



### Cold Winter's Night

You had a bad day at work. Nothing went right. Everything went wrong. The truck fell in the ditch, the computer went down, customers and bosses are screaming with an equally high decibel level. On top of that, it is really nasty out...cold and drizzly. You, with a splitting headache, finally make it home and are sitting in your easy chair, looking at the stockings all hung with care. You turn on the 7:00 news and with a little Christmas "cheer" in hand you are looking forward to an evening of quiet solitude that just might put you into the spirit, which up to this point is a mood that you have not experienced this holiday season. After the usual amount of negative news and speculation about the upcoming bowl games, the weather guy comes on and says matter-of-factly, "We are in trouble now. The worst winter storm of the season, and possibly the worst in many years, is on the way. A combination of sleet, ice and snow makes for a lethal precipitation laden cocktail. As a matter of fact there is almost a 100% chance of losing power, schools have already closed, and this storm is to arrive just before dawn. Ladies and Gentleman in TV land, make sure that you have your emergency provisions in order, including candles, food, blankets, propane, wood for the fireplace and anything else you may require for a multiple day power loss."

You suddenly realize you are not prepared for this predicament and you decide you have got to go to the grocery store. So you leave the warm confines of your home, bundle up like an arctic explorer, and make the five minute drive, through light sleet and rain, to the store. The place is packed with cars as everybody and their brother are there to get all the items that they are lacking. You are generally optimistic and positive, although today's events have pushed you to the limit, so you drive to the front of the store to see if you are lucky. It rarely ever happens, but occasionally you find a spot and it keeps you coming back for more. You turn the corner, 50 feet from the storefront and then you see him. A man has just walked out of the store with his arms full and his car is parked right in front of the door! You pull over to the side so he can get by and you watch as he unlocks his door, puts his packages in, gets in, straps in, cranks up, and backs out. This is your lucky day. As he pulls forward and just as you are about to release your brakes to pull into this primo parking space you know what happens. Some yahoo in a burgundy van comes flying around the corner and without even slowing down pulls right into your parking space! This guy could not have missed you. You were 30 feet away with lights on for at least two minutes!

How do you feel right now? What is going through your mind?

You immediately decide to go find this guy and give him a small piece of your mind. You drive down to the end of the parked cars, about 30 cars away, open the door, step out and your foot immediately goes into a mud hole. Icy water flows over your sock and down into your shoe. You are really hostile now, so you hustle into the store with the intent of giving a little larger piece of your mind to this mindless ill-mannered interloper who has caused a precipitous spike in your blood pressure. You go into the store and you can't believe it. Not only has this guy taken your parking place, but he has

butted into the front of the line. You walk up to him and are just about ready to unload when you hear him say to the cashier: "There's been a wreck about a ¼ mile from here, a car slipped off the road and is upside down in a water-filled ditch, there is a family in there screaming. I left my brother to go down and try to help them out, and I have come up here to get some help. Please call 911 and tell them there is a real emergency and we need them there immediately. It's right across from the high school."

How are you feeling now?

The Leadership point is this...when things go wrong, especially when someone does something unkind toward us, we must get all the facts before we make a judgment. Too often we get one side of the information and then make a hasty decision that comes back to haunt us when we hear the whole story. Especially at work, but in our personal lives as well, I am convinced that unless bodily harm is involved there is not a thing in the world that can't wait until tomorrow morning.

So at the end of a long hard day when something happens: the customer was let down, we shipped the wrong material, we made an error which cost us — that is not the time to start pointing fingers and blaming and throwing more fuel on the tension filled fire. That is the time for someone to say, "There's nothing we can do about it now, it's a done deal. Go home, get a good night's sleep and we will meet tomorrow morning to sort all this out and see how we can keep this from happening in the future." And of course one of the great one-word, open-ended questions of all times is: "WHY?" This generally will give us the information to start a logical thought process.

- Why did you take my parking place?
- Why did you say that?
- Why do you think that?
- Why did we miscommunicate?
- Why did we schedule production this way?
- Why did we ship that instead of this?

Although I hope you have never had a day like the foregoing, here is a recent real world example where someone made a judgment based on limited information and possibly caused some significant heartache to some pretty special people.

**OpEd. from Phoenix newspaper, The Arizona Republic  
Complaint: A wake-up call from  
Luke's jets. June 23, 2005.**

*"Question of the day for Luke Air Force Base: Whom do we thank for the morning air show? Last Wednesday, at precisely 9: 11 a.m., a tight formation of four F-16 jets made a low pass over Arrowhead Mall, continuing west over Bell road at approximately 500 feet. Imagine our good fortune! Do the Tom Cruise-wannabes feel we need this wake-up call, or were they trying to impress the cashiers at Mervyns' early-bird special? Any response would be appreciated."*

**The Response**

*Regarding "A wake-up call from Luke's jets" (Letters, Thursday):*

*On June 15, at precisely 9:12 a.m., a perfectly timed four-ship of F-16s from the 63<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base flew over the grave of Capt. Jeremy Fresques. Capt. Fresques was an Air Force officer who was previously stationed at Luke Air Force Base and was killed in Iraq on May 30, Memorial Day. At 9 a.m. on June 15, his family and friends gathered at Sunland Memorial Park in Sun City to mourn the loss of a husband, son and friend. Based on the letter writer's recount of the flyby, and because of the jet noise, I'm sure you didn't hear the 21-gun salute, the playing of taps, or my words to the widow and parents of Capt. Fresques as I gave them their son's flag on behalf of the President of the United States and all those veterans and servicemen and women who understand the sacrifices they have endured.*

*A four-ship flyby is a display of respect the Air Force pays to those who give their lives in defense of freedom. We are professional aviators and take our jobs seriously, and on June 15 what the letter writer witnessed was four officers lining up to pay their ultimate respects. The letter writer asks, "Whom do we thank for the morning air show?"*

*The 56<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing will call for you, and forward your thanks to the widow and parents of Capt. Fresques, and thank them for you, for it was in their honor that my pilots flew the most honorable formation of their lives.*

*Lt. Col. Scott Pleus  
CO 63<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Squadron  
Luke Air Force Base*

I encourage your response to these thoughts. [farlgroup@aol.com](mailto:farlgroup@aol.com)

Have a great day!

Please forward this on or send us the e-mail addresses of co-workers, friends or family members who might enjoy a monthly leadership thought.