

## RESTLESSNESS, PATIENCE<sup>1</sup>, AND INACTIVITY STORIES<sup>2</sup>

### How to Use These Stories

Leadership begins when people exhibit virtues with excellence. Virtues are standards of moral behavior, such as courage, integrity, kindness, and humility. This document focuses on the virtue of patience. When we lead with exceptional patience, we feel deeper satisfaction over what we accomplish, we help and benefit others, and we improve the world around us.

Like all virtues, too much or too little of a virtue is a vice. Thus, when leaders are not patient enough, people may produce lower quality work and become resentful of their leaders. When leaders are too patient, people may become lazy and lose sight of their goals.

Leading with exceptional patience is often difficult. It is difficult to find the optimal expression of patience between restlessness and inactivity. It is difficult because a patient action in one situation is not a patient action in another situation. It is difficult because the people who care about a situation often disagree about the best way to exhibit patience, and in many of these cases each person—including you—will be partially right and partially wrong, and we need to learn from each other and work through conflict to sort this out. Even when you figure out how to exhibit exceptional patience, it is also important to communicate what you are doing to others so that they will understand what you are doing.

This document contains stories of people being patient and of failing to be patient. (The titles next to people's names are their titles at the time the story occurred and may not be their title currently.) Discussing diverse situations in which people failed or succeeded to live up to their values often helps people to recognize and act on other opportunities when they arise. By discussing these stories in meetings, on teams, over internet or intranet forums, or in classrooms, groups can come up with ideas for leading with exceptional patience, learn each other's perspectives, work through disagreements, and generate ideas. For example, you might read and discuss one story at the beginning of a weekly meeting, post a story on a team forum and ask people to share their thoughts, begin a work shift by discussing a story, use a story in a town hall meeting, or use the stories as fodder for discussion in classroom settings. The following questions may be helpful in discussing the stories. Choose whichever questions are most helpful for your group.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to being used to foster discussions about the virtue of patience, these stories may also be used for discussions about calmness, poise, self-control, or tolerance.

<sup>2</sup> The stories in this document were written or told by the protagonists. Ryan Quinn edited them and added the reflection questions. The stories are to be used as the basis for class discussion, and not to illustrate effective or ineffective handling of a particular situation. Some protagonists agreed to use their real name, others asked for us to use a pseudonym. The goals of this document include becoming aware of issues, identifying the benefits and drawbacks of taking different approaches, assessing their impact on outcome(s), and learning ways of addressing situations you may encounter in the future.

1. What, if anything, did people do in this story that was patient?
2. How could the people in this story have been more patient? How could they have been exceptionally patient?
3. How might some experiences from your own life be similar to this story?
4. What inspires or elevates you about this story?
5. What disappoints or angers you about this story?
6. What might you have done in this story to overcome your disappointment or anger and help the person who disappointed or angered you to do better?
7. What caused the people in this story to behave the way they did?
8. Who in this discussion disagrees with you? What could you do to understand this person's point of view?
9. How might your perspective on this story be wrong?
10. What ideas can you take from this story and discussion to apply in your own life?

### **Story #1: Brad Keller, Director of Workplace Strategy**

As the Director of Workplace Strategy, I managed multiple teams. One of the teams I managed was the Audiovisual team. For months, I struggled to resolve a work conflict between the Audiovisual Team and the Conference Services Team, which are supposed to work closely together. Previously, the leader of the Conference Services team, Subayi, had responsibilities and resources shifted away from her team over to the Audiovisual team. I soon learned that our two teams did not work well together because of her resentment over this decision. Unfortunately, this had a big impact on our customer because it caused inconsistent service delivery.

I tried to overcome and resolve this disconnect, but my efforts were continuously unsuccessful. I resolved to consider her perspectives, fears and concerns. On a Monday morning, I reached out to Subayi to see if she was available for coffee and to get her opinion on how the meeting went last week with our combined teams. She seemed slightly taken off-guard by this gesture but agreed to meet me for coffee ten minutes later.

Our first few minutes were spent with small talk about activities from the previous weekend and children heading back to school. This was a purposeful attempt to connect on a personal level and it seemed to ease the tension. I then asked her how she thought the meeting with our teams went on Friday. While she was pleased with the team meeting overall, she reported that individual team members were still struggling to work together. She then explained her frustrations and concerns about areas of responsibility and not being included in important decision making. I made a conscious effort to listen, ask questions and not react when the tone escalated. Though I greatly desired to respond to her accusations and what I perceived to be inaccurate claims, I held back my response and focused on listening with empathy. When she finished her points, I responded with understanding and a desire to create solutions together for the betterment of both departments. This seemed to break down some barriers and decrease the tension.

As we wrapped up our brief coffee-supported conversation, she thanked me for working together on this partnership. I was further shocked when she extended her hand in gratitude, wishing me a good week.

This was just a first step toward building this relationship and achieving efficiency with our connected teams. However, it was a start in the right direction. We both agreed, if our team members can observe us modeling this collaborative behavior, their actions will quickly follow.

It was only a 20-minute encounter, but it changed the tone of our working relationship. This tone carried over to the next meeting with our combined teams. People even showed a more positive demeanor in email communications.

Over the following months, Subayi and I continued to improve our relationship. Ironically, the Conference Services Team was eventually moved into my organization. Subayi and her manager agreed that the team's alignment to my area made the most sense operationally. A couple years later, Subayi retired from the company. I still oversee the original Audiovisual team, but after some time a peer of mine took responsibility for the Conference Services Team. The two teams still work closely together and have no friction between them anymore.

## Story #2: Liang Liuxian

There are four sales engineers in our company who are responsible for the United States Nestlé-Dreyer's ice cream factories. I was preparing to host a conference call with them when I decided to take about a hundred steps back and re-think the whole agenda. Normally, for this conference call, I would have created a power point deck with our success stories from one location, to share with the other three. I would have talked through the applications, conducted a "mini-interview," spoken about each guy's sales quota, and then at the end, asked each guy what I could do to help them achieve greater sales. I probably would have asked at least once "Why don't you try...?"

I wanted to build trust and get the sales engineers helping each other. I came up with an idea, but I was nervous to try it out. I decided to act confidently and give it a try.

When the call happened, I thanked them for calling in, acknowledged how tough their jobs are, and introduced them to one another. Then I asked one of the sales engineers to share his biggest challenges with the customer. There was a long pause, but I defied my impulse to speak during the pause. Eventually, he spoke. Then, another person spoke. Before long, all four sales engineers began trading stories about the factories with which they have accounts. They asked each other questions such as, "How did you...?" "Have you seen...?" "Can you send...?" and making suggestions such as, "*This* will work ..." It was remarkable. One sales engineer was very successful with one factory. As the conversation unfolded, the sales engineers who work with the

other three factories became confident and inspired, and they shared what was going on at their locations.

Because of this conversation, I believe we are on track to earn another major win with Nestle-Dreyer's.

### **Story #3: Paul Jones, Manager**

I was appointed to a task force on workplace violence for my health system because of our clinical psychologist who was shot and killed by one of his patients. We needed to come up with a plan that would prevent anything like that from happening again. As we analyzed our system, it became clear that we could not make a direct connection between the culture of distrust that had grown up in our system, but it was easy to show how this culture led directly to many bad things, and it was not a major leap from those bad things to events like the shooting. Thus, we were trying to develop a careful, systemic solution to the problem. We began to feel that we had a preventative model on our hands. Based on the model we were developing, we identified seventeen hospitals in our system that were ripe for similar incidents.

As we developed this model, one of the hospitals with which we were working decided they would solve the problem by installing state-of-the-art metal detectors, a multi-million-dollar decision. Their employees were terrified, and they wanted something done now. The hospital had seven different access points at which the metal detectors were installed.

When our task force heard that they were going to do this, we told them, "Slow down. This is a mistake. Hold on and we will think this through with you." Our law enforcement experts told us that installing metal detectors would make the problem worse.

The hospital told us, "No, we have to get this done now." They installed metal detectors and, as predicted, things got worse. Although there were no killings, our measures of negative culture increased. The metal detectors created long lines at every access point because they were not adequately staffed. Patients got angrier, as predicted, because our law enforcement experts told us that if you create choke points, violence goes up, it does not go down. After standing in line with the patients and not being able to get in, employee tardiness increased. Therefore, employees stopped using the main entrances and tried to enter through the loading dock. This created new security issues because there were no security cameras in the loading docks and the loading dock entrance was poorly staffed, so this action that was taken to increase employee safety caused employees to use the only entrance in the hospital that had no protection, no security, and no safety oversight. It was like going down a back alley to get to work.

Top management called the metal detectors a success. Senior management at the hospital felt safer, and they argued that the reason there were no deaths was because they had installed the metal detectors. However, they were disconnected from their employees, and they caused more problems than they solved. When the employees complained they said, "We gave you what you

asked for, what is your problem?” This response reinforced the negative culture. In my opinion, it was a huge waste of money with no evidence that it was making people safer.

#### **Story #4: Auguste Rochette, Founder**

We wanted to be different from other Madison Avenue advertising agencies and have a humane company culture. Advertising is a ruthless industry. There is room for a couple of “senior statesmen,” but most employees in an advertising agency are young kids who you work to death and burn out. The industry kind of eats its young. This meant that there were a lot of high-quality, middle-aged people without jobs in the industry, so we wanted to hire those guys. We did, and we told them we do not care how you look doing your work, we do not care what time you come in or what time you leave. We are not going to micromanage you. Instead, we will just hold you accountable to come through with whatever you are contracted to do. If you have to go home because you are coaching a little league team, then we trust you to come through tomorrow. We don’t care as long as you come through. It was a real grown-up place to work. We wanted grown-ups who didn’t need policing and were self-directed. We did that and it was a successful model. We had a culture that was unparalleled. We were trying to reinvent the advertising industry for people like us, so we could survive in it.

The problem was that the media director in our advertising agency was failing. He wasn’t strong enough. He was good when we started, but when we got into large accounts that were more complex, he just wasn’t good enough. My partner would work late at night trying to make up for the media director’s less than adequate work. Most of the people that worked under him were actually better at his work than the media director was. Eventually, his direct reports started going around him in order to get their work done.

My partner had the biggest heart. He was so kind and had the most integrity of anybody I knew. I told him he needed to fire the media director, but he could not fire him. This was the first time we had to fire someone. I told him again, “You have to do this,” but he did not do it. I said, “We have to serve truth. We have to trust that truth is truth and it will serve us well regardless of the pain or consequences,” but three weeks later the media director was still there.

Finally, I told my partner that if he did not fire him, I would. “You are not doing him any favors. You are going to lose the really good people under him who are doing his job for him and propping him up, so he looks better than he is. Is that the kind agency we want?” My partner said he would do it the next day.

He followed through. After he fired him, he was crushed. He said, “I never want to do that again.”

I asked, “Was he surprised?”

“No.”

“Was he relieved?”

“Yeah, he kind of was.” Frankly, the media director had been miserable. He knew what was going on.

It turned out that the joke was on us. A week and a half later, the media director had a new job with a higher salary at an agency across town. We were worried that he would lose his house. His kids were in college, and we wondered how he would pay for things, and we were losing sleep over that, but the new job he got was a much better fit for him, and we got a much better media director as well.

From then on, I always used that example with my partner. I would say, “Remember the media director! This sounds like one of those situations.” Interestingly, my partner stopped being a big softy. He was so energized by how things had turned out that he started firing other underperformers. We also stopped praising people in their reports just to make them feel good, gave more honest assessments, and started holding people accountable. So, we got smarter. Honest evaluations were better, even though they were uncomfortable. When people got the feedback, they rose to the challenge, or they realized that they were not going to cut it at our agency. We kept all of the other features that made our company a good place to work, but we also gave people more honest feedback more quickly.