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"You create your opportunities by asking for them."

» **Shakti Gawain**



What's Different Around Here?

I recently observed something while walking through the airport at 6:15 AM that brought a smile to my face.

And believe me, there aren't many things bringing a smile to anyone's face at that time of the day in an airport.

As I walked toward my gate at the end of the terminal, my eyes were drawn to a display in the distance.

Nearing it, I saw it was another airline's gate, beautifully decorated in an autumn theme.

It gave me a flashback of preaching branch decorating to bankers for so many years. In a sea of unremarkable counters and gates, this one stood out and conveyed a friendly, welcoming vibe.

That fact shouldn't be discounted. If I had a problem to address, my gut would tell me that the people at this gate are friendlier than the others.

But the marketing benefits go beyond that.

I've repeated dozens of my "mantras" to retail bankers over the years.

One of the originals was, "That which becomes static becomes ignored."

Research shows that our minds frequently – often subliminally – scan our environments looking for anything that has changed around us.

Researchers believe it's a trait embedded in us thousands of years ago when humans lived in far less hospitable conditions.

Spotting something different or a change in the environment could signal opportunity...possibly something to eat, or danger...like something that might eat you.



Glad You're on the Team

I had the opportunity of catching up over dinner recently with an old friend while attending a banking conference in New Orleans.

This friend is one of the sharpest bankers I know.

I always feel a bit smarter for the time I spend discussing issues with him.

(He would likely tell you that's a low bar.)

The fact that the first three restaurants we walked up to were closed that evening started our conversation.

We were amazed at the current state of the labor market and spoke of the challenges small businesses – including community banks – are being faced with.

While we're not always the oldest guys in the room, neither of us could ever remember a time in which so many seem indifferent to their jobs.

The underlying reasons for this situation can (and will) be debated for years.

Regardless of the reasons, many entry-level folks know they can walk off jobs today and likely find comparable paying ones almost immediately.

He suggested that while that is a positive for these folks in some ways, it may be hurting many in the long run.

They aren't learning to overcome the struggles, frustrations, and growing pains that tend to develop people into exceptional employees, and later...competent leaders.

Simply, if you continually jump from job to job as soon as frustration or even boredom kicks in, you risk developing less-than-helpful habits.

Intelligence and ability aside, it tends to be folks with strong work ethics and higher levels of commitment

While most humans' environments have changed considerably since those times, that hardwiring remains.

Because of that, you can be in the most trafficked retail store or along the busiest street in your town and become essentially unseen by the folks frequenting that store or street.

If the image you present never changes, it becomes ignored. If you become just part of a blurred background, a high traffic area loses much of its value to you.

On the positive side, even small tweaks and changes can generate attention.

I've often calmed leaders who are a bit worried about "junking up" branches with decorations by pointing out we're not talking about making branches look like Clark Griswold's house.

(Not that I'm necessarily against that.)

It may be because it's such a simple concept and relatively easy to execute that too many of us overlook the practice. We shouldn't.

Are your branches standing out today?

who end up in positions and at levels most hope to achieve.

We laughed at the prospect of stressing to new hires during orientation that struggles and frustration are important parts of building their careers...so hang in there.

But the fact is that you'd be hard-pressed to find many successful people who don't have stories of times they were frustrated or demoralized and considered quitting...but didn't.

He shared that regularly communicating with and gauging his team's engagement levels were larger parts of his job than ever.

He usually does more listening than speaking before reminding them of how valued they are.

Whether you physically see the folks who report to you each day or not, reminding them that they are appreciated matters more than ever.

Leave no doubts in your team members' minds today.

"Our life always expresses the result of our dominant thoughts."

» Soren Kierkegaard



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