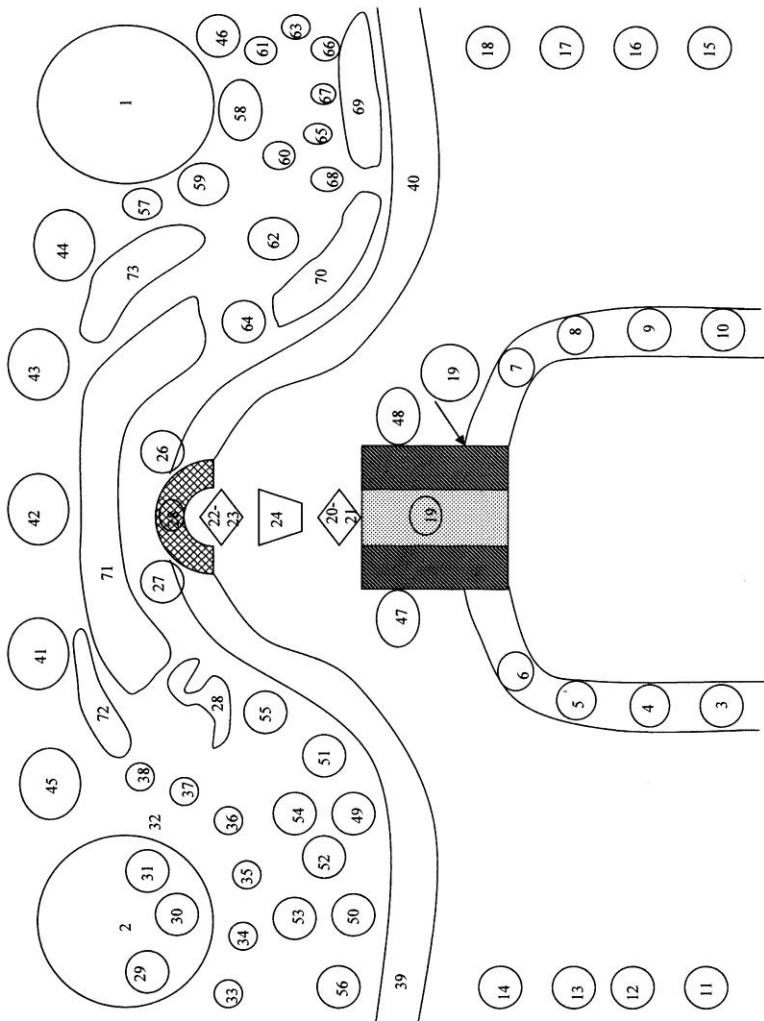
For a moment he stood in his garden, taking in the night air. Impulsively he decided to make another attempt to see Lily, or any other fairy for that matter. He had once heard that to see fairy folk, one must slightly squint and if tiny, glimmering, dancing flashes of light are seen ahead or in peripheral vision, the observer is witnessing the wee folk realm. So he began to squint and tried to relax while keeping warm in the nippy air. Several minutes passed and, behold Frank was certain he was seeing all kinds of pastel flashes of dancing light. This lasted for a few moments and then disappeared completely. He knew it was far too early in the season for fire flies. Moreover, the pastel shades of light indicated something mystical and magical. He took one more moment to send out another mental message to the little people.

“Thanks for sharing your world with me, see you tomorrow,” he grinned and tiptoed on the dew fresh grass back to the house.”

<i>Strategic Planning Statements/ Questions</i>	<i>Garden</i>
<p><b>How</b> am I going to achieve these objectives?</p>	<p><b>Colourful – Evergreen shrubs –</b>  2- Euonymus, emerald gaiety  1- Holly, blue prince  1- Yew, pyramid Japanese  - <b>Flowering shrubs -</b>  1- Burning Bush, dwarf  1- Forsythia, northern gold  1- Lilac</p> <p><b>Primarily Perennial – Wild flowers</b>  - Periwinkle  - Hostas media variegata  - Bleeding heart  Delphinium  - Echinacea purpurea  - Lavender  - Shasta daisies  - Purple Phlox  - Pink Astilbe  - Day Lilies  - Peony 3-4’</p> <p><b>Annual - Alyssum</b>  - Lobelia  - Snapdragons  - Zinnias</p> <p><b>Rose Section – Pink Zepherine Drouhin -climbing</b>  - The fairy – shrub polyantha  - Angel Face–garden rose floribunda  - Paradise –hybrid tea rose</p> <p><b>Easy Maintenance/Drought tolerant–</b>  I am willing to give at least an hour every couple of days to maintenance. Therefore, I will mulch with landscaping fabric and cedar chips.</p> <p><b>Focal Point-</b> Cedar arbor  <b>Shaded sitting area-</b> Cedar bench  - Cedar pergola with sitting area  - bird feeding area  - games table</p>
<p><b>When</b> do I want to be completed?</p>	<p>July 1<sup>st</sup>. Submission to contest the first week of July</p>
<p><b>Who</b> will I enlist to help?</p>	<p>Local Carpenter for arbor, bench and pergola</p>
<p><b>Budgeting</b> concerns:</p>	<p>Under \$2000.00</p>

## Garden Legend

Map Placement	Item	Amount
1	Colorado Blue Spruce	1
2	Locus Tree	1
3-10	Japanese Pyramid Yew	8
11-18	Euonymus (climbers)	8
19	Pergola with two benches	1
20-23	Stepping Stones	4
24	Bird bath	1
25	Arbor	1
26-27	Climbing rose bushes (pink)	2
28	Driftwood	1
29-32	Multicoloured Begonias	4
33-38	Impatience (pink)	6
39-40	White Sweet Alyssum alternating with Lobelia	23 each
41	Spirea	1
42	Rose of Sharon	1
43	Weigela	1
44	Lilac	1
45	Forsythia	1
46	Burning Bush	1
47-48	Wisteria	2
49-56	Hybrid and floribunda rose bushes	8
57	Delphiniums	3
58	Hollyhocks	3
59	Wild flowers	seeds
60-61	Hostas	2
62	Purple Phlox	1
63	Peony	1
64	Shasta Daisy	1
65	Bleeding Heart	1
66	Pink Astilbe	1
67	Lavender	1
68	Echinacea	1
69	Periwinkle	6
70	Day Lilies	5
71	Wave Petunias	15
72	Snap Dragons	12
73	Zinnias	12



Although he felt a renewed energy having placed the envelope in the garden, his common sense got the better of him and he decided to go up to bed to watch the news. Experience taught him that late nights didn't agree with him after he turned forty.

Since he felt a slight chill from his garden visit, he chose to change into his flannel penguin pajamas. Yes, he still chuckled when he sported these fashion-statement night clothes which his daughter Olivia had given him last year. When presenting him with the gift she said, "Here are some birds in suits, for an old bird who lived for suits!" The penguins were cartoon characters sporting bow ties and walking in many series of long single files, jumping into the ocean off an iceberg. In a moment of silliness, he waddled to his bed and then dove into the sheets.

## **KISS Principle**

The next morning Frank woke unusually late at 10:00. As he rolled to get out of bed, he felt a sharp pain in his lower back. He had not felt this back spasm for a number of years. He immediately wondered if his recent gardening activity was too much for his back which he injured during a tobogganing accident years ago. Moving slower, he rolled his legs out of bed and gingerly stood up. As he began to walk, he could feel his back loosen up. Later that day he would have to make a point of doing his abdominal and back strengthening exercises.

In an hour, Frank had managed to shower, change, read the paper and have a quick breakfast of coffee, toast and peanut butter. He was procrastinating about going out to the garden, afraid that Lily would not be there. He desperately wanted to see her, but he equally did not want to face the disappointment if she was not there.

Frank decided it was time to venture out to the garden in search for his tiny friend. “Gosh, if my old business buddies saw me right now, heading out to my garden to talk to a fairy, they would think I had lost it!”

Stepping off the cement step, he sent out a mental message, “Lily, are you there? Did you see the plan?”

He walked over to the driftwood and noticed that as before the envelope looked like it had not been touched. He then glanced around the garden and squinted, hoping that he might see some flashes of light. Nothing. He tried again. Nothing. Disappointment hit his throat and he felt a knot.

Rolling his shoulders back, stretching, he thought maybe he needed to be more patient. Lily was not a t.v. show or thing that you just turned on and off. So with renewed hope, he began to tug away at the rose of sharon seedlings that surrounded the birth shrub, humming some of his favourite tunes from My Fair Lady.

Frank found himself lost in the moment of clearing the rose of sharon. Moreover, he made a point of being very careful as he pulled each seedling out, thinking he would either transplant them elsewhere or give them away. Now that he had renewed his interest in gardening, he saw these little plants as precious treasures that should not just be tossed into a compost heap.

“Frank, Frank, be careful,” Lily squeaked.

“Lily! You are here. I was afraid that you were not going to come. Good to see you! Did you say be careful?” responded Frank.

“Yes, Frank, my fellow folk have been watching you pull up these shrubs and they want to make sure they have a proper new home.”

“Not to worry. I have already decided to pass them on to my neighbour Lai. You see, last year she asked for as many cuttings as possible to form a hedge, so they will have a very attentive home. Lai is very knowledgeable and passionate about gardening. She will take good care of them.”

“Frank, your garden plan is spectacular. It is interesting how you applied your business strategies in charting your gardening objectives.”

Continuing to casually pull out the odd rose of sharon, he nodded, “Yes, up until this point I never really acknowledged how my business problem-solving skills and strategies directly related to how I deal with every day life. You were right,



my attitude is really my business culture. Funny, sometimes as business professionals I think that we have a tendency to forget how much our business strategies affect how we function throughout everyday life outside of the office.”

Lily fluttered upwards and landed on Frank’s hand. She smiled and continued, “Frank what also struck me was the simple depth of your plan. I must say you managed to be very thorough, yet you didn’t lose your creativity.”

Looking at this little being on the palm of his hand was breathtaking. She weighed no more than a few feathers. At such a close distance, her beauty was beyond anything of this world. The iridescent shimmer of her wings, clothing and even her skin made her look rather translucent and almost ghost like.

“Lily, you know, I amazed myself actually. You see when I used to think of strategic planning and conduct seminars the process was not difficult but definitely complex. Now that I am not in that environment, I wonder if we didn’t make the process more complex than it needed to be. You see in the business world, it was usually very competitive. The acquisition of power and money seem to be the all consuming motivators. Both of these factors tend to appeal to the ego and greed. As a result, this atmosphere tends to cultivate milieus of self absorbed people (SAPs). Outside of the office, this attitude tends to be reflected in people who have a sense of entitlement and think that they can bully their way to achieving their own agendas.”

“Didn’t you call that office setting the Bad Apple Orchard?” queried Lily.

“Yes, you are right,” nodded Frank. “Lily if you noted the plan was based on the following questions:

What is the culture?

What is my goal/objective(s)?

How am I going to achieve these objectives?

When is my estimated completion time?

Who will I enlist to help?

Budgeting concerns?

It basically boils down to the old direction we used to receive at school when analyzing topics: who, what, where, when, why and how. If these questions are repeated to any issue, it is fairly easy to keep things simple and in perspective. It reminds me of a boss I had many years ago. He was a master of simplicity. Some might say that he was bossy or never really tended to detail, but, he really gave us a whole picture direction and then allowed us to take ownership in developing the strategies as we saw fit. He trusted us to fill in the detail. This trust was empowering. Let me share the story of, “**Jack the Axe**”:

The president of a large chemical company was asked for a corporate plan so that the employees would be aware of his priorities and expectations for the coming year. The employees wanted a meeting to hammer out the priorities. The president also known as "Jack the Ax" said that there was no need in wasting time with a meeting. He knew exactly what he wanted from

the team. He said that he would have THE PLAN available in one week's time. Sure enough, one week later he called a meeting of his key players and distributed a single page. On the page were six statements each with a strong verb but no longer than one line. He stated that the statements were in order of priority. Each statement was expressing a measurable objective. The time line was one year for all of them. When questioned by his subordinates about the lacking strategies and overall mission, he redirected them to more closely examine the statements. Sure enough, the strategies were implied and so was the mission. They were not articulated but with very little thought the approach, direction, priorities and expected results were very clear. Not only did this one page PLAN do the trick but it also enabled managers to easily develop next level measurable objectives for their staff. It was a very successful year. Although most of the objectives were directed towards improving operational efficiencies and cost cutting, one of the objectives was truly a visionary strategic direction which would have long term impact and benefits for the corporation.

“So, Lily, it was amazing that this fellow managed to not only achieve short term objectives, but long term goals. It really reminds me of the Kiss principle – Keep It Simple Stupid!”

“Your drawing is wonderful Frank. The positioning of all the plants looks good.”

Lily started to giggle. Without warning she took off in flight, fluttering in and around the garden blowing kisses in the breeze. Frank smiled in amusement at her whimsy. In several minutes she returned, blowing kisses to Frank, then landing with a somersault in the centre of a tulip.

Peeking over the top of one of the petals, Lily said, “Now you have a comprehensive plan, I think that it’s time that you bring your creative ideas to life. My next question to you is, once you plant your garden, how are you going to encourage and enhance its growth? Frank, remember I am not just talking about basic maintenance.”

With that she ducked into the cup of the tulip head and disappeared. Frank bent down to look inside the flower, finding it empty. He was always astounded at how quickly she vanished into thin air.

She was right, it was time that he got the project rolling. If he wanted to participate in the local gardening competition it was important that the garden be planted within the next three weeks.

## **Steady Ready Go!**

That day, the clouds rolled in by noon. The threat of rain prevailed as Frank contemplated his next step. He sat on his patio having yet another cup of his caffeinated mud. Finally he made a decision to shop around for the best contractors to build his pergola and arbor.

The afternoon was spent combing through the yellow pages for contractor advertisements and checking the classifieds in the city and community papers. His rule of thumb was to always obtain three quotes on any job to ensure the best price. By the evening he had appointments set for the next day to meet three contractors.

At six o'clock he felt his stomach growl. To cook or not to cook, that was the question! After a brief five minute self-banter, he decided to head to the local grocery store to buy a pre-cooked chicken meal.

Full and content, Frank went to his bedroom to read before going to bed early. En route upstairs, he passed a photo of Lilly, Olivia and himself, in front of the back garden in its prime. It was taken after Olivia's graduation ceremony. They all looked so happy. He remembered the day with pride, thinking that Olivia's graduation from a Bachelor of Arts program was one of the most important milestones for them as a family. To him it marked his graduation as a parent, having successfully reared his little girl with a solid education base. From that day on he felt that he equipped her with all the essentials to build a life of her own; he could now relax and watch her take off with bounding strides, stretching her graceful yet strong wings, as she gained lift and flew with increasing altitudes

and distance. He only hoped that she would continually return home, even if only for short visits, after migrating for new adventures.

Frank changed into his penguin pyjamas, chuckling to himself, thinking about how silly he had been the night before. He grabbed one of Lilly's gardening books that gave the history of the pergola.

He quickly thumbed the pages of the book, stopping halfway when he noticed a bookmark. Finding this treasure brought a longing and excitement in his throat. He smelled a slight scent of lavender and remembered how Lilly loved to have Lavender pomanders in their closets. He tugged at the card and to his surprise it had a beautiful pastel sketch of a fairy on a bright orange lily. The fairy wore a dress of white rose petals, trimmed with tiny blue forget-me-nots. Tiny golden threads were wrapped around her eighth of an inch waist. In her light blonde hair was a crown of lily-of-the-valley and touches of orange spirea blossoms. My goodness, she looked exactly like Lily in his garden! On the back of the card it stated,

Take a minute  
Stop and look  
Beyond the green, violet, crimson floral display  
Is a world of magical fairies at play.  
Yes they are safely hiding in your garden patch,  
BUT, if you squint, believe you just might  
catch,  
A glimpse of fluttering, fluttering light,  
Before you know it they will be out of sight.  
Heed these ancient protectors of the earth  
The wee folk want to ensure that we respect  
their worth.

So help them please and give your best try  
To protect the plants, animals, soil and sky.

It seemed like seconds since Frank had been looking over the bookmark, but now he could hear the cooing of the mourning doves. He noticed his bedside light was still on, while the early morning rays of sun were persistently beaming through the slats of his blinds. Frank was amazed that in retirement, he could still manage to fall asleep so easily.

After his regular morning toiletry routine, he went downstairs for his coffee ration. He knew he had to eat a quick breakfast as the first contract was to arrive in twenty minutes. The next two appointments were lined up within the following two hours. Frank was looking forward to seeing what these gardening contractors had to offer, in addition to having some company.

By twelve o'clock that day, after extensively interviewing the contractors, Frank decided to do all the carpentry work himself. He had some experience building his fence years ago and felt that because he had the time, he could learn how to do the woodworking. The price the contractors quoted seemed high and being frugal, he just couldn't bring himself to having someone do the work. Besides, he was taught that if you only put your mind to it, you could accomplish anything.

The afternoon was spent at the local lumber stores pricing wood. After going to four stores, spending several hours, drawing, planning and pricing the pergola, arbor, benches and game table, Frank decided on the store that could offer the best price.

He was on a mission. By eight o'clock that evening he left the lumber store having bought all his materials with arrangements for next day delivery. He felt invigorated with the rush of planning a project. He prided himself on his efficiency through the day.

Feeling quite smug, he sat down to an ice cold beer and takeout burgers when he returned home. He was extremely confident that he could manage to do it. He grabbed a piece of paper and started to sketch his plans with corresponding measurements. Considering that he had not done any manual labour, let alone any carpentry work in years, his attitude verged on cocky.

The next morning arrived with a deafening crack of thunder and torrential rain. Frank bolted up in bed, his heart racing. He had never experienced a wake up call like this one! Minutes later, the dark morning sky was by a lightening show.

He flicked on his bedroom television to catch the weather for the day. To his disappointment rain was forecasted for the next three days. He was frustrated, as he had wanted to do all the building in the backyard.

“Oh, well, flexibility is what is needed here. I'll just do as much as I can in the garage,” mumbled Frank.

By noon that day, Frank had set up his table saw, received as a Father's Day gift 15 years prior from Olivia. He had only used it once before when building a bench after taking a weekend carpentry course. He also meticulously set up any tools, nails, screws, brackets he thought he would need on a long folding table. Each item was lined up and placed on the table in organized rows. The garage had transformed into a carpentry shop. Last, he set



up his portable stereo. He chose the sound track from the Phantom of the Opera, as he felt that its intensity would motivate him through the afternoon.

The pounding rain continued. Frank took a deep breath and got out the measuring tape and a large piece of cedar. Looking over his plans, he measured the appropriate cut lines. He was now ready to use THE TABLE SAW.

He approached the saw carrying the large piece of wood, palms sweating and his heart rate slightly elevated. Apprehension settled in the pit of his stomach. The question foremost in his mind was, did he really know what he was doing? It had been so long.

Lining up the wood, he turned on the machine. In seconds the cut was made. He felt a sense of relief. It worked! He continued to measure and cut all the pieces for the arbor. After each cut, he organized the pieces into piles according to size, with the plan that once all the pieces were cut he would assemble them into his freestanding creation.

He worked through the afternoon, taking some breaks. The rain, thunder and lightening persisted, leaving him with the feeling of being a mad scientist/creator, as the Phantom blared in his makeshift workshop.

Five o'clock was met with a short break to grab a thin sandwich and bottle of water. He was determined to assemble the arbor before he went to bed. He always tended to work obsessively on any project he started. Since he had no other distractions, this was no exception.

"Yes!" Frank yelled out, as he tightened the last screw into a cross brace on the arbor. He couldn't believe it. He did it! Stepping back he surveyed his work. The structure was certainly

sturdy, but it was rather plain and simple. He had made a few mistakes drilling extra holes for the cross-braces, but overall it was satisfactory.

Day one of construction was over and he couldn't wait to hit the sheets. He grabbed a bottle of water and made his way up to his bedroom, feeling some of his arm and back muscles ache. Before retiring he decided to take a steaming hot shower.

The sheets felt like soft feathers stroking his lobster red sensitive skin. He felt deep contentment as he listened to the rain pelting the eaves trough. In no time he was in a comatose state.

## The Cut

The next day began the same way as the day before, with an earsplitting crack of thunder followed by bright flash of light. Frank again sat upright with his heart pounding, shaking his head, trying to regain his senses from his dreamy state. He peered through the blinds in his room to see that the rain was relentless, as it created a massive backup turning the sewer system into a raging torrent. His wake up was like having an electric shock. It left him pulsating with energy.

In twenty minutes he was showered, dressed and drinking coffee while looking over the plans for his next project. Today he was going to start tackling the pergola. Now, this was going to be a challenge!

The rain, bombarding the garage, sounded like gun fire in a war zone. This set the atmosphere Frank felt like a marine planning his attack on the enemy. His steely determination to conquer the building project, combined with his success the day before, gave him the motivation to start immediately.

He measured his first piece of cedar. Methodically he walked over to the table saw. Today he did not feel intimidated by this saber toothed beast. No, yesterday he had proven that he was in control.

Turning on the saw, Frank began to feed the piece of wood through the metal teeth when suddenly a tremendous crack of thunder hammered with such force, Frank was startled. It only took two seconds of lost concentration. Frank's left thumb hit the ferocious machine creature. Instantly he felt excruciating pain. He pulled his hand away and saw

his blood dripping from the silver spikes. He looked down at his hand and his legs felt slightly wobbly. Blood streamed down his arm. The cut was clean but deep.

Quickly, he went into the house and grabbed the nearest towel. He wrapped his hand and held it high above his heart. Hopping into his brand new Chrysler 300 C, he made his way to the local hospital, driving with his right hand while keeping his left forearm propped up.

Walking in through the automatic doors, he smelled the hauntingly familiar antiseptic scent that he endured three years ago while supporting Lilly through her illness. The odor combined with sterile bland colours cause an uneasy wave of nervousness in Frank. He glanced over to see that there was only one other person sitting in the waiting room. Luckily, the emergency department was not busy.

He took note of the intake desk. The seconds that followed seemed to be broken into a slow motion movie. Initially, he felt his legs become lead pokers and tingly, followed by a sense of suspended floating. His peripheral vision darkened, creating a tunnel effect that was narrowing as he moved closer to the desk. He heard someone say, "What? This man is ..." Darkness. Silence.

It was not long after that Frank found himself lying on a gurney covered with a blanket. He was shaking uncontrollably and felt rather cold yet clammy. He noticed that his wallet on top of the blanket, and he wore a hospital registration band on his wrist. For a moment he thought, "What am I doing here?"

He looked down and saw his left arm still wrapped up in gauze and a towel. Yes, suddenly he remembered, he sliced his finger. He realized his

adrenaline allowed him to drive to the hospital, but the moment he reached the safety of the hospital, he must have gone into shock. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

“Sir, you are awake, great!”

He opened his eyes to see a blonde cheery faced middle aged woman with huge brown eyes and long lashes that resembled the gentle softness of a doe. Her wide full shiny soft pink smile framing the t.v. perfect teeth, made him feel safe and welcome. She was like a breath of fresh air in a smoke filled room.

“My name is Jennifer. I will be your attending nurse while you are with us. You passed out when you arrived twenty minutes ago. Not to worry, this is a normal reaction. I hope you don’t mind but we did find your wallet in your pants and retrieved all your vital information. We also could see that you had a wound and did a temporary change of dressing. You will need stitches. In the meantime, I need to go over this form with you. Gee, you are really quite the trooper driving here on your own. I think that we should call you Superman! But I must say, next time Superman, get someone to drive you, just in case you go into shock while driving.” Again she flashed her pearly whites.

Instantly Frank felt at ease. Jennifer was soft spoken and exuded kind patience while still getting her firm point across. Efficiently she took the clipboard and began to ask Frank questions about his previous medical history, allergies, family doctor, and the story of how the injury happened.

“Great Frank it’s your lucky day, because we are not busy this morning. The doctor should be able to see you in the next ten minutes. Just sit tight and don’t fly away on me!”

Ten minutes passed quickly, as Frank tried to doze on and off. He listened to the regular rhythm of the hospital all calls for various staff.

“So here is superman!” beamed a young petite woman, dressed in black jeans, a crisp white blouse and white lab coat. Like Jennifer, she had a wonderfully warm smile and dancing blue eyes, “I guess you’re not up for an arm wrestle! By the way, I am Dr. Leslie Bell,” she chuckled, unwrapping the towel and temporary dressing.

“Yes, this is going to need a few stitches. Let’s get started. Now tell me how this happened.” She efficiently wasted no time and began to set up for the minor procedure, all the while chatting and listening with great interest to Frank’s gardening plans.

A local anesthetic and ten stitches later, Frank was finished.

“There you go! Oh, my, you’re my last patient for this morning!”

Frank responded, “Gee, are you finishing a shift?”

“Well, I have to tell you, yes, this morning may look quiet, but last night was crazy. In the storm, there was an accident on the highway involving a number of cars. It seemed like the steady stream of people on stretchers would never end. The intensity continued until an hour or so before you arrived. I am looking forward to a sleep and getting out to my garden later today.”

He was flabbergasted. Throughout his entire experience at the hospital, he felt he had the royal treatment. He was amazed that the staff was so fresh, upbeat and positive. He never would have guessed that they were exhausted; they hid it well. Moreover, the speed and pleasantness of the

experience was outstanding. He had generally experienced superior care when Lilly was sick, but assumed this was due to the severity of her illness. Here he had a relatively minor injury and was treated with just as much attentiveness. This team was an example of competence!

Frank thanked the doctor with a firm handshake and proceeded to walk out into the cloudy and misty morning air to his car.

“What a pleasant experience!” whispered Frank.

When Frank arrived home, his hand was throbbing. He took a pain killer and proceeded to make himself a coffee. He grabbed the quotes from the three contractors and reexamined them. Reluctantly, he began to stare at them, then put them down.

“I am not going to give up. I said I was going to do the building and I am going to follow through!” Frank emphatically stated out loud to himself.

The rest of the afternoon was spent pricing plants at the local nurseries, deciding where he could find the best deals for each of the desired specimens. He always looked for the best deals. Moreover, he planned to try to negotiate a deal whether for free delivery or a price cut wherever he felt he had some leverage in buying a lot of stock.

By nightfall, despite the pain in his hand, he completed a purchasing chart with the nursery stock. He managed to decide on two locations from which to order. Since the following day would be spent trying to negotiate a better deal, he decided to retire early.

## **The Knots (nots) of Procrastination**

Glorious sunshine left a golden glow throughout his bedroom by six forty-five the next morning. Frank gave a thankful sigh as he stretched in bed thinking the change of weather was a welcome break from the previous days of rain and clouds. He was energized and ready to start the building project.

Determined and persistent, he marched down to the garage, after a quick coffee and change of clothes. Nothing was going to stop him. Taking his pergola plans he marked his cuts on all the cedar. Before starting the cutting, he decided to head out for a break and grab a coffee and donut. He was feeling determined but tense. A slight knot pulled at his upper stomach.

He drove only five minutes away to the local donut shop. Traffic was heavy in the parking lot and he could feel a particular edginess erupting inside himself. Looking to the left he saw a free parking spot and quickly stepped on the gas to maneuver into the slot. To his surprise, an oncoming vehicle moved faster and parked in what he felt was his place.

Frank's fuse was lit. He threw up his hands in disgust and screamed out, "You jerk! That was my spot! Don't you have any driving etiquette?!"

He could feel his face turn red-hot as his blood pressure sky-rocketed. He was ready to get out of the car and give the driver a piece of his mind when he noticed another spot come free. Rather than lose this place he wheeled in without a problem and quickly threw the car in park.



“Damn, he thought to himself. That spot was mine! I don’t have all the time in the world. I have to get this project done. I have no time to waste.”

He proceeded to walk into the coffee shop and was greeted by an enormous line ten people deep. His now limited patience was dissipating like rising steam. Filing in at the end, he began to call attention to himself as he stood with his arms crossed impatiently glancing around. He started voicing his dissatisfaction to other patrons in line.

“Really, during the morning hours the management should have more people scheduled!” he emphatically stated to the man ahead.

He continued without a response, “You know I have a very important project that I am working on back home and I don’t have the time to spare standing in line!”

The gentleman who looked to be in his twenties, gave him a strained smile then looked away rolling his eyes. He was not going to get into a discussion with this out of control senior.

The lack of response irritated Frank further as he stood in line.

Finally he reached the counter. Unfortunately, the young man behind the counter turned away to start another coffee pot before asking Frank his order. Frank was ready to lose it. Three minutes later, just as the employee returned to ask Frank for his order and Frank prepared to explode about not being served faster, Frank was suddenly struck by how much the young man looked like his grandson. Frank’s anger melted. He saw before him an innocent teenager just trying to do his job. He thought how he missed seeing his grandson and he knew he couldn’t take out his frustrations on this young man.

Shining a big smile the lad asked, “What can I do for you today sir? I am sorry for the delay but I just had to put on another pot, you know the coffee is moving out of here like a storming river today!”

“A medium black coffee and a double chocolate donut, thanks,” Frank replied.

Frank let go of all his tension. It was as if someone kicked him in the head. He thought to himself, “This is silly, why am I getting myself into a lather? There is no rush, I am my own boss on the gardening project. Why am I so angry?”

Frank’s donut and coffee were delivered in a short couple of minutes.

He left the shop feeling rather foolish. He got into the car and drove off mumbling to himself, “Well, I must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed!”

He returned home, taking a deep cleansing breath as he pulled up in the driveway. He decided to bring the coffee and donut into the garage so he could nibble while working.

Selecting a piece of marked cedar, he began to feed the wood through the table saw. Unfortunately after an hour he realized that continuing with the construction would be difficult. His thumb pulsed in pain, particularly whenever he used his left hand to help prop or lift the wood.

It hit a climax when several planks of wood fell on his thumb while he was trying to reorganize a stack of wood. Instantly, his thumb started to bleed through the dressing. Upon examination, Frank could see that although the stitches had not split, the cut had been irritated by the work. He had to force himself to make a decision. It was obvious that the rest of the building projects were going to be too difficult for him to complete. He was so

frustrated. He had made up his mind to do everything on this project himself and he had to change direction. Frank was not good at changing direction once he had committed to a cause. It was a point of pride to him. He used to always say to Olivia, “If I say I am going to do something, then I am going to do it. Nothing is going to get in the way!”

He avoided making a decision on the carpentry, spending a day and a half purchasing plants, arranging for delivery and watching the sports network. Every time he thought about letting go of the building project, the issue caused a knot in his stomach.

He finally made the call to Mark, the middle priced contractor. This company had a reasonable price while having a more creative design than the lowest quote. Moreover, he particularly liked the demeanor of the young fellow, as he seemed to really want to listen to Frank and incorporate an essence of Lilly in his designs.

“Mark, I’m calling to say, ‘uncle’,” laughed Frank.

Mark knew what he was getting at. Upon meeting Frank, he knew he was dealing with a determined man who likely would want to try the project himself. Chuckling, Mark responded, “I am surprised to hear from you. I actually thought you would have done the project yourself.”

“I tried, and managed to build the arbor, but I had an injury. Nothing serious, but I have come to the conclusion that my hand won’t let me. I liked your style and your price was good, so are you willing to take on the job?”

Mark immediately agreed. “This is coming at a perfect time. I just finished a job so, I’ll be there

tomorrow at eight a.m.. Hey, Frank you took a big step. Together we will get the project back on track.”

Frank laughed, “Yes, this has been a big step for me. I am not used to admitting that I need help nor am I used to changing direction mid stream, but hey I have been humbled! But that is okay, I’m not too old to learn some life lessons.”

Frank hung up rubbing his chin, thinking about Mark’s inclusive last words, “...we will get the project back on track.” This man was a team player.

Several days had passed since he wrote to Lily. He missed connecting with her. He also felt a little sorry for himself, having to change his plans. He needed to see her and just say, “Hi” and give her an update. He remembered two quotes which aptly described how he felt. Quickly he scratched the following on a blank note card:

Humility is the only true wisdom by which we prepare our minds for all the possible changes of life.

--George Arliss

It takes humility to seek feedback.

It takes wisdom to understand it, analyze it, and appropriately act on it.

--Stephen R. Covey First Things First

**Undo Knots!**

**Humility -> Flexibility-> Flow**

He placed the card in an envelope and walked in the evening dusk to place it under the

driftwood. He could feel the mosquitoes busying around his ears and waving his hands around his head, he trotted back into the insect free house without hesitation.

## Flexibility

“Dad, how are you doing? A couple of days ago I had the strangest feeling. I was writing in the afternoon, when suddenly I had a very strong feeling of you and then my thumb started to ache. It was really strange. I wondered if it was some arthritis setting in due to all my typing. Are you okay Dad?” asked Olivia in a rather anxious voice.

“Olivia, funny that you should call! Yes, I am okay, but you know what...I did have a mishap a couple of days ago. You see, I was bent on doing the construction work myself. I was pretty proud of myself. I managed to complete the arbor! The following day, I was using the table saw to make some cuts for the pergola. I lost my concentration when a huge crack of thunder sounded and my thumb hit the blade,” explained Frank

“What? Oh my! Are you sure you’re okay? Did you need surgery? Do you want me to fly out?” responded Olivia quick to jump into hyper mode.

Frank shook his head and raised his voice, “Olivia, stop right there! Take a deep breath and calm right down. I am fine. I had a few stitches and a little discomfort but that is it. The emergency staff were outstanding! They were one of the most competent group of professionals I have had the pleasure to meet. I found out they’d had an incredibly wild night in the ER. You never would have guessed with their cheery dispositions.”

“I am glad to hear you had excellent care!” said Olivia.

“You know, it brought to mind the time I had to sleep at the office trying to roll out that billing system. Remember that Olivia? You and your mom were so patient and understanding.”

“Oh, yes, I sort of remember! Refresh my memory Dad,”

“Remember, I called it **The Sleep Over**. It went like this:

I was asked to initiate a new computerized billing system for a major insurance company. Due to the logistical constraints of sending out customer billings I was required to establish a cut over date from the old to the new system. In those days elapsed times for new computer systems were extremely difficult to estimate. The technology was so new and there were so many hidden factors. On top of that I was a very young, unseasoned manager and was just starting to grow my wings. But what I lacked in experience, I had more than enough of chutzpah. The president reassured me that I should take as much time as necessary but once the cut over date was established there was no turning back. I had assembled a crew of very dedicated and competent programmers and systems analysts. They all knew exactly what had to be done and how to do it. But as fate would have it, Murphy's Laws came into effect and everything that could go wrong did go wrong. We all worked long hours and each day the amount of sleep time grew less and less. Finally we were two days away

from the cut-over date and the system had still not been tested. My staff was so dedicated and loyal and I should add COMPETENT that they all decided to stay at the office until the job was finished. Several of the programmers actually fell asleep while working on the floor. They felt it more comfortable and needed the space to spread their weary bones. I managed to stay calm and patient. I had faith in my staff and I knew they would not let me down. The president would ask each day how the project was coming and I simply reassured him that the system would be up and running on time. A few hours before the deadline we all gathered in the computer room and ran the first test. IT WORKED!! Yes, we were all amazed and very thankful. But what was more important was the recognition in one another of the inherent confidence, trust and determination that shone through each and every participant. Yes, it was a glorious and rewarding experience. No, we hoped we would never encounter another close call like that again. But the pride and the professional competence shone ever so brightly.

“Amazing what people can accomplish when they put their minds to it! Both your story and your experience demonstrate circumstances where



people have gone the extra mile. Examples of excellence and professionalism,” said Olivia.

“Oh, by the way, just to let you know, I even tried to do some more building, but you’ll be happy to know that I gave it up and I have passed on the job to a local contractor.”

He could hear Olivia’s sigh of relief. “Oh, my, I am glad you are through it and feeling okay. I am also particularly happy that you buried your ego and contracted the rest of the work. You are going to get someone to plant the garden too, right, Dad?”

“No, the planting is something that I am not prepared to give up. Every plant in this garden, will be placed by me. Olivia, I guess it is a form of therapy. This was your mother’s garden and I am going to be the one who lovingly plants every specimen. It was my left thumb that was injured, so all I’ll do is cover it with a glove. It should be fine.” Frank explained with a father’s firm direction.

Olivia knew at this point it would serve no purpose to discuss the issue further. He had made up his mind. So surrendering she said, “Gee, it won’t be long before I will be able to see your creation. Well, Dad, I’m glad you’re okay. Spooky, how my thumb started to hurt at about the same time. I guess a parent-child bond has no boundaries!”

After a thorough sharing of Mark and Brian’s latest happenings, Olivia signed off.

“Dad, take it easy, remember you are not superman!”

“Funny the nurse at the hospital was calling me that, it must be a term to make us old guys feel good. Take care of yourself! Talk with you soon.” Frank answered.

“See ya Dad.”

Click. There was silence. Frank hated the suddenness of the click of a receiver. The abruptness was like a slap in the face. Then a loud knock brought a new focus to Frank's day.

He ran down the flight of stairs to find that both the landscaping delivery truck and Mark the contractor. Frank was in his element, directing the parties to their appropriate stations.

"Well let's get started, we have no time to waste!" said Mark with authority.

Frank responded with, "You're my kind of teammate!"

That day was full with activity. Between digging and planting the garden and supervising the carpenter, he did not have a spare moment. Conversation was limited, as both men were determined to complete their tasks by the end of the day.

By dinner time, the contractor had built and installed the pergola with two interior benches and a small portable games table. His work was meticulous. Frank's arbor looked quite simple and rough in comparison. Although he wished that he could have done it himself, he was very pleased with the workmanship. He paid the gentleman and even gave him a handsome tip as he was so impressed with his professional work.

## Garden Glory

After a quick clean up, he poured a beer and sat out on his patio, surveying the land. He was proud of how it all unfolded like an intricate pop-up book that reveals all its glory at the turn of a page. He felt proud. Time seemed suspended as he enjoyed another beer walking through the garden, examining the excellence in carpentry work again.

As soon as the mosquitoes began their buzzing, Frank lathered down with Deet and threw a steak on the barbeque, frozen veggies in foil on the grill and rice in the microwave. The smell of the sizzling beef started his mouth watering. He continued his walk about the garden between checking on his dinner. Night fall was settling in and Frank could see the fire-flies.

Oddly enough though, he was seeing a particular fire-fly incessantly, circling his beer glass. At first he wondered if he was just too tired or had too much beer on an empty stomach, when it hit him. It was probably Lily. He sat under the pergola and placed his glass on the new table. In a flash, the light stopped then turned into a glow and magically Lily appeared.

“My, you like this vile stuff!” exclaimed Lily holding her nose, while sitting on the edge of the glass.

“I was once told it has protein! On top of it all, it is my own mild legal anesthetic,” chuckled Frank.

“We little people prefer berry juice or grape juice,” answered Lily.

“You mean wine!” laughed Frank.

“Well, yes, I guess sometimes it does have a bit of a kick to it! Frank what is all this about

humility? I seem to remember asking you the last time, how are you going to encourage and enhance the growth of the garden? Please explain the connection. By the way what in magic's name happened to your hand?" Lily asked with a quizzical face.

"First Lily, in my compulsive overdrive ego state, in which I was attempting to do it all and do it perfectly, I was humbled to surrender to my own limitations. You see, I injured myself trying to do all the carpentry work. To be honest, wood working is not my forte. I seriously cut my thumb and had to make a decision to get help. This was a hard step for me because once I make up my mind to do something, I hate changing it. I guess I am a little stubborn and when I decide to be in control, I want full control. Moreover, I have come to realize that I am deeply attached to this project. Changing mid-stream was difficult for me. But, you know, I think that it was the best thing to happen as it gave me an attitude adjustment prior to the maintenance stage of my garden's development."

"Really Frank, how is that?" asked Lily dipping her fingers in his beer, licking off the malt beverage with a wince.

"Lily, it reminded me that I won't be able to control every single factor. The garden is going to be at the mercy of the weather, insects, the local bunny, squirrels and of course, I may have chosen spots with the wrong light exposure for some of the plants. I finished my career feeling quite invincible and smug. Lily, my little accident got the ball rolling. You see it reminded me of where my competency lay. Unfortunately, it did not stop me. I still was not going to admit defeat. My stomach was feeling nervous, but I didn't really know why. I was

tense and overreacting with people at the donut shop. Afterwards, I was still resistant to giving up on the woodworking, until I almost had another accident. I then procrastinated with my gut in a knot for a day and a half until I finally surrendered. I admitted to myself that I needed help. In my attempt to go the mile, be determined and be passionate about a project, I was losing the enthusiasm, fun, and my sense of humour. I was no longer happy with what I was doing. I recognized that I was being inflexible and it was clouding my perspective and divergent thinking.”

“What did you do?” asked Lily.

“I thought back on times that I procrastinated, (**not** doing something for a friend or family member, **not** doing a task, **not** saving, and many other **nots**). These **nots** created knots in my stomach and my life in general. They created anxiety and stress, preventing me from flowing forward and temporarily or permanently stopping positive growth. I knew I had to undo this knot and make a decision so that I could be back in a state of flow.”

“So, Frank, are you feeling centred and balanced again?” quizzed Lily.

“Yes, when I finally made the decision to hire a carpenter, I felt a sense of relief,” answered Frank.

“Well, I must say looking around you have done a bang up job! It looks wonderful so far. Now you just have to maintain the growth of the garden,” said Lily nodding with approval.

Lily looked particularly spectacular tonight, with the early charcoal evening sky as a backdrop. Her crystal-like wings reflected the beams of light from the full moon, leaving an abundance of

rainbow prism reflections dancing throughout the brand new garden. It was as if Lily was performing a sacred baptism, breathing full life and soul into the garden. Frank felt a solemn hush.

Frank felt like he had been in a trance for what seemed hours. Lily brought him to his senses by flicking beer on his nose.

“Wake up Frank! You’re dinner is going to burn! Listen carefully, I wish you success in tending to your garden. Remember to heed your own advice and flow with passion and energy as you cultivate the blossoming of your garden.”

Without a second delay, Frank could see Lily glow bright for a minute then in a flash disappear.

Frank took a deep breath, sent a warm wish of love out to Lily. He stood for a moment enjoying the cool evening air, noting that not once did he feel or hear the sound of a mosquito.

“Curious,” he thought and headed back to the barbeque.

## Weedy Weeks

*Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them*

--A. A. Milne *Eeyore* from *Winnie the Pooh*

The weeks that followed were filled with highs and lows. Every day Frank awoke with a devotion matched only in those enchanting first days after birth, when the freshness and hope of newly bestowed fatherhood called upon his soul to be the perfect protector and provider.

Initially, his main focus was to have the most outstanding garden in the community and win the coveted gardening award. During the first two weeks, he spent countless hours in the garden watering, pulling weeds, pruning and fertilizing. The garden showed progressive growth but Frank's unyielding diligence became obsessive. At first, he was invigorated by the growth progress, however, as the weeds increased Frank's enthusiasm started to wane. He could not tolerate the smallest of unwanted plant life and consequently, he was like a vigilant hawk waiting to swoop down on his weedy prey, pulling it with zeal. The time he spent pulling weeds was becoming excessive, and so his interest in garden maintenance was burning out proportionately.

One evening during the middle of the third week, Frank found himself scribbling a note to Lily before retiring. On the paper he wrote in large letters:

*Gardening requires a lot of water - most of it in  
the form of perspiration*

--Lou Erickson

*Give weeds an inch and they'll take your yard*

*-- Unknown*

*I am frustrated!*

*--Frank*

The moment he wrote it he felt better. He slipped it in an envelope marched out to the driftwood and slid the note under the weathered limb. He was so tired, he turned and went back in to the house to retire. As he lay in bed, trying to fall asleep, he poured over Lilly's gardening magazines and books, looking for an answer to the excessive weed problem.

Before he knew it, the morning sun was filling his room. He had fallen asleep with the light on and a book open on his chest. He quickly got ready, following his regular routine.

In twenty minutes he was outside hoping to see Lily. He wanted an answer. Noticing a few microscopic green invaders, Frank began to comb the soil, pulling anything foreign. As he bent forward, tugging on a green leaf, a bright golden light landed on the tip of his nose. He heard the soft, yet fiery, voice of Lily.

"What are you doing, you silly man!"

"What do you mean?" asked Frank as the light transformed into the image of Lily standing a foot away cross-armed and shaking her head.

Frank continued, "Lily, I am getting rid of the weeds. Those unwanted plants! They are like aliens! I am so frustrated at this point because it seems all I am doing is pulling them out. What can I do! I am beginning to dislike this gardening experience. I did say that I wanted a low maintenance backyard."



“Frank do you remember what you wrote in your plan to help keep the upkeep low?” asked Lily with an exasperated tone.

“Well I did say that I didn’t want to spend more than an hour every couple of days.”

“Yes,” interrupted Lily, “And do you remember how you were going to achieve this?”

“Oh, my how stupid of me!” Frank responded hitting his hand to his head. He suddenly remembered that he planned to mulch the whole garden. “How could I forget to mulch! Yes, come to think of it, I was going to lay down landscaping fabric and then the mulch to keep the unwanted plants out.”

“Yes, Frank, I guess it has been a long time since you have been gardening. Now, on the weed front, Frank have you ever heard it said that a weed is a plant in the wrong place?”

“You know that is what my mother used to say. She would then say to me that she heard that a weed was an unloved flower. Often she left the flowering weeds, because she said they enhanced her garden. She’d chuckle to herself and mumble under her breath in a cheeky way that her garden was an inclusive garden and that the horticultural society could stuff all their gardening rules. Funny, eh, she knew to be careful in exercising her power as the grand discriminator.”

“Frank, I think that you got so caught up in ensuring a win in the contest, you lost sight of the forest for the ‘weeds’,” smiled Lily.

“Yes you are right. Sort of how I lost sight of things with my family.”

Lily looked concerned, “How so, Frank?”

“You see Lily, like the garden project, my work was my obsession. I was constantly

preoccupied with the issues surrounding work. It wasn't that Olivia and Lilly were the least important, it was that I was raised with a strong work ethic. I thought of myself as the exclusive provider for the family. I was trying to better myself and make money, obtain recognition to garnish more financial rewards. I became a workaholic. I lived and breathed my job," reflected Frank.

"Frank, I can't believe that you intentionally ignored your family," answered Lily with warmth.

"No, you are right, Lily. I didn't mean to lose my compass of values. As a matter of fact, I thought I was pointed in the right direction. Now, I can see that I am really repeating the same pattern with this garden. I am losing perspective. I was so sure that my priorities were correct and all my "ducks were lined up in order". I saw my family as a strong pillar of my career and needed them to support my every thought and activity. They were always there. I was also fortunate never to be confronted with a major disaster or situation which would detract from my work priorities. As far as I was concerned, I was doing everything possible for my family's success and they were responding in the same manner. Although the job and the corporation were getting every ounce of energy that I could give, it seemed that it was a win-win for all."

"Frank, I think these weeds have taught you a thing or two!" countered Lily.

"Yes, you are right again. I think that I owe someone an apology for something I said not too long ago!"

Lily winked and nodded, "I know she will appreciate what you have to tell her Frank. Through your honest self-examination, Frank, you will be

able to morph and fly to greater heights during this very precious time of your life. I congratulate you!”

Frank held out his hands in a cup like manner. Lily flittered and landed in the center. At once he felt a warmth radiate into his hands, followed by a rolling energy that moved up his arms to his chest. He felt a unique power and tenderness that he had only experienced years ago with Lilly. This compelling emotion and connectedness possessed his entire being and, without warning, he felt a tear of love and peace tumble down his cheek, landing in the little fairy’s outstretched hands. In a twinkling, Lily had raised her hands above her head, sprinkling the water in a delicate shower, while she twirled in swirling pirouettes. Before long, she was performing a breathtaking ballet throughout the garden. She finished with a majestic curtsy in the centre of a deep crimson rose, then disappeared in a translucent cloud of glitter. She was gone.

Frank felt euphoric. He felt at peace. He was reborn in a manner of speaking. He knew what he had to do. First things were first he needed to follow up on his plan and lay the landscaping fabric topped with mulch.

By the end of the day, the entire garden was properly mulched. Frank felt extremely satisfied full of renewed energy for his gardening project. It was a powerful day that would change the rest of his life. He knew that the second issue at hand would require some reflection and writing. He had until August to perfect his message.

The following weekdays were spent efficiently and effectively gardening, watering, pruning, fertilizing and on rare occasion, weeding. Every day, Frank enjoyed the garden more and

worked less. The garden flourished in a kaleidoscope of jeweled- tone colour.

He also found himself slowly detaching himself from his intense desire to win the contest. By the end of July, the first place ribbon was no longer important. His priority was now not proving himself but celebrating and enjoying the fruits of his labour.

At night, Frank looked over photos of Lilly, Olivia, their family life together and more recent times with Brian and Joseph. He revisited all the great memories of their special holiday seasons, trips and significant family events and tried to write a journal on each. He then reorganized the photographs with his journals in a scrapbook with the intent of surprising someone special.

The rest of Frank's time was spent doing crossword puzzles, making his own computer generated crosswords based on business principles, (which he planned to give as a challenge to Joseph when he arrived), and catching up on all his reading.

Through all of this, Frank did not write to Lily. It wasn't that he forgot her; rather he felt that she was always with him. At quiet moments, he would send warm mental messages out to her. In return, he felt that she sent back a quick thought of reassurance or endearment.

## The Day Before The Big Arrival

It was the day before Olivia and Joseph's arrival. Frank felt a sense of panic. He wanted everything to be perfect. He spent the day doing a last minute tidy of the garden, shopping for their favourite foods, and cleaning the house. He was determined that Olivia was not going to lift a finger helping out the old man!

That night, although he was tired, there was one last finishing touch he needed to add to the scrapbook. He intended to write a letter to Olivia answering the question she had initially posed him on his day of retirement: "Dad if you could do it all over again would you have not given so much to the office and more to us?" The answer that he had originally given was one from his ego. It was self-justification and rationalization but it wasn't honest. Through his gardening adventure and his wee garden friend, he was finally able to uncover much of his hidden intent and emotions.

It was ten o'clock at night, and he knew that he had to start. He grabbed a pen and paper and began to write whatever came to his mind. The first word to hit the page was, sorry. Several minutes passed, like the quiet before the storm, then like the breaking of a great dam Frank began to write:

*Sorry. Olivia, I am sorry that I got distracted and fooled and thought work and home were exclusive. Yes, I do wish that I had spent more time with you and your mother, instead of prioritizing my office responsibilities. You and your mother were the heroes. Both of you showed continuous unconditional love regardless of my*

absence, moodiness, and obsessive tendencies. When I retired it was said that I was the example of servant leadership; as far as I am concerned you and your mother were the servant leaders. I was only able to accomplish what I did because of the support and guidance from both of you. I thank you. Do I now live in regret? No, what is done is done, and I have learned a hard lesson. Now, I am here for you and your family. I leave you with these two quotes I managed to find while I have been catching up on all my reading:

To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right.  
--Confucius

Your family and your love must be cultivated like a garden. Time, effort, and imagination must be summoned constantly to keep any relationship flourishing and growing.  
--Jim Rohn

All my love and gratitude,

Dad

To his surprise, upon signing Dad, a tear fell at the bottom of the page; a tear of love, joy and hope.

## The Big Arrival

It was noon and the British Airways flight from London arrived on time. Frank spotted Joseph towering over Olivia as they moved through the international flight gate.

Waving his arms, Frank quickly moved towards his family. His heart was racing and he felt a slight lump in his throat.

“Joseph, you have grown! Oh my, you are taller than me now!” spoke Frank, giving his grandson a bear hug.

“Hey Grandpa, ya look great! How’s that finger?” smiled Joseph patting his grandfather on the back with a bear hug.

“It’s okay, Joe, look. Oh, Olivia, you look great too! I am so glad you are both here!” Frank immediately extended his arms around his daughter.

Olivia embraced her father, warmed by his extra exuberance. She couldn’t help but wonder if love was in the air for her father. “Gee, Dad you seem just fabulous!”

In the bustle of the airport crowds, they managed to chatter like parakeets, find the car and be on the highway back to Oakville in less than an half hour. During the car ride home, the conversation touched on full details of Joseph’s school year past, the year coming up, and his summer job. Olivia would chime in with extra proud mamma details when Joseph was being particularly modest.

At the house, without wasting a second, Frank directed Olivia and Joseph to hold hands and close their eyes as he guided them out to the garden. Upon reaching the back, he instructed them to open wide.

“Oh, my, oh my, Dad, it’s beautiful! I can’t believe it! Oh, you have done an outstanding job. It could compete with the best of English gardens. Oh...” cried out Olivia.

“Grandpa, wow I am impressed. Grandma would sure be proud of you!” added Joseph with a huge grin.

Hugging both of them, Frank beamed. He felt so proud and content. He was anxious to share with them all the intricacies of the garden.

“Follow me, I have to show you everything!” said Frank passionately.

The afternoon was spent, eating a slow lunch while Frank shared his development of the garden. He showed them the plans and gave every last detail of the building fiasco and the hospital visit.

He finished with, “It was an amazing journey! Particularly, since I met a very special neighbour. Her name is Lily and she was very instrumental in helping me plan and implement the garden.”

Olivia’s ears perked up at the reference to a female, especially since she had the same name as her late mother.

In a teasing tone she asked, “So Dad can we meet Lily? Where does she live?”

“She lives in the back. Well, unfortunately you won’t be able to meet her. You see she was off work for a short period of time while I was working on the garden, but now she is consumed with a new job,” coyly explained Frank. He was not about to reveal all the intimate details to Olivia, partially because he thought she may think he had ‘lost it’ but more importantly his relationship with Lily was magical and sacred.



“Too bad,” replied Olivia disappointed that she could not share this special person in her father’s life.

This awkward moment was dissolved by the sound of the doorbell. Frank was relieved as he was very uncomfortable telling his white lie.

Frank got up and walked through the grand foyer. Beyond the etched stained glass insert, Frank could see a shadow of a large white disk on top of what looked like an average sized female. He opened the door to be greeted by a very distinguished, well groomed middle aged lady sporting a Channel navy pantsuit. A spectacular wide brimmed hat covered in luscious rose peonies stylishly graced the brunette hair which was twisted in a French knot. She was a statement of flamboyant elegance.

Without wasting a second, this stunning lady extended a French-manicured hand with a beaming smile saying, “Good morning sir. I am Lynn Coulson, president of the Oakville Horticultural Society.”

“Oh my,” interjected Frank. “I completely forgot about the contest! Hello I am the fellow who submitted the garden. My name is Frank. Please step in.”

With perfect poise and grace, Lynn stepped in. Her soft floral yet spicy perfume reminded Frank of the scent that Lilly often wore. He found himself energized by this woman’s presence.

Lynn cleared her throat and announced, “I am here to present you with the prestigious Trillium Award for your outstanding garden,” ceremoniously offering Frank his trillium emblem and certificate.

“Congratulations! We will be by at four o’clock with the local papers for pictures. You will

be here, I hope?" She firmly and enthusiastically shook his hand

"Yes, of course," stammered Frank slowly releasing his hand. "Thank you. I look forward to seeing you later. Bye now."

In the distance he could hear Olivia, "Dad, are you okay? What happened?"

Frank was shocked. He had completely forgotten that he had entered the contest! He won and never had he ever been so unattached to a winning before!

"Yes, you won't believe it... the garden won the contest!" yelled out Frank with pride, shaking his head.

## The Answer

Later that night, the cool late summer breeze filled the stately family room. Frank had his favourite classical f.m. station playing in the background, while the crickets could be heard in the distant background.

Olivia lit several candles and turned the lights low. She learned to create relaxing atmospheres from her mother. She sauntered over to the bookshelf which housed the albums. Taking one out, she decided to share the memories with Joseph.

“Dad, there seems to be a lot of pictures missing. What has happened to the albums?” Olivia asked with a tone of annoyance.

“Well, my dear, this summer has been very significant for me. I accomplished much and was very introspective. A question you posed to me the day I retired resonated with me. Over the past weeks I have reconsidered the answer I gave you. My dear, I have something for you.” Frank pulled out a large gold gift bag with tissue from a large mahogany armoire and handed it to Olivia.

“Olivia, here is my revisited answer along with a scrapbook and journal of some of our fondest memories. Enjoy it and share it with your family.”

Frank then went back to the armoire and pulled out a package of envelopes neatly wrapped with a wide gold ribbon and tied in a bow. He handed them to his grandson.

“Joseph, these are for you.”

Joseph was surprised. “What’s this grandpa?”

“This summer, I had time to think about many things. The funny thing was that in planning this garden I ended up reflecting back on my

business experience and philosophy. Don't ask how, I just did. In the process I ended up writing many of my thoughts on paper. These are for you. I hope they might help you achieve your dream of maturing into a business executive. Even if you decide on some other path, hopefully these notes will give you guidance in all aspects of your life. Just remember to keep a balanced lifestyle and you won't get lost for the forest and the trees, in a garden gone wild. Joseph I have added a quote on the top. It is from one of my favourite authors and leadership gurus, Lance Secretan. It states:

‘Leadership is not so much about technique and methods as it is about opening the heart. Leadership is about inspiration -- of oneself and of others. Great leadership is about human experiences, not processes. Leadership is not a formula or a program, it is a human activity that comes from the heart and considers the hearts of others. It is an attitude, not a routine.’

This quote can be applied to all areas of your life. I wish you all success!”

Joseph took the package and gave his grandfather a long hug.

Pulling away Frank, quickly excused himself and went to the backyard. It was dark. Frank's solar lights glowed throughout the garden. He walked across the patio, under the pergola along the path, under the arbor, then stopped, to survey the beauty of all the flowers and scrubs in shadow

He sent out a mental message summoning Lily. Quietly, he whispered, “Lily, thank you, or should I say Lilly. You have always stood behind

me, even to this moment of triumph and self-actualization. You my dear are the servant leader and I salute you.”

Frank blew a kiss into the darkness. In the twinkling of an eye, Frank saw a myriad of fire flies dance around the garden. A bright glowing ball of light, hovered before him, and as he suspected, Lily appeared. She looked absolutely brilliant. She gave him a wink and in a melodious voice she answered, “I love you! Remember, it is all about love!” A flicker, a flash and several dashing lights later, Frank was left in the still blackness with the soft tinkle of wind chimes blowing in the breeze.

It was now time to turn, and enter his new chapter.

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### **Mary Catherine Rolston a.k.a. Dazzle**

M.C. has taught for over 12 years at the elementary level. She has also owned a craft business, bed and breakfast, and worked extensively in her community as a volunteer. As a trained Toastmaster, performance artist, and writer of poetic metaphor, she is on a mission to promote servant leadership, living passionately, and infusing life with fun. She spends her spare time researching, writing and presenting “interludes” on these topics. "It is important that we don't take ourselves too seriously and maintain our sense of humility."

### **Frank Urbanski a.k.a. Mr. Sparkle**

Frank is a retired executive, with extensive experience in banking, telecommunications, insurance, computer technology and information management. He was also a member of a prominent Management Consulting firm and later provided management courses in Strategic Planning. With this experience and an MBA, Frank provided leadership with many work and volunteer groups in achieving their objectives and enhancing productivity. Although retired, Frank has continued to contribute to society through various leadership and support positions in volunteer organizations. He is a strong proponent of servant leadership and fostering fun on the workplace.

