



Leadership Living

the MasterPoint™ Series for the ascendant professional

by Tim Herd

Starting things

Full disclosure: I never went to kindergarten. It didn't exist in my rural township in those dark, early days soon after the ice sheet had receded from North America.

And so I never learned all those things that people learn in kindergarten: Things like... like...

Hmm. Maybe that's the problem right there.

In the late 1950s, educational progress in our locale consolidated a dozen one-room schoolhouses into a "modern" elementary building. So a few days after I turned six years old, I started First Grade. My teacher, Mrs. Sham, wore what used to be called "coke-bottle glasses" (because the lenses were so thick), and what I called "teacher's perfume." (I have never met anyone else so distinctively scented in my life.)

I was an impressionable kid, and I learned many life lessons from Mrs. Sham: How to Raise Your Hand; How To Carry a Chair; How To Set Down Your Glasses (even though not a single first-grader wore them); When to Hang Up Your Wraps (poor Cindy E. didn't know she was a girl on the first day of school because she hung up her jacket during the boys' turn. She flunked that year.); How Not To Run Out To Recess Riding On Donald L's Back While He Whinnies Like a Horse; How To Stay In For Recess For A Week, and so on...

But the most lasting and profound lesson Mrs. Sham taught me was When You Start Something, Finish It. It speaks of the invaluable trait of persistence, which, when practiced, pulls you through the quicksand pits, muck-filled troughs, and inevitable round-about detours of life. Although we may not always be consistent, it is with persistence that we reach our goals.

I once witnessed a yearling black bear cub—a first-grader, you might say—with her heart and appetite set on a well-stocked birdfeeder, practice both persistence and ingenuity as she literally clung to her dream pursuing it. Because the feeder was suspended by ropes between trees, she quickly discovered that her goal was unreachable if she did not leave her comfort zone in one of the trees. Attempting and failing to step across tightrope-style, she also tried: hanging by her front claws; dangling upside-down sloth-style; failing and falling repeatedly; reaching and missing and stretching and grasping; and awkwardly holding and swaying and inching along between two bouncing and dancing ropes until she achieved what she had so persistently aimed for.

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In this monthly column, I will be interpreting proven concepts of personal, corporate, nonprofit, and community leadership for both the aspiring and the seasoned professional. I'll extend principles and parables—drawn from the worlds of nature, culture, business, and everyday living—for personal and professional growth, along with “MasterPoints” of essential concepts to master and maximize your leadership impact. Welcome to this new beginning! Join me in the journey, won't you?

MasterPoint 55

Never stop learning, never stop striving: practicing persistence pays off!

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