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Ideas For Success | *December*

It's a tradition – and my favorite issue to write. Every December I share the '10 Things I Learned' during the previous year. Thank you for spending a few minutes with me each month. I value and appreciate your time.



Better Instructions – Clear communication is essential to achieving desired business results... and sometimes what you think you say isn't what others hear. At a strategic planning meeting I facilitated, the CEO kicked things off with this story: "Early in my career, I launched a facility in the Middle East that manufactured storage tanks. The first week, at the end of one day, I told the night crew, 'Never paint the tanks on the inside.' The next morning I arrived and discovered they had taken two tanks outside and painted them amidst the blowing desert dust."

Lasting Words – The best quote I discovered in 2016 is from decades ago: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea." It's attributed to a writer whose classic you probably read in school. *The Little Prince* is the fourth bestselling book ever. You might not know that 15 months after publication, French author and aviation pioneer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry perished in a plane crash while flying a reconnaissance mission during World War II.

Insightful Thought – One of my clients has an important reminder tacked to the bulletin board in his office. "The Dalai Lama, when asked what surprised him most about humanity, answered: 'Man. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present or the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived.'"

Forever Young – Someone alive today might want to reflect on the Dalai Lama's view. A U.K. scientist named Aubrey de Grey believes there is a person walking the earth who could avoid the illnesses of old age and live to be 1000. That potential deca-centenarian might want to take out a long-term care policy... really long-term.

Information Please – My favorite customer service lesson this year? During our visit to the Charles M. Schulz Museum, I asked a docent

December 7, 1941

Seventy-five years have passed since 2,403 Americans perished on the 'date which will live in infamy.' The escalation into World War II led to 418,500 American military and civilian deaths.

The week after Pearl Harbor, my father and every boy in the Menasha (WI) High School Class of '42 enlisted in the military. Some were sent into the heart of battle... and never returned. Tom was more fortunate – spending four years in the Navy as a pharmacist's mate.

At the National WWII Museum this summer, I learned 16 million Americans served during the war. The youngest of those are in their nineties – and each day we lose 372 of them. Only 620,000 WWII veterans remain.

Recently, Kathy and I were in a checkout line at our local grocery store. On the branded shirt of the 30-something gentleman ringing up our items, there was a patch: "I Proudly Served". When I asked which branch, he said: "Eight years in the United States Marine Corps."

We are fortunate there are brave men and women willing to risk their lives to protect our freedom... as they have in each conflict from the American Revolution to the Global War on Terror.

This year I started saying thank you to every current and former military person I

how the cartoonist sent artwork to his publisher. She handed me a stamped postcard and said: "I don't know, but if you'll write that question down and self-address it, we have a gentleman who researches everything. He'll mail you the answer." Three weeks after we returned home, the card you see here arrived in our mailbox. That's a Joe Cool souvenir!



Softer Voice – In church one Sunday I leaned over to my 18-year-old daughter and quietly made a comment about the sermon. As we pulled out of the parking lot afterward, she told me: "Dad, you're whispering isn't really whispering. It's just making your words more breathy and speaking slower. Everybody heard what you said."

Everybody Helps – When I went to Ft. McMurray, Alberta, in October the visible devastation from May's wildfire amazed me. My host told me that in three days they safely evacuated 90,000 people from the Oil Sands. (There is one road and you either drive north 30 miles to work camps or south 300 miles to the nearest city.) The oil companies placed tanker trucks along the route to provide free gas fill-ups, food and water – and housed displaced families in previously shuttered camps. Three Canadian airlines worked together to fly evacuees to Calgary and Edmonton. "Everyone was calm and focused on a safe departure," he said. It's often in the worst of times that folks show their best. Imagine if we did that every day.

Ongoing Legacy – When a lifelong friend's boys were beginning 7th and 9th grades, he wrote each a 'life' letter – and continued penning those words of wisdom from a loving father every fall until they married. Lee told me that Matthew and Bryan – soon to be 28 and 30 – occasionally bring up those many guidance lessons. He became a grandfather in July... and is looking forward to continuing the tradition with the next generation.

Heartfelt Gratitude – Marshall Goldsmith is the gold standard among executive coaches. This year he wrote about becoming "a connoisseur of gratitude, a virtuoso of thanking" people. I'm a big believer in sending handwritten notes to those I meet in business settings – and suggest clients do the same. "Writing a thank you note," opined Goldsmith, "forces you to confront the humbling fact that you have not achieved your success alone. You had a lot of help along the way." Inspired... one of my 1Q17 goals is to create a list of the people who helped me most during these first 35 years of my career and write each one a note to show my appreciation.

Gift Giving – At this time of year, contributing to a charitable organization is not just about getting a tax break – it's about sharing your blessings. If you're seeking a worthy cause, here is a nonprofit where 87% of donations go directly to helping children:

Samaritan's Feet – Did you know 1.5 billion people suffer from parasitic foot diseases picked up through contaminated soil? This group's mission is to "serve and inspire hope and opportunity among the world's most impoverished children, by washing their feet, providing a new pair of shoes, and encouraging them to pursue their dreams." A \$20 contribution buys

meet – and praying we never again have a war that causes suffering and pain for so many families.

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shoes for a barefoot child and moves the charity closer to its goal to give 10 million pairs to 10 million children in 10 years.

This completes 13 years and 156 issues of *Fast: Forward*. Fifty years ago this week, Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* debuted on CBS. The 'Mean One' – whose heart ultimately changed – figured it out: "Maybe Christmas, the Grinch thought, doesn't come from a store."

Merry Christmas. Happy Holidays. Happy Hanukkah. Seasons Greetings. May peace and love be upon your doorstep during this most wonderful time of the year... and continued success in all things during 2017.



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