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I LOVE MONDAYS

**Accomplish More,
Make a Difference, and
Create a Culture Shift**

"Rather than the traditional bullet-point, dull-as-dust approach, the authors have couched the lessons within a story line that is original, engaging, powerful...and lasting. I Love Mondays is a new and creative way to impart valuable leadership lessons."

Jane Auster, *Writer-Editor, EnsembleIQ*

**GEORGE ANASTASOPOULOS
DAKOTA LAMARRE**

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All the Edward Hopper paintings referenced throughout the story were accessed digitally through www.edwardhopper.net, www.desmoinesartcenter.org, and www.whitney.org. Full citations of each painting can be found at their first appearances throughout the novel.

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DEDICATION

*To every manager out there—
if you feel like you're sinking in quicksand,
here's a branch.*

INTRODUCTION

A note from George and Dakota:

We love Mondays.

That might seem odd, since many view Monday as the start of the workweek grind. It brings piles of affairs to deal with, problems to solve, a long to-do list, back-to-back meetings, and reports to prepare.

Then there are people and their “stuff”—emails, requests, and expectations.

You’ve likely heard co-workers complain that “everything’s a priority” or “it’s never been this crazy.” Maybe you have thought the same.

We acknowledge you, our reader, for showing up to work every day, putting on a courageous mask, fighting the good

fight, doing your best, trying to please everyone, and sacrificing yourself to do what's asked of you. Even though it might feel like it, you are not a victim.

Hierarchies and authority structures are found in your work, your family, charitable organizations, religious institutions, and government. This hierarchical world instills a belief system so subtly and early in life that we're not even aware it's happening. Our belief system guides what we do and what we think we can't or shouldn't do. This book isn't just about doing things differently. It is about embracing a fundamental shift in beliefs, from manager-thinking to leader-thinking, regardless of your place in the hierarchy. That shift can be life-changing.

This book provides practical and simple-to-apply skills to help you see your way out of the status quo.

This book is for you if any of this applies:

- You're done sacrificing your family and well-being for your career.
- You want to do great work and help others do the same.
- You're somewhere between fresh and seasoned, between rookie and veteran, working in any sized company.
- You're a wannabe manager but don't want to be like your manager.
- You're early in your career and won't wait to get to the top to create change.

- You're a CEO or executive and are frustrated that your people don't take accountability, that your organization isn't proactive or innovative, and that everything falls on you.
- You're a business owner needing your lean team to work extraordinarily well together and be nimble and responsive to pivots and changes.
- You're interested in being a better leader, which is to say, a better human being interacting better with other human beings.

You can ditch the drudgery, frustration, and harmful health effects of “the way it is.” You can (re)discover fulfillment in your work, appreciating that your job isn't just a means of making money. Your work should be a calling that ignites you and inspires you to make a difference.

Action is the answer, rather than complex plans and strategies. Action in the form of simple and transformative skills that you can start using right now to make a difference in your own life and the lives of others around you.

Our hero is not unusual. She takes the train into the city, works in a typical office environment, visits the art gallery, and has lunch with her co-workers. She's a talented, driven, committed employee and manager who's frustrated with the over-management culture. Her journey is one of enlightenment, enhancement, and transformation. It's about sage wisdom and the willingness to embrace it, about collaboration and co-creation.

A Few Other Things

Though we wrote this book during the COVID-19 pandemic, we chose to depict a non-pandemic world. Whether you're reading this while working in isolation, in a hybrid model, or in your original at-work world, everything in this book still applies.

We know your time is valuable, so in this story, the pace at which our hero learns and adopts the presented skills is ambitious. With commitment and an open mind, the outcomes that she experiences are possible. This is a fable, which means we've used the fantastical to deliver our underlying messages.

We know that you are more than just a “business person,” so we invite you to read this book as a human being. That's why we didn't write a typical business book, but rather a story with hopes, fears, and relationships. A story like yours.

Please, dive into the story and know that you are the narrator of your own. You have the power to make the rules and create lasting change.

FLOODGATES

The elevator doors parted with a chime.

Jessica's workplace was quiet, but not calm. The air was thick with nervous energy. People darted to their cubicles in silence, like mice sneaking through a barn, fearing a cat.

Jessica made it to her office without acknowledging anyone. They were all focused on their computer screens, striving to look busy.

"You ready for this?" asked the voice in her head as she entered her password into her desktop.

"Do I have a choice?" she answered.

The floodgates opened as she started her applications, bringing emails and IMs with problems apparently only she

could solve. Nearly a dozen messages were from Maureen, who had a habit of sending follow-up emails if she didn't hear back promptly.

In one thread, Maureen's first email was from 11:37 the night before, and the second at 7:16 this morning. The original read:

Subject: Need this ASAP

Jessica,

Need a report on database errors from last quarter.

Please send this to me by the end of day tomorrow.

Thanks, Maureen

And the second email:

Jessica,

Reminding you to make this a top priority.

Jessica rolled her eyes. "This is a top priority," was Maureen's favorite expression. Jessica rubbed her temples, noticing the warning signs of a headache, when someone knocked at her door.

"Morning," Ravi said. "Got a minute?"

Ravi was an open book and her go-to guy. He loved to share his story about moving from India at the age of six, his family overcoming culture shock and language barriers to build a good life. Jessica promoted him to digital campaigns manager within a few months of her becoming director.

She envied the hope he exuded, his enthusiasm and desire not yet muted. Jessica wished she could save him from following in her footsteps.

“I had an idea last night that I want to share,” he said, pushing his way through the door.

Jessica wished she could nurture Ravi’s creativity, but the mere thought of new projects when she was continually trying to do more with less was exhausting. She knew it was only a matter of time before Ravi gave in to this exhaustion or quit.

“Let me catch up on some of this first,” she jerked her head towards her computer.

The spark faded from Ravi’s eyes.

“I’ll try you later,” he said, closing the door behind him.

She didn’t have long to think about what life would be like without Ravi before her phone rang. It was Maureen, no doubt summoning Jessica to her office. This was how Jessica’s day started several times a week. She let it ring and tried sifting through her inbox, triaging the most important requests, demands, follow-ups, and fixes.

The phone stopped ringing, ushering in a moment of silence, then lit up again. The display showed Maureen’s extension, the little red bulb next to the phone line winking in mockery.

“That’s enough,” she said aloud, pushing herself from her desk and leaving the ringing phone behind. It was already time for a break.

FAMILIAR TERRAIN

Jessica couldn't focus.

She had cleaned up the coffee spill as best she could, but was informed that the janitor was busy elsewhere and would deal with her office after lunch. The lingering soggianness made it hard to focus on her work.

The computer screen was blurry; her hands felt like someone else's. Something was tugging at her: the whisper she had either heard or sensed in the stairwell. It was like a soft breeze rustling the leaves of a tree.

Her emails might as well have been written in Greek. Another appeared in her inbox, this time from an unexpected

sender. The art gallery was reminding her that it was almost time to renew her annual pass.

Jessica thought about how therapeutic it would be to roam the halls of the gallery. Visiting some of her favorite artwork might give her a chance to process this idea that she could create change within her team, that maybe there was someone out there who could help her.

She made the judgment call to take an early lunch.

She barely noticed the people she passed as she rode the elevator to the lobby and stepped out into the city streets. Her mind raced with questions as she walked.

Did she have to suffer the fate of late nights and pointless meetings? Did she have to observe helplessly as her work schedule continued to build animosity in her husband and daughter? Did she have to watch her bosses be miserable and her team members slowly descend towards the same fate? Or could things be different?

Whatever hope that still flickered within her was making a final effort to claim her attention. She wasn't sure how it would be possible, but she knew, as sure as she knew her name, that it was.

The large door creaked as she pushed it open.

"Ticket please," said a man in a red jacket.

Jessica rummaged through her purse for her pass.

Inside the quiet, cool gallery, she retraced the path she took on her first date with Paul. Ten steps in was where he admitted to knowing nothing about art. Twelve steps in was where she forgave him. Down the hallway to the right was

where he asked her if she wanted kids. A bold move on a first date, and yet, she felt comfortable saying yes. She knew he could be the someone special she almost gave up hope of finding.

She reminisced about this younger version of herself, chuckling as she flashed back to Paul struggling to comprehend the paintings he examined. She wished she could reach through time and take young Jess by the shoulders, to shake her and tell her to prioritize what's important. She feared it was too late.

A year and a half after their first date, Paul proposed. A year later, she was pregnant with Lily, an unexpected gift. They hadn't planned on having children so soon. They had shared tears of joy when Jess walked out of the bathroom with a bashful smile and a positive pregnancy test in her hand.

Lily had already grown into such a vibrant little person. It was a joy for the two of them to bear witness as she explored the world with reckless abandon. They had started talking about having another child not long after Lily was born, Paul practically begging to expand on their little family. Given her circumstances, the thought of bringing another child into her unbalanced life scared Jessica.

"I don't believe in myself," she said to Paul sometime last year. "It's not that I don't believe in you, or even in us. I just don't feel like I can take on anything else right now. It wouldn't be fair to you, or Lily, or the new baby."

After that conversation, Paul dropped the subject entirely. Jess was afraid he had given up hope.

As she entered the wing of the Edward Hopper collection, a sense of urgency drew her forward. The voice that had drawn her here seemed to be coming from down the hall. Despite her curiosity at what waited ahead, she couldn't help but smile at the memory of introducing Paul to Hopper's work.

He didn't get it at first, but she pointed out how well Hopper captured Western culture. His paintings often featured solitary people staring off at some point far on the horizon. Jess loved Hopper's work. The simplicity and implied loneliness resonated with her.

As she walked along the rows of paintings, passing the framed snapshots of a woman gazing out of a window, a scene at a bar, a woman sitting alone at a table, Jessica's eyes welled. She was struck by a wave of gratitude, for her amazing family, and for the life she worked so hard to build. She worried that another bout of tears was on the way. Thankfully, no one else was in the room.

She looked up at one of her favorite paintings, *Compartment C, Car 293*¹. It depicted a woman sitting alone against a train compartment's green background, and it reminded her of herself.

Her family was who she was working for, along with the urge to keep others from falling into the same trap she had. She was ready to act, believing that things could be different,

¹ Edward Hopper, *Compartment C, Car 293*, 1938, <https://edwardhopper.net/compartment-c-car.jsp>, accessed 23 March 2021.

that she could build a culture where she didn't feel like a hostage in her own office. She didn't yet know how to make it happen, but she could picture a team of strong people who were self-sufficient and confident in their abilities, and who were capable leaders guiding their teams to victory.

The question wasn't what she needed to learn, but who she could ask for help. Racking her brain, no one came to mind. She was still alone.

The tension in her shoulders and pressure between her temples had abated. She was soothed by her favorite artworks. Though her problems were far from solved, she at least felt better. With nothing but hope for a brighter future, she braced herself to head back to the office.

She glanced up at the woman in the painting.

"Can you help me?" she jokingly asked.

She stood up, turning towards the exit. "Maybe I'm crazy," she muttered. "I can't be the one to make change. At least, not alone."

She almost toppled backwards over the bench as a voice announced, "You're not crazy. And you're not alone."

I LOVE MONDAYS

Learn to love Mondays because you love what you do, where you do it, and who you do it with. Managers everywhere know the feelings of being overwhelmed, overworked, and underappreciated - like sinking in quicksand. If you find yourself saying "it's just the way it is," we'll show you how to change it. Instead of the usual business book formula, we created a fable that showcases real, applicable skills with real business outcomes. Accomplishing more, making a difference, and creating an amazing team culture is possible for you, regardless of where you are in your company's hierarchy, by changing the way you work, live, and play with those around you. Welcome to the world of loving Mondays!

"My advice to anyone looking to live life on their terms is to pick up this book; you won't regret it."

Brian McCarthy, Senior Sales Executive

"Whether you are a manager who is drowning and in need of a life line, or a manager who is looking to become a better leader, I highly recommend it."

Scott Mackintosh, Director of Operations, Thomas International

"Wow - make sure you read this book. You will learn what it is like to converse with a non-judgmental voice that listens well, asks powerful questions, creates the space for you to shift your perspective, and doesn't give advice."

Sue Sheldon, Master Certified Coach, Director of Learning and Development, FLOW

"This fun fable offers sage advice with some good lessons about balancing corporate mechanics with relational competencies in order to achieve highest-level corporate performance. The characters are all quite relatable. In fact, I believe I have worked with all of them sometime in my career!"

Kyle Barber, President & CEO, YMCA of Oakville

"Do you dread Mondays? Are you burning your candle at both ends? Stop what you're doing right now and read this book. It's a must read for anyone that leads or aspires to lead. Find fulfillment in your work again, and start enjoying Mondays!"

Julia Wilson, Marketing Manager, RGX Rim Repair

"A practical path for middle managers who are passionate to make real, positive change without getting fired! And it makes the case for senior leaders to listen to them."

Jim Danahy, CEO, CustomerLAB,
principal owner Lakewood Pharmacy

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