

Management by Metaphors

Paul Baardman



PAUL BAARDMAN

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CONTENTS

	About the author	8
	Praise for Management by Metaphors	9
	Introduction	10
1	The Metaphor	12
2	History	13
2.1	The Oracle of Delphi	13
2.2	Being There	14
3	Management by Metaphors	15
3.1	For yourself	15
3.2	For the other(s)	15



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4	Methods	16
4.1	Solving problems	16
4.2	Constructing metaphors	18
4.3	The Metaphors	18
4.4	Worksheet	19
5	The storyteller	20
6	Pain	21
7	The orchestra	22
8	The blow with the hammer	23
9	The ghost	24
10	The rooster	25
11	The smartest	26
12	Not to speak	27
13	The wounded warrior	28
14	Garbage containers	29
15	Horse carriage	30
16	The traveler	31
17	The captain and the engine driver	32
18	The wind and the sun	33
19	The fisherman	34
20	The farmer and the hare	35
21	The doll	36
22	The king's pigeons	37
23	The scared emperor	38
24	The three sieves	39
25	The jeweler and the clock	40
26	Destiny	41

27	The tired goose	42
28	It depends on how you ask	43
29	The Zen master and the professor	44
30	The thief	45
31	The phone	46
32	Money	47
32	The mussel and the snipe	48
33	Poor visibility	49
34	Short-term versus long term	50
35	The chairman	51
36	The butterfly	52
37	Space Shuttle	53
38	Master Bankei	55
39	Rice plants	56
40	The vases	57
41	The fox and the tiger	58
42	Polar bears	59
43	Quality	60
44	The cave	61
45	The cranes	62
46	The effect of talking a lot	63
47	The pumpkin	64
48	The elevator	65
49	The wooden bowl	66
50	The first lecture	67

51	The rat	68
52	Moving mountains	69
53	Diamonds	70
54	The mark	71
55	Worms	72
56	Goal versus means	73
57	How to train a flea?	74
58	The vacancy	75
59	The tree planters	76
60	The needle	77
61	The three stonemasons	78
62	The treasure	79
63	The man and the lion	80

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hello, my name is Paul Baardman (1954). I work as a management and vitality coach. In 1987, I founded IVPO (Instituut voor Persoonlijke Ontwikkeling, English: Institute for Personal Development). Every human being has a body and a brain, which will have to last for the duration of one's life. The limits of what we will accomplish in our lives are determined by the vitality of our body and our brain. In our 24/7 performance society more and more is demanded from us. Keeping our body and mind vital is often ignored or forgotten and we only start worrying about it when problems arise. Vitality is more than the absence of disease, pain, fatigue, and stiffness.

It is my mission to teach others how to increase or maintain their vitality by teaching them skills, insights and techniques to become the best version of themselves on the level of body and mind. Working on self-development in relation to others forms the basis for personal happiness and societal success. An important part of vitality and success is our communication. The communication you have with yourself and others. The communication you have with yourself again forms an essential part of your thinking.

Working with metaphors is one of the instruments you can use for this.

My motto:

To live a vital life in a way that provides a meaningful contribution to the society we live in.

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PRAISE FOR MANAGEMENT BY METAPHORS

"When, in late 1988, I set my first steps as a management consultant in the world of business services, it quickly became obvious to me that every level within every separate organization demands its own approach. It is necessary, to reach your goal again and again, to always learn how to use new languages. With the use of metaphors, I have, looking at it metaphorically, received an instrument with which this can be accomplished in a gentle and friendly manner, the way Esperanto was meant to achieve globally. From my perspective, the workbook Management by Metaphors offers you an explanatory dictionary of the language which is spoken in your organization, but is above all, easy to understand".

– Arthur Kerner, Kerner Management Consultants

"The power of metaphors by reading or listening, gives refreshing ideas and dialogues".

– ir. Joost J.W. Heuvelink, director Jan Brouwer Associates

"An adventure to discover all the hidden messages".

– Ronald van Herpen, Managing Director AVA Benelux B.V.

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after finishing my studies I left for South Africa to start out my career. I was employed at a big car dealership, when I read an ad for a free! sales training. As a real Dutchman that drew my attention. An organization was set up to deal with the great shortage of (good) sales people in the area of Johannesburg. The possibility to follow a sales training was provided, and the acquired knowledge would be put into practice right away. Those who completed the training successfully were offered a job! The organization that hired you paid for the sales training.

There were many interested people at the evening of the presentation. The management of the organization welcomed us, and the evening began. The first two speakers held an introduction on the trade of 'sales'. After all those years – it was in 1975 – I can't remember anything from those speeches. What I do remember is the hard chair and the hope the break would be there soon. However, before it was time for coffee, we had to listen to the third speaker: the sales trainer.

From that moment on everything changed. The trainer started his speech in a surprising way: no treatise on motivation and perseverance, but a story about a farmer in South Africa who wanted to look for diamonds. And he asked what motivation really is. He himself could not define it, but he could give an example. He told the story of a shy student at a university, who, like the others, wanted to pick up a girl. There was a lot of laughter during this last speech, there was an entirely different atmosphere. We forgot about the time and the coffee. I can still remember a lot of that last speech word-by-word.

During the years that followed I have had the pleasure to listen to such inspiring speakers several times. Since that evening in 1975 I have always been particularly interested in people who are able to fascinate others. Only when I looked at the psychological processes, did I start to understand why these speakers are so successful. Why it is that they can captivate others' attention, how they motivate others, how they influence the thinking of others, how they earn authority that way, how they manage to create a team (spirit) and how the things they want to happen, do indeed take place.

Tom Peters, the famous management guru, once said: "The best leaders, almost without exception and at every level, are masters in using stories and symbols". Indeed, although these speakers all had a different background, education and experience, they had one thing in common: the ability to work with metaphors. Not only did they know a great many metaphors, they also knew how to tell the right metaphor in the right way at the right time.

When people hear the right metaphor under the right circumstance, they will remember it for the rest of their lives.

From the moment that I understood the power of metaphors, I have been immersing myself in the topic and I have been collecting them. This quickly became known by friends and professional relations and these people started to send me metaphors they had heard. The collection grew fast. I am very grateful to all these persons for their contribution.

While coaching managers, working with metaphors was discussed frequently. The idea was born to publish a number of metaphors in the form of a workbook. In this way even more people can expand their leadership, motivational and coaching abilities with this powerful instrument. In this workbook you will find sixty ready-to-use metaphors, which you can use instantaneously. Also, I have described a number of methods which let you make your own metaphors and how you can work with this concept.

I wish you a lot of fun and new insights.

Paul Baardman

1 THE METAPHOR

The word “metaphor” originates from Greek and means “transmission”. It is the most important form of imagery, with the comparison being based on the similarity. The right hemisphere of the brain – the part where the creative system is located – loves metaphors. While the left hemisphere – the ratio – deals with facts, the right brain half is engaged with structures and images. The right hemisphere can be engaged with similar structures, while the facts are completely different.

A metaphor identifies itself by its simple structure and shortness. It can be used as a story with a hidden message or a task. Hidden, but nonetheless clearly present. You “feel” what is meant by it, even though it can take a while before the meaning becomes clear. Humor is also often used to convey the message. Whether a metaphor is funny, sad or surprising, the effect always is that a way of thinking is breached.

“A mind that is stretched by a new experience, can never go back to its old dimensions”.

In many metaphors, you will find elements of the “dark” sides of man, like egoism, greed, jealousy, stubbornness, perfectionism, limiting convictions, aimlessness and similar traits. The moral of the story is the price you have to pay for these qualities.

2 HISTORY

From the moment that man could talk, those who could tell stories in an inspiring way were held in high regard. Since thousands of years, religious leaders and politicians influenced people with their metaphors. Looking back very far in history, we see that “the wise man and women” often made statements through imagery. When people came to ask for their help, they explained the situation in which the person was looking for guidance or what he had to do, by means of a comparison.

What is the reason for their success? There are a few:

- As those who come asking for counsel were convinced of the (endless) wisdom of the counselor, the counselor’s statement was not doubted. No conflict arose in the brains of that person and only the interpretation remained,
- As the statement wasn’t (yet) fully understood – or not at all, it was assumed the counselor had to be really wise,
- When the person came with a solution, which he had come up with because of the metaphor (and it turned out well), the honor went to the wise counselor,
- Finding the right interpretation gave a good feeling.

If the solution didn’t turn out well, then the cause of the interpretation mistake had been made by the person and the wise counselor was not to blame. To be fair, it has to be mentioned that that was not always the case. Throughout history, some advisers have not survived their counsel as e.g. a king thought he had been given a bad advice.

2.1 THE ORACLE OF DELPHI

In the year 480 BC the Persians led by Xerxes landed on the Greek mainland, where they conquered two thirds of the country. Before the Athenian city council took a decision regarding what actions to take, some delegates were sent to the Oracle of Delphi to ask for advice. There they heard the following prophecy: “The wooden wall shall save you and your children”. It was known that such a prophecy always was ambiguous. On the basis of this statement, people started considering different possibilities.

One of the members of the city council proposed to build a wooden wall around the Acropolis in order to defend the city. Another one translated the “wooden wall” into the ships which were all placed next to each other... In 479 BC, after a sea battle, the Athenians forced the Persians into retreat.

Similarly, there are scientists who claim that “the Horse of Troy” also is a metaphor.

2.2 BEING THERE

The film “Being There” starring Peter Sellers, is one great metaphor enclosing other metaphors on multiple levels.

“Mr. Gardner, do you agree with Ben, or do you think that we can stimulate growth through temporary incentives?” the President of the United States asks Chauncey Gardner (Peter Sellers). He ponders over it and says: “As long as the roots are not severed, all is well. And all will be well in the garden”. The President looks confused. “In the garden?” Another silence follows. “Yes. In the garden, growth has its seasons. First comes spring and summer, but then we have fall and winter. And then we get spring and summer again”. Both the President and Ben, the rich magnate, are racking their brains. Which important message is hidden inside Chauncey’s words?

Ben’s face clears up. “I think what our insightful young friend is saying is that we welcome the inevitable seasons of nature, but we’re upset by the seasons of our economy”. “Yes,” says Chauncey, “Yes! There will be growth in the spring!” The President thinks it over and then says: “I must admit this is one of the most refreshing and optimistic statements I’ve heard in a very, very long time. ... I admire your good, solid sense”.

How is it possible that an unworldly gardener whose knowledge about life is based solely on watching TV becomes an adviser to the President of the United States? He speaks in (garden) metaphors and he fascinates others in such a way, that they confuse his simple mind with that of a genius. He is celebrated as if he were a great philosopher.

3 MANAGEMENT BY METAPHORS

How can you use metaphors in the different areas of the management process? You can use them for yourself and for others.

3.1 FOR YOURSELF

Metaphors are very adequate for finding (creative) solutions and new insights. You read random metaphors, give it some time to develop and to experience what it means to you. Take notes of the epiphanies you have (which people, companies, situations come to mind?). When you observe your situation like this, from a completely different angle, you can come to ideas you wouldn't have had otherwise.

Working with metaphors offers some other advantages:

- It lowers stress and helps you to take better decisions
- You increase your authority, especially if you are using your metaphors adequately
- To vivify your speeches in order to get your audience's attention
- To lend more importance to your speeches when you introduce them with a metaphor
- It relaxes and at the same time activates the listener
- The metaphor sticks, and even many years later people remember the story ... and the one who told it.

3.2 FOR THE OTHER(S)

Metaphors are a very effective way of instructing people. With a metaphor you can take a concept or ability from its original framework. It helps people to think outside the box. A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions. It is a perfect tool to *sell* tasks and ideas to people inside and outside an organization. It barely invokes resistance, because it is not you who is saying it, but something or someone else. This way, for instance, you can point someone to his mistakes without a direct attack or sell something without talking about the product.

4 METHODS

The message in some metaphors is very obvious. However, there is often a message behind the message. Give it time to sink in, regardless of how obvious it seems to be, and do not read all the metaphors at one time. If you want to explain something to somebody, you can just tell it, or you can use a metaphor and introduce it as follows: “What you are saying or how you behave reminds me of a story I once heard ...”, and then you tell the metaphor. The power of the metaphor is that you bring in a third person. It will be listened to with less censorship and people are curious to hear the end of the story, which increases the chance of acceptance.

When someone doesn't understand the metaphor at first, you can fill in the part of “wise person” as in earlier ages. Let the person contemplate on it a few days and write down his epiphanies. Then discuss these with the person. You exchange thoughts by speaking about, for example, the hidden messages in the story. Because the person starts thinking about the metaphor itself, he automatically examines the far corners of his own model of the world. This way, a person can expand his own boundaries bit by bit. The chance that someone changes his behavior with the help of a metaphor is bigger than that he is going to change because you say so.

It is important that you do not give away (your) explanation of the metaphor! It is very well possible that someone comes up with another solution, which then, in return, brings you to another insight. The secret is – just as with the Oracle of Delphi – to let the other look for a solution. That motivates. Compliment that person with the found solution.

4.1 SOLVING PROBLEMS

When a common problem occurs in the organization, you can gather around the table to solve this on a metaphorical level. The results will surprise you. You can use metaphors to visualize the actual and the desired situation. You can start the meeting by telling the metaphor of the “Diamonds”. You ask the participants to make a metaphor about a problem, the current state. Let the participants write it down and tell it later. Then let them write (or draw) a metaphor of the desired state. What kind of outcome do we want? Starting from here, you can make a translation to the factual solution.

When people in big organizations with service units and business units start making metaphors about each other, this can lead to mutual understanding and better cooperation. Here, too, keep in mind the current and desired state:

- How does the department see itself right now?
- How would the department like to see itself?

And in the second round:

- How does one department see the other right now?
- How would people like to see the other department (which advice for improvement do people have for the other department)?

A few examples:

- One department sees the other department (metaphorically) as an amusement park. You have to stand in line for a long time to get in and once you are in, you have to wait a long time to enter each attraction.
- As a mountaineering association. They help you to reach the top.

In a playful manner it becomes clear:

- How to better relate and respond to each other.
- How to improve understanding about your own strengths and weaknesses.
- How to improve understanding about the strengths and weaknesses of the other department.
- What can be improved.

If you work as a trainer, you can let a new group of people introduce themselves by a metaphor which represents themselves. You can ask: “With which animal or object do you identify yourself most?” A successful salesman introduced himself with the following metaphor: “I see myself as a terrier, I bite at everything which moves and once I get hold of it, I won’t let go. A problem occurs every once in a while, I get something between my jaws which is too big for me”.

You can work this out by asking how they would like to be (again metaphorically).

4.2 CONSTRUCTING METAPHORS

An additional advantage of working with metaphors is that you yourself also start to ‘think’ in them, as well. As a result of certain situations, you will create metaphors yourself. Animals are perfectly suited for making metaphors. You may, for example, come across a company and think to yourself, “Which animal does this company remind me of?” And the image of a snail might come to your mind. When you want to motivate someone or correct them, you can say “If you look at yourself, or at your company, the department, the management, etc., what metaphor comes to your mind?”

During a workshop “Working with Metaphors” a participant told me the following metaphor about the company: “Our company is like a well-trained football team; the only problem is that everyone believes to be the forward player”. There was a wave of recognition and laughter in the group. From that moment on, the foundation was laid for change.

In a meeting of a company’s management team together with their partners, we also worked with metaphors. One of the spouses said: “This company is like a big fortress. It is strong and offers security. It is easy to enter, but once you’re inside you’ll never get out”.

This way you will get another perspective on how employees or an outsider sees you or the company. By wrapping it in a metaphor it is less threatening, and often it can be funny, but it reaches the bottom of the issue.

You can also read a metaphor at the end of a meeting and discuss it the next meeting. This way, people have more time to think about it. The answers can be written on flip charts. When you have told a metaphor during a meeting or a presentation, you can return to it next time by asking: “We talked about this or that last time, and perhaps you remember the story I told then”.

4.3 THE METAPHORS

Following you will find the ‘ready-to-use’ metaphors. Some are a thousand years old. Read the metaphors and let them soak in.

Below you will find a worksheet which you can use to work out the metaphors. The first question on the metaphor is: “What is your first reaction on this metaphor?” It may be that your first reaction is: “This doesn’t tell me anything”. The more life experience you have, the earlier you’ll understand a metaphor. It is possible that you haven’t lived through a situation to which the metaphor is comparable, yet.

Your first reaction can also be: “This is just a funny story”. There is a proverb which says: “Many true words are said in a joke!” or the old Dutch proverb: “Through the hole in the joke, the truth whistles”. Try to discover the hidden message. Let it ripen, give it time.

4.4 WORKSHEET

After reading a metaphor, you can ask yourself the following questions and note what they bring to mind:

- What is my first reaction to this metaphor?
- What does it tell me about myself, both professionally and privately?
- Which person does this metaphor remind me of and why?
- Which organization/department comes to mind and why?
- Which situations does this metaphor make me think of and why?
- Which new ideas and insights did I get from this metaphor?
- For which purpose can I use this metaphor?
 - peptalk
 - speech
 - training
 - meeting
 - assigning a task
 - correcting someone's behavior
 - selling an idea
 - et cetera

5 THE STORYTELLER

One day someone remarked to an old sage who often told stories: “You tell us stories, but you don’t tell us how to interpret them.” The old wise man responded: “What would you do, if a fruit seller in a market ate the fruit before your eyes and then left you with the peels? This is exactly what determines their value”, he continued. “What value would you attribute to a cup from which you could drink only water? The question is not so much the meaning of this story, but if the person to whom I tell this can get something useful out of it”.

6 PAIN

A worried-looking boy went to see the doctor and said: “Doctor, when I press my left shoulder, it hurts really bad. And when I press my left elbow, then that hurts really bad, as well. And that’s not all, doctor. When I press both my left and my right knee, it also hurts a lot. When I press the place where my heart is, it is also very painful, and when I press my right temple, right here, same thing. I am terribly worried, because I fear something very serious is wrong with me”.

The doctor examines him very carefully, for more than half an hour, but can’t find anything. Finally, he sent him to the hospital’s specialist, with the request to make a scan of the whole body. When the specialist had looked at the results with great detail, he went to the boy who was sitting in the waiting room and said: “Well, young man, I have finally found out how it is possible that all those places on your body hurt so much when you press them. Your index finger is broken”.

7 THE ORCHESTRA

A long time ago there lived a king, who could afford the luxury of a very large orchestra. The king loved the sound of the flute and in his orchestra, he had 300 flute players. The king enjoyed being awakened by their music. And in order to demonstrate his power, he let all of them play simultaneously. That was an impressive spectacle.

During that time there was a man named Kim. He was looking for a job and had a smart idea. He applied with the king's orchestra, got the job, and was paid as royally as the others. As he made pretty similar movements, it struck no one that he couldn't play. When the king died he was succeeded by his son. He was also very fond of the flute, but he preferred to have each musician play separately. Kim fled silently.



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8 THE BLOW WITH THE HAMMER

One day in a factory, something went wrong with one of the machines. Groaning and chirping loudly, it stopped. A mechanic was called immediately. When he arrived, he first asked a couple of questions to the man operating the machine. Then he walked to the machine to take a good, close look. He felt some pipes, listened to certain spots, and then went to his toolkit. After searching through it, he took a little hammer and walked back to the machine.

He bent over in-between two pipes and gave a light blow with the hammer where two smaller pipes joined. Instantaneously, the machine started to run again. Production resumed. Three days later the director of the factory received an invoice for 500 euro. As the mechanic had been busy for, all in all, only 15 minutes., the director demanded a specification. It was sent to him and said the following:

Blow with the hammer: € 0,50

Knowing where to hit: € 499,50

Total: € 500, -

9 THE GHOST

A man's wife turned seriously ill. On her deathbed she said to him: "I love you so much! I don't want to leave you and I don't want you to be unfaithful to me. Promise me you won't have a relationship with another woman, once I am dead. If you are unfaithful, I will pursue you and terrorize you".

After her death, the man managed to avoid contact with other women for a couple months. Finally, he met a woman and fell in love. On the night they were to get engaged, the ghost of the late woman appeared. The ghost accused him of not keeping his promise and every night the ghost reappeared and scared him. The ghost also repeated literally everything that had happened that day between him and his fiancée. This upset the man to such an extent that he got grave sleeping problems.

Out of his wits, the man went to the old Zen master in the village. "This is a very smart ghost", said the Zen master after hearing the story. "That is totally true", affirmed the man. "The ghost can remember every detail of what I say and do. This ghost knows everything!" The Zen master smiled and said: "You should admire this ghost ... I'll tell you what you have to do next time the ghost appears". He beckoned the man to come closer and whispered in his ear.

That same night the ghost returned. The agonized man did as told by the Zen master. The man said: "You are a very smart ghost. You know I can't hide anything from you. Now, I have a question for you and if you can answer it correctly, I will break off the engagement and be a bachelor for the rest of my life". The ghost said: "Ask your question". The man walked to the kitchen and took a handful of beans out of a bag. "Can you tell me exactly how many beans I have in my hand?" At that moment, the ghost dissolved into thin air with a loud scream and hasn't returned since.

10 THE ROOSTER

An artist was given the task by a king to draw a rooster for him, his favorite animal. After two months the king hadn't heard nor seen anything from the artist. The king sent a servant to see how the artist was progressing.

"I am very busy with it", the artist said.

After half a year the king still hadn't heard anything and decided to visit the artist by himself. The artist asked the king if he could wait for a couple of minutes. He walked to the easel and, within ten minutes, he painted a beautiful rooster. The king was impressed. This was exactly what he had in mind. He asked the artist why he had waited so long to make the painting.

The artist walked to a corner of his studio and returned with a big pile of paper, containing lots of studies of roosters, in all forms and shapes.

He had needed all that time to identify himself fully with the animal so that, now, he was able to paint the most beautiful rooster almost automatically within a matter of minutes.

11 THE SMARTEST

At the end of his life, an old man said to his three sons: “If I divide my property in three, too little would remain for each of you. I thus decided to bequeath my property to whoever of you is the smartest. There are three coins on the table. Whoever can buy something with it that fills the room, will get my inheritance”.

The three sons all left in order to buy something. The first one who returned brought straw, but when it had all been put in the room, it was only filled halfway.

The second son had bought sacks of feathers, but this also didn't fill the room.

The third son entered the room with a candle. He waited until it was dark, lighted the candle and filled the room completely with light.

12 NOT TO SPEAK

In the context of their training, four monks agreed not to speak for a week. The first morning and afternoon passed just as decided upon. However, that evening the wind started to blow, later on it even started storming. It was so bad that the lamp attached to the ceiling by a chain started swinging strongly, producing a squeaky sound.

After an hour the first monk couldn't control himself any longer and cried at the one closest to the lamp: "Fix that lamp!" This one replied: "Hadn't we agreed not to speak?" Subsequently, the third monk said: "Idiots, you are not allowed to talk". Just after that the fourth monk smilingly spoke: "You have all lost, because I am the only one who hasn't said anything".

13 THE WOUNDED WARRIOR

A warrior was struck by an arrow during a battle. His comrades wanted to help him get the arrow out and treat the wound. The warrior refused the aid. He first wished to know who the archer was and from where he had shot. Also, he wanted to know exactly with what kind of bow the arrow had been shot. While his comrades were busy gathering this information, the warrior died.

14 GARBAGE CONTAINERS

One summer, a retired man moved to another city. This way, he lived closer to his children and grandchildren. His new house was located 500 meters from a school. The neighborhood was peaceful during the summer vacation. However, when the vacation ended, this changed. Every morning on the way to school three boys drummed on the metal garbage containers in front of the flat on the opposite side of the street. As the flat had five entrances, there were also five containers. The sound boomed through the whole street.

The man decided to do something about it. One morning, he approaches the boys and says: “You can drum well. I would like you to do this every morning and I will give each of you three a euro per day”. The boys drummed every morning.

After a few days the man tells the boys: “Boys, I have unexpectedly high repair costs in my house. I can only pay you 50 cents”. The boys aren’t happy about this, but they accept it. A few days later, the man talks with the boys again: “Boys, the costs of my house are even worse than I had thought. And I only have a small retirement. I cannot pay you more than 20 cents. Is that okay for you?” Without hesitation, the oldest boy says: “Do you really think that we will still drum for a stupid 20 cents? Find someone else, we quit!”

15 HORSE CARRIAGE

Once upon a time, there was a king who received his first lesson in riding a horse-drawn carriage. The trainer who was teaching him rode in a carriage next to him. As soon as they reached the field the king gave his horse a beating and overtook the trainer. Still, the trainer won the race with flying colors.

The king got angry and called the trainer to account: "You teach me, what did I do wrong?" The trainer smiled to the king and answered: "You must know your horse and then look at the whole course which you have to ride, so you can apportion the physical abilities of the horse. When you already tire your horse at the start, then it can never finish the ride well, let alone win a match".

"When you overtook me at the beginning, you were afraid I would catch up with you. That was the only thing you were thinking of. You tired the horse more and more. Not one moment of the ride were your thoughts with your horse, asking yourself if it was fit enough to finish the match well. That is the reason you lost the race".

16 THE TRAVELER

A traveler approached a big city. He asked a farmer, who was working the land: “How are the people in the big city?” The farmer asked him: “How were the people in the city you are coming from?” “Terrible”, the traveler answered. “Mean and unreliable in all perspectives”. “Well”, the farmer said, “You will find the people here not to be much different”.

A couple of weeks later another traveler passed by the farmer and asked him the same question. This time as well, the farmer asked: “How were the people in the city you are coming from?” “They were fine people, reliable, honest, and with respect for each other. It is a pity that I couldn’t stay there any longer”. “Well”, the farmer said, “you will experience that the people here are the same”.

17 THE CAPTAIN AND THE ENGINE DRIVER

A captain of a ship and his engine driver were having a discussion about who was more important for the ship. In order to find this out, they decided to switch places. After a few hours in the engine room, the captain came up to the bridge. Completely covered with oil and sweat, with a wrench and a dirty cloth in his hand. "I must admit that I need you down there", he said. "The engine stopped suddenly, and I can't get it running anymore". "I can imagine", the engine driver said. "We have run aground".

18 THE WIND AND THE SUN

One day, the wind and the sun were having a heavy discussion. They were even fighting. Both claimed to be the strongest. Despite their arguments they couldn't come to a solution. Finally, they decided to do a test. "Do you see that stone mason on the mountain?" the wind asked. The sun nodded. They agreed that the one who could make the stone mason take off his jacket, would be the winner. They drew lots, and the wind was to go first.

The wind immediately started to blow very strongly. As a result, the stone mason started to button up his jacket. The wind, who thought to get the job over with rather quickly, now started to blow and howl as hard as he possibly could. He went off more and more and got furious. The only effect was that the stone mason now buttoned his jacket completely, stopped with working and took cover behind a big rock. Exhausted, the wind gave up.

Now it was the sun's turn. He appeared and started shining lovingly. Very soon the stone mason returned from behind the big rock and started to work again. The sun continued to shine at him lovingly and at some point, he took off his jacket, even rolled up his sleeves and continued his work whistling.

19 THE FISHERMAN

A businessman is enjoying his vacation. He is lying on the beach and watches the beautiful blue sea. A little bit after that, a small fishing boat is shoved on the beach and a fisherman jumps out. There is a big fish in the net he carries on his back. As he walks past the businessman, the latter says: "That is a beautiful fish, how much time did it take you to catch it?" "Well, not that long actually, I caught it just like that. Some days, I am just lucky". The businessman looks surprised and asks: "Why then didn't you fish more today? You could have caught much more fish."

"Well, because this fish is more than enough to feed my family".

"And how do you spend the rest of your day?" the businessman asks, sitting up now.

"Well, in the morning I get up without a hurry, I fish a bit, play with my kids, have lunch. Then I have a siesta with my wife. After that we walk to the village, have a glass of wine, play the guitar and finally play cards with some friends. It is a rich life, mister".

"I think I have some good advice for you" the businessman said. "I am a businessman and I have already founded several companies and made them successful".

"The first thing you must do, is spend more time fishing, then you buy a bigger boat, and you earn more money. Then you buy another boat and that way you will create an entire fleet of fishing boats.

Concerning the distribution, don't sell to an intermediary but directly to the factory which processes the fish and cans it. In the long run, you can start your own factory and that way, you will have full control over the product, the production and the distribution. Then you do the same in the neighboring countries and you move the head office to New York".

"But mister, how long would that take?" the fisher asked.

"About 15 to 20 years, I guess, based on my experience".

"And then?"

"Then ... and this is the best part, then you sell the company at the right moment and you make millions of dollars" the businessman said beamingly.

"Look at that" the fisherman said dreamy, "millions, right?"

"And then?" the fisher asks again.

"Then you retire, and you move to a small seaside village in a sunny country. In the morning you get up without a hurry, you fish a bit, you play with your grandchildren, you have lunch, you take a siesta with your wife, then you walk to the village, drink a glass of wine, play the guitar and finally you play a game of cards with your friends".

20 THE FARMER AND THE HARE

A farmer was working his land. Suddenly, a hare passed by with great speed and hit a tree on the border of the field. The animal broke his neck and died instantly. The farmer picked up the animal and took it home. “Isn’t that an easy way to get food”, he thought. Next day, the farmer returned to his land and sat down next to the tree waiting for another hare to hit the tree.

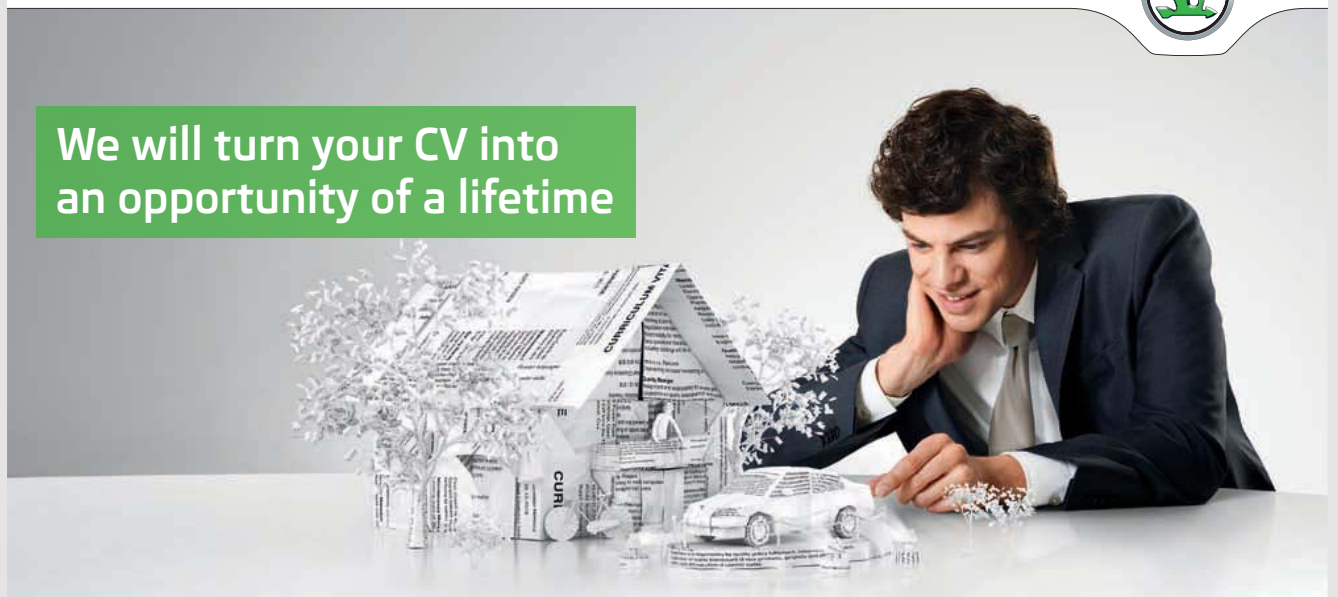
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21 THE DOLL

A mother went to a toy shop with her daughter to buy a doll for her birthday. In the shop there were dolls of all kinds and every doll had another special feature. “What can that doll do?” she asked her mother. “That doll can talk”, she said. “And that doll?” “That doll pees after you have given it some water to drink and that doll has eyes which close when you put her down”.

When they reached the cheapest doll, which couldn't do anything, the girl again asked: “What can that doll do?” The mother thought about it for a second and then said: “This doll listens”. The girl stretched out her arms, took the doll off the plank, pressed it firmly against her chest, and said: “I want to have this one!”

22 THE KING'S PIGEONS

Once upon a time there was a country where the people had a special custom. Every New Year's Day the people offered pigeons to the king. During the ceremony which followed, the king released the pigeons. Everyone who had caught a pigeon and gave it to the king received a reward. One day someone asked the king why he did this. The king answered: "On this special day, I release the pigeons to show the people that I am peaceful and have the best intentions for everyone".

The other person then responded: "When the people heard that you needed pigeons for this ceremony, it came to a big race to catch these animals. As a consequence, quite a lot of pigeons were killed while they were being caught. If you really want to set them free, it would be better to prohibit the catching of the animals. Your attempts at showing the people how peaceful you are, stands in a sharp contrast with the death of so many animals".

23 THE SCARED EMPEROR

Once there was an emperor who was afraid of losing the war with his neighboring country. He was particularly afraid to be taken prisoner. That's why he asked his council of wise man if they could think of something that would always shift him into a positive mood.

After a couple of days, the counsel of wise men met again and presented the emperor with a ring containing a stone. They told the emperor that he was only allowed to look under the stone if he found himself in a hopeless situation.

After a while the emperor was trapped in the situation he had been afraid of: he was completely surrounded by the enemy and there was no way out. So, he took the ring of his finger and under the stone he found a message:

It said: "This too shall pass".

24 THE THREE SIEVES

Socrates, the Greek philosopher, was walking through the streets of Athens. Suddenly, a man came to him, all excited. “Socrates! I must tell you something about your friend who...”. “First, wait a second”, Socrates interrupted him. “Before you continue. Have you put the story you wish to tell me through the three sieves?”

“The three sieves? Which three sieves?”, the man asked, confused.

“Let us try”, Socrates proposed.

“The first sieve is the sieve of truth. Have you researched whether it is true what you want to tell me?”

“Well ... no, I heard someone tell it and ...”

“Oh well! But then, it must have gone through the second sieve?” The sieve of the good! Is it something good you want to tell about my friend?”

Hesitating, the man answered: “Well, no. To the contrary ...”

“Then you must have at least put it through the third sieve and asked yourself if it is necessary and useful, right?” The man’s face turned red. “No, I have not”.

“Well then”, Socrates said smiling. “If you want to tell the story, which possibly is untrue, not good and also not necessary, it is better that you keep it to yourself”.

25 THE JEWELER AND THE CLOCK

Once there was a jeweler in a middle-sized town. Everyone knew this jeweler, because, since many years, he had a beautiful clock hanging in his shop window. Every morning when the jeweler had rolled up the shutter, a man would pass by. This man would stop and adjust his watch to the beautiful clock in the shop window. This went on for a few years, day in, day out. One morning, the jeweler sees the window is dirty on the outside as the sun shines through it. He gets a bucket with water and soap and goes outside. Just at that moment the man passes by and adjusts his watch.

And now, the jeweler stops him, and says: “I have been seeing you adjusting your watch to my clock for years. I am really proud of that”. “That’s right”, the man says. “I always have to have the right time, as I am the foreman of the factory down the road. Among other things, it is my job to let the whistle sound at exactly five o’clock, to signal the end of the workday”. “Well,” the jeweler says, “what a coincidence. Every day I adjust my beautiful clock to that whistle of five o’clock.”

26 DESTINY

During a war in ancient Japan, a general had to fight the enemy. His troops were outnumbered, but he was convinced he could win. The men in his troops however doubted this and were afraid. On the way to the battlefield the general stopped at a temple. After a common prayer, he took a coin from his pocket and said: "I will now toss this coin. If it is heads we will win. If it is tails, we will lose. Destiny will now be revealed!"

He tossed the coin into the air and the soldiers watched closely... It was heads ... The soldiers were cheering and were full of confidence. The battle was won gloriously. After the battle, a lieutenant said to the general: "No one can change destiny", upon which the general said: "It's true, you are totally right". And he showed him the coin, with, on both sides, heads.

27 THE TIRED GOOSE

Once there was a famous archer, who went for a walk together with the emperor. During this walk the archer saw a goose circling through the sky. “Do you see that bird there?” the archer asked. The emperor looked up and nodded. “I shall show you something”. The archer got out his bow, aimed at the goose, and bent his bow, and released. With a vibrating sound the bow recoiled. The goose fell from the sky like a brick and hit the ground at a few meters distance of the emperor and the archer. “I knew you were a good shooter”, the emperor said, “but that you can shoot even without an arrow, that I didn’t know”.

The archer looked at the emperor and smiled: “No, this was not a matter of shooting well. The sound the bird made, and its manner of flying told me it was exhausted. Probably it had already lost his mates for a while. Because of this I knew it couldn’t put up with more stress and that the vibrating sound of the recoiling bow would scare it of being hit and that was sufficient to take it down”.

28 IT DEPENDS ON HOW YOU ASK

A monk went to the abbot and asked: “Can I smoke while praying?”

The abbot answered: “Absolutely not, how do you dare asking such a thing?”

Sometime after that, another monk went to the abbot and asked: “Can I pray while smoking?”

The abbot answered: “But of course, it is always a good idea to pray during our activities”.

29 THE ZEN MASTER AND THE PROFESSOR

During the previous change of the century, a professor visited a Japanese Zen master. He wanted to know more about Zen. The Zen master invited him to drink tea. He started pouring tea into the cup ... and kept on pouring.

The professor looked at this full of surprise and finally cried out: "Stop, the cup is full. Nothing more can be added!"

The Zen master spoke: "Just like this cup, you are full of your own opinions and beliefs. Thus, how could you learn about Zen, if you don't empty your head first?"

30 THE THIEF

One day a lumberjack lost his axe. The only possibility was that his neighbor had stolen it. When he looked at his neighbor closely the latter was acting suspiciously. He talked differently, moved differently, to put it short, it was obvious the neighbor was the thief. That same day he found back his axe. He suddenly remembered how he had left it there. When he encountered his neighbor again, he discovered his neighbor didn't look like a thief at all.

31 THE PHONE

A man had received a big promotion. On the morning of the first day in his new job he sat in his big, new office behind his big, new desk. This was really impressive. Suddenly, he heard steps in the corridor. The steps came closer and stopped in front of his door. Someone knocked. He called: "Come in!" and simultaneously took up the phone and like that, started a conversation. "Of course, madam, I will take care of that personally for you. You can always trust in our company. I will immediately assign some of my staff to supervise this project ... You are welcome ... Goodbye".

He put down the phone and looked at the man standing in the doorway with a bag of tools. "Please come in, what can I do for you", the young manager said. "Well, If it is possible", the man said, "I would like to connect and program the phone".

32 MONEY

In a country not so far away, there was a flood. A great part of the country was submerged and from many houses, only the roof was still visible. All inhabitants of the village were sitting on their roofs. A group of people decided to take a ramshackle old rowing boat to a hill not too far away. They would be safe there. However, on the way, the ramshackle boat gave up and fell apart. A pity, but not a real problem, as they were all proficient swimmers. The whole group started swimming towards the hill.

Suddenly the group discovered one of them wasn't keeping up, despite swimming with a lot of effort. People yelled, asking why he moved so slowly. He yelled back that he had tied all his money, 5000 coins of gold, around his waist. Because of all that weight, he could barely keep his head above the water, let alone swim towards the hill. "Let go of that money", the others yelled. But he didn't want to listen and became more and more tired. Meanwhile, the first people had reached the hill and yelled once again he should let go of the money, but he didn't want to part from his money.

Not long after that people saw how his strength was depleted and he sunk into the water.

32 THE MUSSEL AND THE SNIPE

A mussel lay on the side of a river and had its shell opened, enjoying the sunshine. A snipe flew by and saw the mussel, turned and flew towards the mussel to pick it out of its shell. Just in time, the mussel could close its shell. However, the snipe had its beak stuck between the shell. No matter how much the snipe moved and how much force he used, he was deadlocked.

“If it won’t rain soon, you will dry out completely”, the snipe said to the mussel with an oppressed voice.

“And if I don’t let go, you’ll be dead in a few days’ time”, the mussel said in turn, with an oppressed voice. They continued to argue. Because of that, they didn’t notice the fisherman who grabbed them both and took them with him.

33 POOR VISIBILITY

The weather was bad, and fog reduced the visibility. A man was driving his car on his way home and he could barely orientate himself and recognize the signposts. Suddenly, he saw the rear lights of a car in front of him. “That’s easy, I just follow this car”, he said to himself. After a while the car in the front of him suddenly stopped and he couldn’t brake in time and hit him.

Enraged, he got out of his car, walked to the driver of the car in front of him and said: “You are acting very dangerously by braking so abrupt”. The other man replied: “May I ask you what you are doing in my garage?”

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34 SHORT-TERM VERSUS LONG TERM

Once upon a time there was a small kingdom high up in the mountains, which had never been attacked. The people were happy, and the king was proud of his people. One day a message came that a neighboring country wanted to send a beautiful gift in order to strengthen the friendly ties. The gift was a beautiful and gigantic carillon. It was so big, that a road needed to be built to transport it. The king gave the order for construction the very same day.

The wisest man of the country quickly went to the king. “You shouldn’t do that. Don’t you see that by constructing such a road the other country gets the opportunity to attack us? We have always been safe here because there are only small roads, which disable an enemy from coming up here!” The king neglected the wise man’s advice. It doesn’t happen that often, being offered such a splendid gift. He felt honored.

When, years later, the road was opened, the gigantic gift was driven into the village. Everyone was happy. A few days later the enemy of the neighboring country invaded the small kingdom.

35 THE CHAIRMAN

After his farewell party, the chairman of a famous sports club talked in private with his successor. “I have something for you which can be of good use in this difficult job you will have to fulfill”. He gave the new chairman three numbered envelopes. “If, after six months, things are not going well, you open envelope number one”, the ex-chairman said. “It contains instructions for you. If, after another six months, things are still not going right, open envelope number two and follow those instructions”, he continued. “And if, after another six months, things are still not going well, then you open envelope number three”.

They shook hands and said goodbye. Half a year passed, and things did not go very well with the club. There were setbacks, and mistakes were made in every area. The chairman decided to open the first envelope. It said: “Dear successor, the fact that you opened this envelope, means that it doesn’t go well. This is what you have to do: blame your predecessor, who is me. Tell the people your predecessor had bad policies and turned everything into a mess. That will distract them and give you some space”.

The chairman was happy with this advice. It even worked for a while. But half a year later the situation still hadn’t improved, and the chairman felt cornered more and more. He opened the second envelope and it said: “Dear successor, the fact that you opened this second envelope, means that things are still not going well. This is what you have to do: blame the economy and the government. Tell the people the economy is in a ditch and that the government has a bad policy. This will distract the people and give you space”.

The chairman was happy with this advice. This time too, it worked for some time. However, another half a year later, the situation still hadn’t improved and now, the chairman was really getting into trouble. “Then I would better open the third and last envelope”, he thought. After opening it he read: “Dear successor, it is about time to make three envelopes yourself”.

36 THE BUTTERFLY

One day, a small hole was formed into a cocoon hanging from a bush. A passerby stopped and, for a while, observed how the young butterfly used all his power to try and crawl through this small hole. After a long time, the butterfly seemed to give up, and the hole still appeared to be too small. It looked like the butterfly had tried everything within its power and could do no more. That moment, the man decided to help the butterfly. With his pocketknife, he opened the cocoon.

The butterfly immediately got out. But his body remained meager and groggy. His wings were not well developed, and it barely moved. The man kept observing him in the belief that the wings of the butterfly would instantaneously open themselves and it would be able to carry its body, so it could fly away. This didn't happen, however! During the rest of its short existence, the butterfly had to drag itself over the ground, with its meager body and shriveled wings. It was never able to fly.

What the man, with his friendly gesture, didn't understand about this butterfly being born, was that the passage through the small hole of the cocoon was a necessary effort to let the fluid flow from its body into its wings, so they would get strong, enabling it to fly. It was the mold through which life let it pass in order to grow and develop itself.

37 SPACE SHUTTLE

The Space Shuttle was a modern piece of technology made possible by the state of science at that time. It was attached to a main rocket with two smaller booster rockets on the sides of this main rocket. All the shapes and forms were designed for optimal performance. Well, except for the booster rockets. The way they were, they could do their work properly and were completely calculated for their task. However, the booster rockets were originally designed by the engineers to be shorter and with a bigger diameter. Why did the design had to be changed?

These rockets were designed by the company Thiokol in the state of Utah. They could only be transported by train to the launchpad in Florida and the train passes through a tunnel in the mountains. This means that the diameter of the booster rockets had to be a bit smaller than the tunnel passage. The tunnel diameter in turn had been determined by the width of the rails. If the width of the rails had been bigger, the tunnel diameter would have been bigger and the bigger booster rockets would have been able to pass through.

How is it that the American railroads have this width? To be precise: 4 feet and 8,5 inch, or 143,6 cm. What a strange number. Where did that originate from? This rail width was used in England and it were English immigrants who had started to construct railroads in the United States.

Why then were the English railroads constructed this way? Because the people who had built the first railroads in England were the same ones who had built the railroads for the tram before. And the tram rails had that width because the builders had used the same molds and instruments they had used before to build horse wagons. And those wagons had that track width.

But why did those wagons have that specific track width? The answer is that another track width would have been problematic on the many old, long roads going through all of England. These roads had deep tracks formed by heavy use. And that space between the tracks had the same width of 4 feet 8,5 inch.

Well, who build those old roads which had deep tracks of that specific width? The Romans were the first to construct roads in Europe and thus in England, as well. It enabled them to move around their legions swiftly. The roads have been used ever since.

And those specific tracks? They were made by imperial Roman chariots who drove over them a lot. If you wanted to use these roads with your normal wagon, you 'd better use the same track width or else damage the construction which fixes the wheel to the axle. If not, the lateral force would have been too big.

All Roman chariots had the same track width. Its structure was made to accommodate the width of two horses in front of it. It is quite surprising that the butt of a horse around 2000 years ago influenced the diameter of a space rocket.

38 MASTER BANKEI

Once there was a Zen master by the name of Bankei. His sermons were not only attended by his students, but also by many other people. Among them were also the followers of other beliefs. The secret of his success consisted of never using unnecessarily difficult words, instead he had the ability to speak at the level of his audience.

One leader of a sect was jealous, as a number of his followers had started to listen to Bankei. This leader decided to challenge the Zen master for a debate.

“Hey, Zen master”, he called out, “only those who respect you, will obey you. I do not respect you. Can you make me obey you?” Bankei answered: “I can show you. Can you come over here”. Proud and with his head up high the man walked up front. He didn’t even take notice of any of the people he passed. “Could you please stand on my left side?”, Bankei asked. The leader went to stand on his left side. “Oh well, we can speak with each other easier, if you would stand at my right side”. The leader went to the other side and looked at him provocatively. Master Bankei smiled respectfully and said: “You have now obeyed me three times. You are a docile man, could you please take a seat and listen?”

39 RICE PLANTS

There once was a rice farmer who wasn't satisfied with the speed with which his rice grew. He could not accept the fact that rice needed its time to grow. One day he came up with a plan to manipulate the growth of his rice plants. Early in the morning he went to the rice field and pulled each rice plant just a little bit higher out of the ground. Exhausted he arrived home at sunset. Tired, but satisfied, as the plants were a bit higher now. Next morning, he hurried to continue the tiring task. That was no longer necessary. The plants had already died.

40 THE VASES

Two merchants in Amsterdam had jointly bought a thousand white vases for one euro a piece at an auction. Each took 500 vases home to their shop to sell them. One merchant put some vases in his shop with a sign saying what they cost per piece. One customer after another came into the shop and stopped to look at the vases. One said: “Is that vase supposed to cost 25 euro? That is way too expensive”. The merchant defended himself with the comment that it wasn’t expensive at all. The customer thought it was, and the merchant thought it wasn’t. And thus, a discussion ensued.

After a few days of not selling even one vase, the merchant decided to visit his colleague, just a few streets away, to see how he was doing with the vases. Having arrived there, he was shocked to see that his colleague had almost sold all his vases. He only had two vases left. The merchant didn’t get it at all and asked the other one how he had accomplished that. After all, they lived only a few streets apart from each other.

“Oh, very easy”, he said. “Just watch this”. A customer had just entered the shop and was looking at the last two vases, asking: “How much?” The merchant held his hand behind his ear and asked: “What are you saying?” The customer repeated his question but now louder. Again, the merchant held his hand behind his ear and said: “Sorry, but I am not hearing well, could you please speak a bit louder?” The customer repeated it again but now way louder. “Ah yes”, the merchant said, “you wish to know the price of the vases ... one moment”.

He walked to the back of the shop, stopped in front of the stairs, looked up and yelled: “My love, what do those vases cost?” Upstairs, a woman’s voice yelled back: “Sixty-eight euros a piece”. The merchant went back to the customer and said: “Well, you’ve heard it, thirty-eight euros per piece”. The customer answered: “I’ll take them both!”

41 THE FOX AND THE TIGER

Once upon a time there was a hungry tiger looking for some fox meat. After a short walk through the forest he came across a very tasty bite. The fox was very afraid his time was up and came up with a smart ruse. “Mister tiger, you cannot kill me. I am the holy fox of the forest and have been sent as the king of animals. Everyone is scared of me”. The tiger looked at the little meager fox mockingly. “And I am supposed to believe that?”

“Of course, I shall prove it to you, just walk behind me through the forest”. The little fox walked in front, followed by the big tiger. All animals fled upon seeing the tiger. The tiger was deeply impressed by the great respect all the animals showed for the “holy” fox and let him go.

42 POLAR BEARS

Two polar bears were walking through the desert. Suddenly, the one says to the other. “It isn’t slippery at all here, right?” The other one answers: “Of course not. Look around you and think for a second. They have already scattered sand here”.

43 QUALITY

A landowner in the far East wanted to expand his stable with an extraordinary horse. He asked his nephew for the best horse merchant in the region. Then he contacted the horse merchant and gave him the task of acquiring information first. The merchant traveled around the world to find the most special horse. After a couple of months, the merchant returned. He was delighted, as he was convinced of having found the best horse in the world. The landowner asked the merchant: “Tell me about the horse”. What does it look like?”

Enthusiastically, the merchant started explaining all the qualities of the horse, its fire, its health, its input etc. “But what does the horse look like?” the landowner asked again, “and is it a stallion or a mare?” Offended, the horse merchant looked at the landowner. “You wanted a very special horse with the best qualities, right? That’s what I focused on and not on its color or sex”. The landowner was impressed by this remark and tasked the horse merchant to buy the horse.

In hindsight, it was the best horse ever bought.

44 THE CAVE

In a land not far from here a robber, an artist, a miser and a wise man were walking through a mountainous landscape. They traveled together and one day they found a cave hidden in a mountain. The robber saw the cave and said: “What a beautiful place to hide”. The miser said: “What a beautiful place to hide a treasure”. The artist said: “What a beautiful place for mural paintings”. Finally, the wise man said: “What a beautiful cave”.

45 THE CRANES

In ancient China lived a farmer who was very proud of the cranes raised by him in the back of the meadow. “They are immortal”, the farmer told everyone who wanted to listen to him. “The cranes do not come from an egg but are thrown from the sky full-grown”. Everyone was always very impressed by this story of the farmer. Then one day people were again listening to him with fascination, when his servant entered, screaming: “A crane laid an egg, a very big egg, and it is breeding on it”.

“That is absolutely impossible!” the farmer yelled, storming outside. Having arrived at the birds he had to admit that the servant had indeed told the truth. “Well”, the farmer said, “what hope is there for the world? People’s attitudes worsen every generation and even the cranes are no longer as they were before”.

46 THE EFFECT OF TALKING A LOT

A student once asked his wise master: “Master, is it a virtue to talk a lot?” The master answered: “What is the effect of talking a lot? Look at the frog in the pond, quacking day and night and that although there is no one listening to him. The rooster, however, only crows twice or three times a day at dawn and everyone listens to him, because people know that when he crows it will be morning very soon and everyone has got something to do. That is why”, the master said to his student, “one should only talk when necessary”.

47 THE PUMPKIN

Once there was a farmer, who, on the land where he was growing pumpkins, covered a pumpkin with an empty glass jar. The little pumpkin grew and grew, until it didn't only have the size of the jar, but also the same form. Then the pumpkin didn't grow anymore. At the end of the season the farmer broke the glass jar and had a pumpkin with the size and form of the jar.



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48 THE ELEVATOR

One day a man got into an elevator. There already were some people inside and there was just about enough space for him. The elevator had barely started moving when he felt someone pushing into his back rather strong. “What an idiot”, he thought. “It is extremely rude to push people in a full elevator. Than it happened again. The man was starting to be really irritated and abruptly turned around to tell the person behind him to stop being so rude.

The moment he turned around, he was startled. He looked into the face of a man with dark sunglasses. Looking down he saw that the man held a white cane. The man was blind and tried to orientate himself by feeling.

49 THE WOODEN BOWL

Once upon a time there was a man living with his son and daughter-in-law. The couple had a son. The son loved his grandfather. He learned many things from his grandfather who always had time for him. Over the years, age increased the trembling of his hands and his movements became jerkier. This resulted in him spilling more and more food at the dinner table. The boy's father was getting more and more irritated by the behavior of the grandfather.

One day, the old man knocked over his soup bowl by accident. It fell on the floor and broke into many pieces. That was it for the father. He got terribly mad and sent the old man to his room telling him that from that moment on he would have to eat alone in his bedroom. The next day, the father bought the grandfather a wooden bowl to eat out of, because that wouldn't break if it fell.

When the father returned from work two days later, he saw his son in the shed working on a piece of wood. To the question what he was making, the son answered: "Well, you see, I am making a wooden bowl". "What on earth do you need a wooden bowl for?" the father asked. "I don't need it, but it is for you, father, when you will be living with me when you are old". That same evening, grandpa was allowed to eat at the dinner table again.

50 THE FIRST LECTURE

It was the first lecture for the first-year medical students. The professor looked around and said: “So you all want to be doctors! Well, as a good doctor, you must fulfill two requirements. The first one is that you are not afraid of dirty things, and the second one is that you need a good observational ability. Let us first test if you are not afraid of dirty things”. From a closet, he took a little jar filled with a yellow fluid. “This jar contains urine. I want everyone to do as I do”. He put his finger in the jar and then licked it.

A wave of disgust went through the lecture hall. The professor handed the jar to the first row of students. Not one of the students wanted to fail the test and one by one they put their finger in the jar and then licked their finger, meanwhile putting on a face of disgust. Finally, the last student returned the jar “Very well”, the said professor, “that you are not afraid of dirty things, that I noticed, but ... I haven’t seen anyone proving his good observational skills, yet. If you really had observed well, you would have seen that I put my middle finger into the jar and then licked my index finger”.

51 THE RAT

Once there was a man with a rat in his house. It was impossible to catch the animal. It was gnawing its way into everything, including the food. Nothing was safe inside of the house. It was a smart rat. Finally, the man bought a cat. A beautiful, strong and brave cat. Even though the cat was strong and brave, the rat was faster and ended up just playing a game with the cat. Another cat was acquired. This one was smart and cunning. The rat, however, was also very smart and only showed itself when the cat was sleeping.

The man was at his wits' end and spoke about this with a Zen monk from the village temple. The monk said to the man that he could lend him his cat. The first impression it gave was that the cat wasn't anything special. This cat was lazy all day and totally indifferent to its surroundings. The rat, who had seen that the cat spent its days dozing, soon dared to get really close to the cat. Suddenly one day, the cat struck the rat. It flew across the room and ended against the wall. It got up and fled out of the house, never to be seen again.

The man was very happy and returned the cat to the monk. He asked the monk how it was possible that this cat accomplished, what the other cats hadn't. The monk answered: "Physical power and technical ability are nothing without the vigilance of the mind".

52 MOVING MOUNTAINS

A long time ago in a place far away lived a farming family. The head of that family was already old. The family lived at the foot of a mountain. When they wanted to go to the city, they had to either pass around the mountain or go over the top. This cost a lot of time, so they didn't go to the city very often. One good morning the old man woke up with a splendid idea. What if they moved the mountain, then it would be easier to go to the city! He discussed this idea with his family, and they also thought of it as a good plan. They decided to move the earth to a valley close by. They went to work that same day.

A man living in the neighborhood was watching the family, shaking his head. "Old man, what are you doing? Why would you mind moving a mountain? Be honest, you are now in your last days. You will never see that it is possible to go to the city without a detour". The old man looked at the neighbor and said: "I will not be able to go to the city without a detour, and neither will my children. However, the children of their children will certainly be able to go to the city directly".

The other man bowed his head in shame, because he hadn't thought of this by himself.

53 DIAMONDS

A great many years ago a farmer lived in South Africa, who thought he was having a poor and boring life. He had heard all kinds of stories about people getting rich from finding diamonds. So, he decided to do the same! He put up his farm for sale and could barely wait until it was sold. He even sold everything for a lower price, that was how hasty he was. The big moment was finally there, and he started looking for the diamonds to give him the fortune he was hoping for. And he looked ... and he looked ... and he looked ... without result. The story goes that in the end, very much depressed, he let himself be taken by the water while crossing a river.

Meanwhile the man, who had bought the farm and the land, found a rather unusual stone at the bank of a little brook. The stone wasn't beautiful at all, but something told him that he should have the stone examined. It turned out to be a diamond of great value. After a closer examination it was found that literally the whole property was covered with diamonds. It is said that this place now is one of the biggest diamond mines of South Africa.

54 THE MARK

A man and his friend crossed the river with a rowing boat. The wind was blowing strongly, and he had to pay attention to keep the boat on course. Because of this, he forgot to take care of the bag with things he had with him, and it fell into the water when a bigger wave hit the boat. The man immediately carved a mark in the rim of the boat, exactly where the things had fallen into the water.

“Why are you carving a mark into the boat?” his friend asked him. The man answered: “When it is calmer in a while, I will go back, and I can dive into the water exactly where this mark is to retrieve my things”.

55 WORMS

There once was a medical doctor, who was asked to lecture for a group of alcoholics to teach them about the dangers of alcohol, with the hope of making them quit drinking. While he was preparing his speech, he came up with a demonstration which would really make people leave the booze aside. He discussed the demonstration with some colleagues, who were all very enthusiastic. That they hadn't thought of it before! What a great idea! That very evening the doctor stood in front of a hall full of people. "Ladies and gentlemen", he said, "I want to show you something. In front of me, you can see two glasses: one with water ..."

While speaking, he took a tin cigar box, from his pocket, opened it and took out a big earthworm. He let it fall into the glass of water. The audience was silent, their eyes fixed on the glass. The worm swam around a bit and crawled over the rim. The doctor picked it up and said: "... And this other glass contains alcohol, ladies and gentlemen". He let the worm fall into the glass and it immediately started writhing. From its front and rear fluids sprayed out. All of a sudden, the worm stopped moving and was hanging in the glass, dead.

There was a tense silence in the hall. "Well, ladies and gentlemen, what do we learn from this?", said the doctor triumphantly. Immediately, someone in the back of the audience said: "It's obvious, if you drink enough alcohol, you will never suffer from worms".

56 GOAL VERSUS MEANS

There once was a man who wanted to go to the Great River. He was well-prepared for the journey and all packed, he drove his pair of horses. He drove off with great speed. When the horses were thirsty he himself also took some time to drink the cool water from the well. That moment a villager passed by. “Where are you going?” he curiously asked. “I am going to the Great River”, the man answered. The villager looked surprised at him. “But then you are going in the wrong direction. You are now riding to the north and the Great River is in the south”.

“That doesn’t matter”, said the man, “I have a good and fast pair of horses”. “Even if you had the fastest pair of horses, you still won’t get to the Great River”. The man was getting irritated now. “I have a lot of money and I can buy everything for the journey”. The villager let him go and he himself went into the right direction.

57 HOW TO TRAIN A FLEA?

Fleas are great jumpers. They look where they want to go and then they jump. When you put a flea in a jar, it will jump out. As soon as you put a lid on the jar, the flea will jump against the lid. It will continue for a while and hit its head. The fact that it continues to hit its head and that it does not like that, will lead to it jumping just below the lid. From that moment on you can take off the lid of the jar. The flea won't jump higher than the rim.

58 THE VACANCY

There was a vacancy for a high position. When the minister was asked who came into question for this post, he answered: "Take Ling, he is well suited". "But minister, Ling is your opponent!" "You asked me who is suited for this function, not who is my opponent". Ling got the post and did the job very well. A few months after that there was another high position which was vacant. Again, the minister was asked for advice. This time, the minister recommended his son Hu. "But minister, Hu is your son". "You asked me who is suited for the job, not who is my son" the minister answered. Hu did his job with excellence.

The minister received a medal for his courage. Both jobs were done by people excellently suited for the work. The minister had looked at their qualities and not preoccupied himself with the fact that one was his opponent and the other his son.

59 THE TREE PLANTERS

A man was walking around the outskirts of a city. Suddenly, he saw a man digging a hole on the side of the road. When the hole was around 40 cm deep he walked another 20 meters and started digging an equally sized hole. Just behind him there was another man who filled up the holes, which had just been dug, with earth. This didn't make any sense to the man. He went to the second man and asked him what they were doing. The man answered, very friendly: "We are tree planters, Jim is in the front and digs the hole, Carl plants the tree, and I close the hole again". The man looked around and said: "But I only see two people". "That's right", the other man said, "Carl called in sick today".

60 THE NEEDLE

The son of a famous professor could not concentrate on his studies, no matter how hard he tried. Every time he looked at his books, his thoughts went outside, to the children who were playing, to the sun that was shining through the trees. And when those thoughts became too strong, he secretly sneaked out of the house to play outside. One day he walked past an old woman while he was playing. The old lady was chafing a piece of old iron on a rough rock. “What are you doing?” the boy asked curiously. “I am making a needle”, the woman answered.

The boy absolutely couldn’t believe how such a piece of old iron could be made into a beautiful thin needle. The old woman saw his incomprehension: “When I work on this piece of iron every day, it will become a needle by itself. Day after day I spend a certain time in order to accomplish what I want”.

The boy rushed home to do his homework for the next day.

61 THE THREE STONEMASONS

A man approached three stonemasons and asked the first one what he was doing. This stonemason answered: “Well, don’t you see? I am making this crude rock into a rectangle shape with my hammer and that way I earn money, because that is what you need, right?”

The man walked to the second stone mason and asked the same question. “I am making rectangle-shaped stones, and that way I earn money, so I can feed my family and enable my kids to go to school”.

The man walked to the last stone mason and again asked his question. Smiling, the man answered: “I am helping to build a cathedral”.

62 THE TREASURE

Once upon a time there was a man who had no problem to manipulate others and, if necessary, bribe them. That is how he managed to be rather successful. One day he needed a big favor from the city's mayor. The man bought beautiful jewels. He knew that the mayor was very fond of those. When he went to see the mayor with the jewels, the mayor refused to accept these. "But mayor, I hold a true treasure in my hands, it's impossible to say no to that?" The mayor looked at the man and shook his head. "You think you possess a treasure? In comparison to my treasure you possess nothing. I possess the ability not to be bribed".

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63 THE MAN AND THE LION

Once upon a time, a man walked through a grassland. Suddenly, he saw a lion and noticed the lion had seen him too. He started running for his life. But where should he run to, on this plain? He knew the lion was faster. Not too far away he saw a tree. “This is my only chance”, he thought. Very soon the lion was close behind him. He could already hear him. A few meters more. While he came closer to the tree he saw that the branches of the tree were too high.

He focused all his attention on the branch which hung lowest. In that moment he already felt the breath of the lion in his neck. He was almost there! And he jumped ... and he missed ... but he got it on his way down!