

Chapter excerpts:

Plugging the Leaks

Stopping the downward spiral of emotion

Loud clanging filled the shop as he knocked the tools from the shelf with one swoop of his arm. The mechanics in the shop stood in stunned silence as their manager, Mark, stormed back into his office, slamming the door behind him. Then it started. A small circle formed as a few mechanics began their diatribe: “He always overreacts!” ...This went on until their work started piling up again.

These mechanics would go home in a bad mood, just as mad as Mark had been that morning. Some would take it out on the drivers on the road, others on their families, and many would repeat that morning’s events over and over. But the one who felt it the most was Dan. The nine-digit item numbers had been off by only one number. Anyone could have mixed up the parts, but this mistake cost them \$750. He was tired of Mark’s temper. He was done with this place...

We could take sides, and most of us will. Some of us side with Dan. After all, who wants to work in a hostile environment? Others side with Mark. Who wouldn’t be upset over a \$750 loss? And we’d be right. It would be reasonable to side with either of them. No one really likes angry outbursts, and no one likes losing money either. Both seem to be reasonable responses. In fact, this is usually the case. **Most of the time, if we stopped to think about it, we would agree that people’s emotional responses are actually reasonable.** We may or may not have the same response ourselves, but many reasonable people would have. Moreover, most of us get emotional, even over little things, when we are under stress. In some cases, someone might be reasonably upset simply because of the pressure they are under. We all get emotional at times...

People are going to get upset. Whether we yell, cry, walk away, or throw tools on the shop floor, we all get upset. We are all leaking emotion. **The problem is that we allow other people’s emotion to leak onto us.** The emotion travels through the room and leaks all over us. **Then we leak all over others, and the chain reaction begins.** It impacts how we respond to the person who is demonstrating emotion, how we treat others, how we do or don’t do our tasks afterward, etc. The impact can be devastating, like a flood destroying everything in its path. This is a normal process of life—a normal one, but not a good one...

Trash the Trivial

Living our priorities

It was around Thanksgiving when Julie was diagnosed with leukemia, and soon after, they took her bone marrow to find a donor. She was twenty-eight years old at the time. She and my brother had been married just a few years and had two precious boys, ages three and one. Over Christmas the whole family became acquainted with leukemia, the process for healing and recovery, and the wait to find a donor. Luckily, it was not a quick-spreading disease, so even though the wait for a donor might be months, she had time.

...Only a few months after her diagnosis, we found out that she had a very rare genetic makeup, and finding a donor was highly unlikely. Not only were there none in the donor database, but with her DNA, there was almost zero chance that anyone would ever match. We

began to mourn. We began to seek answers to the many “why” questions that come at times like this. ...The months passed, and we enjoyed our time together... It was a solemn time as we waited for her to die...Things continued this way for a while until one day, the call came.

By some unbelievable chance, a donor had been found! I still remember the tears of joy that fell as I heard the news. It was a miracle! ...By May, she had her bone marrow transplant and everything was going well. We could not have been happier! ...er body had accepted the bone marrow, and her anti-rejection medicine was working. It would not be long before she would be able to come home!

Finally, the scheduled day was only a couple weeks away; she was finally going to be home and all was well...When I finally headed home, it was about an hour before I was able to get cell phone service and could check my voicemail. I had about a dozen messages. One by one, I listened to each call that had occurred over the last few days. In a matter of minutes, I heard the entire story unfold...Julie had died.

Nothing can explain the pain you feel in those moments. I have lost many people in my life. We had a large family, so I was accustomed to funerals from a young age, even funerals for those who were young themselves. But nothing prepared me for the devastating grief I now faced and the anger I felt toward God.

Luckily for Julie, she had lived in such a way that she had no regrets. She worked at home as a medical transcriptionist, while my brother worked as a chemist in a lab he had set up at home. They had pursued what was most important to them—their family. They both got to stay home with the boys and with each other. They lived their priorities.

During this time, I realized that I had not. I worked myself to the bone, spending too much time doing things that didn't matter. I didn't want to be on my death bed, having let life pass me by while all I did was work. I vowed to restructure my life and focus my priorities on the people who mattered to me. And that's what I did.

...I'm convinced **we're all so busy manicuring our lawns and folding our underwear that we're missing out on the really important stuff in life.** For some people, nutrition or finances or cleaning or gardening or cooking are a priority or a passion, but for me, my time with my family is my top priority and passion; most everything else is unimportant. You can choose your own values, but whatever values you choose, you must let them drive your life, instead of what's pressing in the moment or what's important to someone else.

Plan B, C, . . .or Z!

If I want it, I'm responsible for it.

He was a big executive in the company and worked all the time. Quality time was extremely important to her, but she could not cajole this man into committing to a date night.

She told me, “I've tried everything!” and I said, “Well, tell what you've tried, because it's helpful to know both what works and what does not work.” So she listed off all the many occasions that she had asked him, at different times and in different ways (because it's not only important *what* you say and *how* you say it, but also *when* you say it). After we made a long list, I turned to her and said, “You've only tried one thing.” I actually thought she might smack me: “What do you mean I've only tried one thing?!”

I said, “You’ve tried this one thing in a lot of really creative ways...but it seems to me that all you’ve ever done is talk about it with him. Sounds like talking doesn’t work.”

No matter how she tried to have that conversation—and she had devised a number of creative, kind, and respectful ways to have it—he still would not commit. Plan A had failed, so we devised Plan B...