

Nuggets and Bright Lines

- Guilty or not guilty?
- Your strength
- It will come
- Summum bonum
- Being Yourself
- Moving on



Your Trial

Let me pose you a question or two. What are you going to do when you are tested? How are you going to respond when you are under pressure? When the strength of your allegiance to your principles is seriously stressed, how will you stay strong? How are you going to withstand coercive forces that offer you alternatives that are attractive ways of avoiding pain? If tried, are you going to be found guilty of honouring what you believe is right and true?

Circumstance will tell. In fact circumstance probably tells in every living moment and the mantra of, 'what you are speaks so loudly I can't hear what you say' will likely reveal it all. The occasions when we are really tested, if my own experience is anything to go by, is one that may demand every ounce of fortitude you have. At such points you can feel totally alone, uncertain and afraid. It can be daunting and sobering.

I will share with you a series of events that demonstrates such a situation. Let me be clear this incident was not a life or death decision or situation, so let's get this into perspective first of all. The story though goes something like this.

Quite suddenly, although the warning signs had been there before, I found myself knee deep in what I considered serious wrong doing and the wagon train I was on was rolling along at some speed. It is important to note also that at this time I was away from friends and family, in a foreign country. I was also at this particular point fatigued and had little time to consider matters.

Confronted with the facts, ones that abruptly and directly challenged my belief system, it took a little while for the reality to set in. The course of action I wished to take as a result of this discovery, I was being strongly advised, to the degree that in hindsight I consider coercive, I could not do. The alternative of continuing along the path that things were going down was not a viable option to me either. The decision I had to make was to either let go of being able to lead the completion, after months of work, of a rewarding project and one that I had put my heart and soul into, or to carry on knowing that I would be complicit in cheating and rule violation. I chose the former.

Sitting alone in silence, in a hotel room, my pain was the loss of an opportunity to continue leading a special group of people with almost magically evolving relationships on to the next stage of a journey. This had been taken away from me because of dishonest and unethical behaviours by people who, despite official positions, had little real understanding of what we were doing. It hurt deeply. I was angry, disappointed and felt little but contempt for those involved.

My preferred option of making the best of the opportunity with a frank and honest admission of the situation and suffering the consequences was an option that was, as I have mentioned taken away from me. I was told it was not possible and could not be done for the good of everyone. My thoughts were and are that it should have been done, 'for the good of everyone'.

I believe we should act in accordance with our guiding principles. Whatever the consequences you can be assured that they will provide a reliable outcome. If this is not the case, then the choice of principles that guide requires a review.

Shanks, probably my greatest hero and one of the great grandfather's of my mentor family tree talked often and candidly about honesty. How blessed I am that his rhetoric is deeply embedded in me.

At points like this you cannot underestimate the influence of the daily readings you put into your mind. The words of Brian Johnson, Ryan Holiday and particularly the works around The Stoic Philosophy allowed me to stand firm when it was necessary. Without them I am not sure it would have turned out the way it did. To you all, I say thank you.

One of my favourite poems, as it is of many, is Kipling's 'If'. I felt scaffolded by the lines:

'Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build em up with worn out tools;.....
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;'

The words of John Wooden and those of The Stoics. both in their own way admonish us to regain control by redefining success for ourselves and not be overly concerned with outcomes, glory or the opinions of others, but only with doing our work. The work that only we can do, right here and right now.

Solace also came in part in the knowing that no experience is wasted, as long as we can look at it in a certain way. In this case, I held on to the fact that no one could take away the magical times we had experienced as a group on and off the pitch. What we had, we had and what we have, we have. Some days prior I wrote a post describing this very thing. Little did I realise how true a message it would contain. I wrote it and now I have to live it. It asks and tests me as to whether I really believe my own words or whether I just wrote to impress and bolster my image and brand. The incidents have forced me to think deeply. Everything I wrote I meant and I am having to live through circumstances that prove it. My responses going forward will tell the full story.

In my inner turmoil I have searched for relief and answers. Much has come in the way of a loving family to talk to. To my children, Dad, Mum, brothers and sister I love you more than you will ever know. I am truly blessed with you. Some has come in the form of being proactive in the rebuilding process, albeit currently a path without the pristine heart beat it had.

At this time I am not proud of many things I am associated with. There are times, however when I am not proud of myself or those close to me either. This is life though. Amor Fati.

Today would have been my first competitive fixture as a coach with the boys I have grown to love. Ironically I am back at the training ground trialling a new group to replace them. It's like an arranged marriage where a bride is chosen for you and you go on to develop a relationship that seems magically better than you could have imagined. Only just before the wedding you are told she is married to someone else but you can still carry on with the ceremony although it will be fake but no one will lose face, as long as you say nothing. On standing firm and declining to go ahead with the sham proceedings you are then contractually obliged to immediately begin another relationship search.

This is the challenge. I realise that I invest emotionally in what I do. This is me. It is my strength and also therefore my weakness. It is akin to a meaningful job like nursing where a bond with a patient is established which, if the patient passes away, the professional is left to deal emotionally with the loss whilst being expected to continue his or her duties without a fault.

It felt like I needed a period of grieving. However in order to salvage the reputation of the corrupt and inept organisation I was involved with I was tasked with engaging in a dismantling and rebuilding process, whilst others, enjoyed the fruit of the previous weeks of endeavour. The pain continued. Life does not give such sufferance to sit and cry.

The trial continued and moved into a wilderness as the path seemed to have little heart. Within this episode it felt like there was another trial yet to be faced. One of sharing my truth around events. I spent many hours formulating my thoughts and feelings into a logical format. It made hard reading and filled me with some trepidation when I considered sharing it. I felt it was something I needed to do if I was to be true to myself and to allow the universe to have its way in the process. This may all sound strange but the only real way seemed to be on the other side of this. Trying to traverse round it felt like I was just carrying it. It needed letting go and as I have said, to have faith, suffer the consequences and be prepared for crucifixion.

After many days of internal wrangling, many email drafts, many questions of who, what, when and where the drive to speak my truth remained as strong as ever. I had to be certain though that I was not just reacting emotionally with no brake and blowing things apart in a red mist, only to wake up after the event with regret. I bided my time, thought, mulled and obsessed. Yes I became obsessed. I recognise now that it was bordering on unhealthy. In light of events I understand the obsession was to do with applying due diligence to the delivery to ensure I did all I could to hit the spot and achieve the objective.

The objective was simply to speak my truth. or in other words 'do the right thing'. This is what the teachings I have learnt towards say. This path was the way I wanted to go immediately after the realisation of what had actually occurred. It was a hot path and I recognised this. After things had settled a little, I sought refuge and temperance in one person, my Dad. A man of balance and thoughtful non action at times but the man for the occasion and how blessed I am. True to his nature he advised consideration before firing any bullets. Thank you Dad, again.

His advice however, failed to dampen down the smouldering desire to speak my truth. Again and again I was pushed to sit, type and retype. The words flowed. I knew in itself it was a cathartic process. Maybe it would be 'a letter in a drawer, never sent'.r. Maybe. Night after night I slept but it arose with me.

One night after reading two articles about having the courage to stand and speak the truth I was more determined than ever to do what I felt I had to do. I decided to do it in the morning as I left for work. Another night of sleep, of course, may have weakened my resolve. It did not. At 7.46 am, I pressed send.

As I picked up my bag to leave for training, I felt both relief and trepidation. The tiger now unleashed, I was prepared for everything to be for the last time.

My colleague, who had been copied in, joked about it, when he saw me. Typical, how could anyone joke about such a communication. The act speaks not of the content but of the interpreter. At training I felt light and had a sense of relief. I was free, I was myself and fully prepared to accept the consequences.

As time ticked and I approached the time to check my mail and messages, I felt unease and fear. When I did, there was only a single two line email response. It simply thanked me for expressing my thoughts and that we would discuss matters at a previously arranged meeting. It's brevity stopped me in my tracks. Such a communication and to the recipients it went to could only have had a profound effect if fully understood. Many people would go through their whole life and not receive such an item. The muted response was unnerving. The understandable attempted authoritarian stance to reassert, in subsequent communication, affirming intentions around making inroads into highlighted issues was unconvincing.

I was holding on to internal constructs that had been built over time. These meaningful, considered and trusted principles empowered me. The opposition I knew were acting on self preservation, deceit, dishonesty and falsehood. They had battened down the hatches and blind eyed the wrong doing. No way could I live with this. I knew not the outcome in this particular situation but I knew my actions were based on power and theirs on blustering force.

As much as many, in private, brag about how they told this person and that person this and that, they hardly ever do. I had, all concerned knew and privately recognised this without necessarily saying so. The position I found myself in as a result, seemed beneficial. They knew they had an assertive principled and assertive personality in camp. My bargaining power possibly elevated with all that had been revealed. I recognised I was also fortunate to be able to sit here unscathed. Taking on corrupt and established bases of power is not always so clean. Now to let it settle and focus on what is important.

I can only hope there will be inspiration for all to be guided by the right star going forward. Albeit currently it may well be under the weight of the stick and not the carrot.

Amazingly, in the minutes and hours following the email delivery four events transpired which I could easily have categorised as serendipitous. A number of occurrences that were positive forward steps in separate projects came into fruition. Bizarrely I was waiting on them patiently and as soon as the release and letting go had occurred in terms of the communication, they manifested. Strange but true. I will, of course, allow you to ponder on this as you see fit, but it makes me wonder if the universal forces that operate beyond us mortals are affected by the changes within you as the consequence of your actions. This is your power.

Speaking your truth in a strong yet quiet way after due diligence is like unleashing the universe to do its will on your behalf. You and your source become allies. Your work and time on this occasion are done. You feel an overwhelming relief as you watch and wait. It is powerful. This omnipotence acts omnipresently for all.

I was also bolstered by another reminder from Ryan Holiday around a powerful subject of such simplicity. One that you could and maybe should build your life around: summum bonum. It means the highest good and reminds us that our duty is always just to take, in our opinion of course, the course of action that will result in the best outcome for the most people. It takes pure selfishness out of the window as you expose yourself to risk by doing what will be the greatest benefit to all and not just yourself. As John Donne wrote so beautifully, '...never send to ask for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.' We are all one and what happens to your neighbour affects you.

What I do know is that I am, a changed man after this. I recognise that doing the right thing, after giving due diligence is empowering. It aligns your external self with your internal self. This is the alignment that Esther Hicks talks about. You feel a force within, as if you just need to be and not actually do. Inside exists the now completed layering of hard experience that says, never again will this happen to me like this.

In this joint venture of life, some of it is up to you and the rest out of your control. All you can do is do that which is in your control to the best of your ability and let the rest take care of itself. Thank you St. Francis and as Nietzsche and Campbell allude to, the bigger the demon you say yes to and swallow, the greater you become.

The Author

Rob is a UEFA qualified coach with a League Managers Association qualification and a science and medicine background. He has worked in the football industry in Europe, USA, Asia and Africa; at International, Premiership, League, Non-League and grass roots levels with both World Cup and European Championship experience.



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