

The Emperor's BOLD New Clothes

My wife, two kids and I helped my Father celebrate his 82nd Birthday on March 4th as he received a flourless chocolate cake (with 8 candles on one side and two on the other) and orange tulips. He didn't know we were coming by and neither he nor my Mother wanted to answer the door. We stood out in the drizzle until they figured out it was probably my son who was doing the knocking and incessant doorbell ringing. Celebrating Dad's birthday brought to mind the gift we gave him two years ago. It was a complete set of swimming equipment, fins, goggles, a kickboard and a cap. Let's just say my Dad takes his time with new habits as it took him nearly two years to begin to swim at all! I teased him about this very subject and everyone had a nice laugh. He does have more energy now, so my Mom has him doing additional projects around the house. I'm happy to report that my Dad swims three times a week covering a distance of about 600 meters each time!

When my Dad first started swimming about a month ago, I met him at the pool with my four-year old son. I was planning on going by myself, but my Mom had the good suggestion to bring Ian along too. I hurriedly packed my bag and put in my son's swim trunks and his towel. This was a momentous event, the first time the grandfather, father and son were all going swimming together and to the exact same pool where I grew up. The pool hadn't changed in 30-plus years. The men's locker room still had rusty blue lockers with squeaky hinges, and there was the same distinctive odor trying to escape behind the overwhelming chlorine smell. My son gets fidgety when he has to sit for longer than 30 seconds, so I tried to spot him on the changing bench. He was determined to put his bathing suit on by himself. Once he was situated, I looked in my backpack for my bathing suit. I then looked again. I couldn't find it or my trusty flip-flops (known as thongs in Australia) anywhere.

It was at about this point my son started to say, "Daddy when can we go to the pool?" My Father had already gone out to swim his laps and I was faced with a stark choice. I could go out on the pool deck in my street clothes and try to spot him as he swam in the children's pool. This didn't bode well for the dryness factor of my outfit or for the pool rules. The alternative was to take a deep breath



A Potential Site for the Emperor's BOLD New Clothes, Greenville, SC, (c) Mark Sincevich

and head out in a clean pair of black underwear, but without my thongs (ah, er flip-flops). I visualized I had the 'most happening' swimsuit on the market and headed out 'pretending' nothing was out of the ordinary. I tried not to make eye contact with the two lifeguards. However, out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw the expression of something like, 'get a load of this guy!' After 10 minutes or so, my initial embarrassment wore off and I was able to become present with my son and play tag in the pool.

You might remember the children's story, "The Emperor's New Clothes" by Hans Christian Anderson. In the story, two swindlers convinced the Emperor they could provide him the finest clothes made of the best quality 'invisible' material. The Emperor thought, "What useful clothes to have. If I had such a suit of clothes I could know at once which of my people is stupid or unfit for his post." After not seeing any progress for a while, the Emperor's faithful old minister was sent to investigate. He saw nothing, but didn't want to report this. "He did not dare to say he saw nothing. Nobody must find out thought he." The Emperor had his doubts thinking he was a terrible ruler and not fit for his post, but nobody would tell him the truth. Nobody that is until a small boy in the crowd said, "But he hasn't got anything on." The Emperor heard the whisper catch like wildfire throughout the crowd, but he knew he had to complete the procession celebrating his new clothes. "He drew himself up and walked boldly on holding his head higher than before."

How many times have you made decisions that caused initial embarrassment or didn't make a whole lot of sense to others at first? When have you walked boldly on anyhow holding your head up high? Sometimes your personal leadership or the leadership you exercise in your organization might make you question your initial decision. Virgin Group Chairman and Billionaire Richard Branson was faced with this choice when he wanted to continue to operate his Virgin Atlantic

Airways. In 1992, he was running short of cash and could either pull out of the airline altogether or try and sell his principal company, Virgin Records. After some trepidation, he sold Virgin Records for \$1 Billion to Thorn EMI and put a good deal of this money into his airline. This was in spite of the overwhelming advice against his decision. He said, "It was a bold move, but even then I knew that it's only by being BOLD that you get anywhere. If you are a risk taker, then the art of the risk is to protect the downside. ... And once again I felt that unless we did something dramatic, which meant spending money, we would never get out of trouble."

What decisions do you need to make to avert the next disaster, increase your sales or to create the next new product or service? While the difference between my revenue and the increase in the number of my programs between 2006 and 2007 has been dramatic, both my wife and I felt we needed to create a business model that allowed us to generate consistent income. Most professional speakers have retirement income, are residential or commercial landlords or have another business such as a restaurant to help them both with income consistency and through downturns in the economy. What began as an initial conversation on a cocktail napkin back in May of 2007 in Atlanta turned into a bold investment in an absentee-owner franchise business.

We picked a reputable franchise because we want to spend our energy on working a tested system instead of trying to figure out if a new business works. We are literally in the process of trying to secure a retail space in the Washington, DC area and once we sign the lease, I will let you know more about the company and provide some additional details. The great thing about this business is that it will allow me to continue to work on my leadership speaking with a unique photography angle and provide me an external office a few days a week. Since I was ok with swimming in my underwear, it has been an easier transition to think of myself as a franchise owner too. I had to follow my own agenda or truth in pursuit of a higher goal and not worry about what other

people think. And sometimes you have to create your own truth even if it means standing in your underwear for a period of time.



Mark Sincevich works with organizations to develop leaders with more focus and creativity. He does this through a unique photography angle in his speaking programs and writing. Mark's programs on leading with focus help his customers gain a fresh perspective, generate new ideas, sharpen the focus and create more business. Mark is the Chief Perspective Officer of his organization, Leading with Focus, the founder of Staash Press, and the Executive Director of the Digital Photography Institute. In between assignments, he can be found spending time with his family or writing in cafés with character. To book Mark at your next meeting or event call 301-654-3010 or visit www.LeadingWithFocus.com.