

## Plotting Your Destiny, Part One

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As most of you know, traveling these days is not easy and getting anywhere on time is a miracle. Since I live in a small town in Pennsylvania, flying anywhere nonstop is nearly impossible, which multiplies the aggravation. I get on and off an awful lot of airplanes and attend countless meetings and chiropractic conventions. Recently, I have had the opportunity to do a few interviews and write a commencement speech, along with doing what I am doing here - writing my *Dynamic Chiropractic* column. In short, my life is far from boring.

The downside to all this travel is that I sleep on too many lumpy mattresses, attend too many meetings and banquets, and am exposed to the frustration and hassle of too many flight delays, cancellations and late arrivals. The upside, certainly, is that I've met some great people throughout the world, eaten in some wonderful restaurants (Italian, of course) and had plenty of time on my hands to do some deep thinking and heavy reading. All while I wait for that next flight.

I watch travelers come unglued when they learn they are stranded in Timbuktu. But I have learned over the years to just take it in stride. My normal routine when I learn that my 6 a.m. flight has been cancelled, and that the next one won't take off until midnight, is to hit the bookstand. Sometimes, you simply cannot carry enough books with you.

In the process of covering airports, I've become sort of a self-styled "expert" on airport bookstores. What they stock on their shelves is quite different from what you see at a typical mass-market bookstore like Barnes & Noble. Airport selections are limited. Oh, there are plenty of gossip magazines and TV tabloids, but in the book section, you'll primarily find *very, very* sexy romance novels, very explosive political narratives, very frightening mysteries, and very provocative business and economic dissertations. (I guess that's what the public wants to numb their minds with while the clock ticks away.)

The trouble is, nowadays the romance novels are so frightening, the mystery novels so explosive, and the political exposés so sexy, it's hard to figure out what is what. I guess that's the blur of the e-generation. You have to scratch your head and ask yourself, "What am I reading? Is it a book about world affairs or is it a script for a soap opera?" I mean, there is a love triangle and murder attempts among astronauts, the revelations of political infidelity, and the many fathers of Anna Nicole Smith's child. Come on now!

By a laborious process of elimination, I have learned that what fits my taste best is a business management or motivational/inspirational book. That's about the closest I can come to sanity at an airport. I like to search out new approaches to professional management, staff motivation and patient experiences, especially if it is information I can impart to the chiropractors I speak to and the students I meet.

Recently, I picked up a small, color-illustrated book; a typical achievement-oriented product you see on every bookshelf and counter these days. Usually, they are displayed alongside greeting cards and souvenirs in that swivel rack. I was attracted to this book because it was a fast reader, illustrated with beautiful photos, and I was hoping my flight would take off on time (which it

didn't). It was titled *The Essence of Leadership*. My first thought was, *hmmm, nice title*. I noticed it was published by Successories, the company that puts out all those big posters featuring serene nature photos and motivational quotes. Most people have seen them around offices and workplaces.

I expected the same kind of material in the book: nothing witty or too deep, just nice philosophical thoughts about life that I could skim through. And that's basically what was there. Except in thumbing through the pages, I came to a chapter that caught my eye. It was titled, "Create an Attitude of Ownership." I don't know why, but that statement struck a special chord. As the message unfolded, I found it inspiring, maybe not exactly as the author intended, since the book was directed toward building *esprit de corps* (morale) within organizations.

However, getting across the idea of creating a team attitude among employees is the desire of every well-run organization. This book took it a little further in a very human and personal way. The chapter related to a story about a housekeeper at a five-star hotel in Texas who saw herself not as a cleaner of messy rooms and dirty toilets, but as a one-woman business who "owned" her floor. It went on to point out that her perspective made all the difference as to how she undertook her duties, treated her clientele and served her employer.

While this story is old, I feel it embodies a management theory that also applies to running a health care practice. It emphasizes the importance and success of molding cooperation and interest to such a high level that employees will want to take on an "ownership" attitude when dealing with the people they serve - not just motivating employees, but empowering them with responsibility and authority. Not stopping there, either; holding them accountable.

Ownership and accountability go together. You can't have accountability without taking an "ownership" attitude. Accountability was the bread-and-butter characteristic of a prior generation. Everything depended upon it. It was a sign of maturity, morality, honesty and sanctity. Our grandparents knew it well. But somehow, somewhere, the ownership characteristic that led to accountability got lost, simply overpowered in the dust of gigabytes and the glare of laser lights. Our high-tech society moved so fast and so aggressively that somehow, accountability was left behind.

Perhaps I am generalizing a bit, but this is a real problem today. It's a problem in person-to-person relationships; it is a problem in business relationships. And it's a major problem in doctor/patient relationships as well. In fact, I will venture to say, its effect is being felt far worse in the health care sector than anywhere else.

The business community has taken heed and reawakened itself to the value of accountability. That's why you see so many books written about it. Old niceties in the form of new theories are popping up in all of the management briefs: The benefit of trying to give more than you get; the strength of valuing pride and self-esteem over money; the wisdom of not shirking duty or letting your customer down; the advantages of keeping lines of communications open. All of these simple, old ideas that are really nothing more than elementary ethics - perhaps just pure common courtesy - are now being repackaged as "breakthrough theories of business."

One should not have to be told that customers don't respond to or have confidence in a server who mishandles them by being discourteous, abrupt or non-communicative. That's the basis behind the old saying, "The customer is always right." Right or wrong, the attitude of the server should be to make the guest feel wanted.

At one time, the business community knew the power of the "personal touch" and the professions

knew it even better. In the past, medical doctors called their patients by their first names, and knew their patients' health and family histories without depending solely on their charts (computer or BlackBerry). They charted events of personal interest as well as conditions of health needs. Doctors took a real interest in their patients - an "ownership" role, so to speak - and as a result, they had loyal patients.

The patient referred to the physician as "my doctor" and the practitioner was just that for life. Today, there seems to be no ownership interest between the doctor and patient; and in a way, no accountability, other than that covered by law and fear of litigation. Today, with most medical offices, there is no sense of ownership, other than that represented by an insurance or Medicare card. The patient is just another number walking through the door. (And in my opinion, this is one time there is no "strength" in numbers.)

If the patient doesn't show up for an annual check up or make an appointment for a follow-up, so be it. It's doubtful the doctor will pick up the phone and ask why. Did he forget, or die? If the procedure is not covered by insurance or Medicare, it's doubtful the doctor will take time to advise further. Depressing to say, but some of this attitude is spilling over into the chiropractic profession. Where once, chiropractic was known for outstanding patient care and concern, today, some modern-day practices are sadly mimicking the impersonal environment of the medical office.

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*Editor's note:* Part two of this article is scheduled to appear in the May 21 issue.

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