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CAREER STRATEGIES AND INSIGHTS

Feedback Hidden in the Rice

One of my coaches, Randy Hain, often reminds me that our insights and stories come from our life experiences. As I think about the experience I'm about to share with you, I realize that there is something to be learned in every interaction - if we pay attention.

My significant other (a.k.a. Bernard) had an outpatient medical procedure a few weeks ago. On the day of the procedure we had to be at the hospital by 6 am, so we were up at 4:30 am and out of the house by 5:15 am. He came through the procedure with flying colors and his doctor recommended taking it easy for 24 hours.

Once we got back home I encouraged Bernard to indulge in full bed-rest for the day and I worked to ensure that he was as comfortable as possible. I saw this as the perfect opportunity to demonstrate my nurturing skills and went full throttle into "nurse Kym" mode. Because "I can bring home the bacon *and* fry it up in a pan" I was balancing this role with a few client calls and other work tasks.



The remote control was well within reach, his supply of liquids remained replenished to ensure adequate hydration, and snacks and meals were served in bed. The alarm clock on my phone was set in advance at the appropriate intervals to ensure that he took his prescribed medication on time.

As the day progressed my energy and enthusiasm for my self-appointed role began to wane. So when this happened, I was near tears. I prepared a wonderful dinner of broiled salmon, steamed rice, and mixed vegetables and proudly took the meal upstairs and presented it to Bernard. I then proceeded back downstairs to get him something to drink. Now, imagine if you can a man 6'4" in stature, broad shouldered and of significant build propped up on pillows in the bed with a small towel on his chest for a bib. When I returned with the drink Bernard (in all of his glory) said, "*The rice is dry, can I have some butter?*" Tired and annoyed, I replied, "*Why not simply ask for some butter? I didn't need to know that the rice is dry.*" Genuinely confused by my tone he replied, "*What? You don't want me to be honest with you?*"



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In the weeks that followed, fully recovered from the experience, I shared the story with others - barely able to contain my own laughter. While I was now able to see the humor in the situation, I made Bernard the “bad guy” every time. Eventually, I did tell Bernard that I had shared the story with several people who also saw the humor in it. During that conversation I told him, *“I have to place this story in a context that allows me to write about it. I haven’t yet figured out how to position it.”* It was right after I said that and a split second before Bernard responded, that I realized it is a story about *feedback*. Just as I had that insight he said, *“What you haven’t figured out yet is that I was giving you feedback because I knew that was not going to be the last time I had your rice. I wanted to be sure that you knew how I preferred to have my rice prepared.”* I replied, *“Yes, I get that **now**.”*

The Morale of the Story: It’s easy to find fault in those individuals willing to be honest with us, especially when their honesty isn’t delivered in a way that is pleasing. But the reality is that people aren’t always going to serve up their feedback in an easily digestible fashion. Sometimes we’ve got to chew on it for a while before we’re able to get the full flavor of what we heard.

Epilogue: Admittedly, I did cook the rice for eight minutes instead of five as the cooking guidelines instructed. So Bernard wasn’t telling me anything that I didn’t already know. My perfectionist tendencies and exhaustion from the long day (bringing home the bacon **and** frying it up in a pan ... and all that) were the filters through which I received the feedback. At the end of the day, it was rice – no big deal!