

Episode #43: Can You Be a Philosopher and a Person of Action?

Welcome to THE CAREER ACCELERATOR, the podcast where corporate managers will find tips and tools to deliver results through others.

Hello. Today I will share three tips I gathered from the book *The Obstacle Is the Way*, by Ryan Holiday

I'm your host, coach Percy Cannon.

In our last episode I shared three leadership tips extracted from the excellent book *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy Seals Lead and Win*:

1. The leader is accountable for everything that happens in his or her team. I invited you to use this piece of advice as a reminder to avoid blaming others and become fully accountable for your team.
2. Leaders must train and mentor underperformers. I encouraged you not to procrastinate addressing underperformance situations with your team. It's not good for them as individuals, and it's not good for the company to let this underperformance linger once detected.
3. It's not what you preach, but what you tolerate. I advised you to look into your own teams and assess if the music goes with the lyrics... Could it be that you are tolerating behaviors opposite to what you preach?

Today I want to leverage the lessons I learned from another great book I recently read: *The Obstacle Is the Way*, by Ryan Holiday.

What I found unique about this book is how the author presents several cases of men and women who, throughout the years, and perhaps without even knowing it, applied several philosophical principles that resulted in concrete action. In other words, philosophy and action do not oppose each other. To the contrary, they can work in tandem.

Let me now share three takeaways from this book, which I thought would be most applicable to you:

1. **My first take-away is: Action and failure are two sides of the same coin.** In one of my corporate jobs, I was responsible for a product line that was failing to deliver the expected profit margins. After an exhaustive analysis, the manufacturing cost was one of the main culprits for the line's subpar performance. After looking at different alternatives, the solution my team and I agreed to was to close the local production facilities and source the product from another manufacturing center.

However, we faced resistance from some of the senior executives. They were not comfortable with any possible negative reaction from the plant workers and the potential disruption of the product supply. They wanted an alternative with zero, or near-zero, chance of failure. Looking back, I think they were afraid to fail...

On the other hand, I vividly recall the reality-check remarks from two of my team members.

One of them commented that there is always an inherent risk to any business activity. The other one said that any major plant decision, even if supported by the right information, will invariably be met with naysayers who will try to stop it at all costs.

Connecting with the book statement of “action and failure being two sides of the same coin,” any business activity has the potential to fail. Avoiding action to prevent failure leads, maybe in a bit hyperbolic way, to inaction. Conversely, if you take action and fail, you will have not only learned how *not* to execute a particular activity, but you will likely avoid a similar error in the future.

2. **The second tip from the book I want to share is to practice premortem: Hope for the best, prepare for the worst.** Circling back to the previous event, although we didn’t call it premortem, our team brainstormed elements of the plan that could potentially go wrong. We were prepared with contingency plans arising from potential fallouts after we made the announcement of the plant closing, such as a negative reaction from the plant workers and a potential disruption in the production schedule. We had even planned an emergency exit route for me in the event things went south during the official announcement. Although we were ready for the worst, the worst never happened. The plant manager had generated a high level of trust from his workers, which helped them understand the reason for the plant closing. In fact, I think several of them even anticipated such a decision. The best scenario actually happened. The production plan was carried out uninterrupted. Moreover, several of the plant workers found jobs in nearby plant facilities, which was something we had included as part of our plan to help them during their transition period.
3. **My last tip from the book is: Never let a crisis go to waste.** Although I had originally heard this statement applied to politics, I find it equally valid for business situations. A good recent example of this is the Covid-19 pandemic. Several organizations used this crisis as an opportunity to align different departments under a single objective related to the pandemic. For some companies, it was how to survive. For others, it was how to maximize those products and services that became in high demand. And for others, it was a mix of both. Unfortunately, there may have been a few too many companies that did not take advantage of this crisis to reinvent themselves. As a leader, you don’t want to miss the opportunity presented by a crisis to align your team behind a worthy goal. Likewise, you don’t need to wait until you face a crisis to break down internal silos and align all departments under a single goal.

Summarizing, philosophical principles can help you become more action-oriented. Three tips I extracted from the excellent book *The Obstacle Is the Way*, by Ryan Holiday, will help you do that:

1. **Action and failure are two sides of the same coin.**
2. **Practice premortem: Hope for the best, prepare for the worst.**
3. **Never let a crisis go to waste.**

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. In the next one, I will share insights I gathered from the book *The Three Laws of Performance*, by Steve Zaffron and Dave Logan.

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This is coach Percy Cannon, working to help you *make the rest of your life...the best of your life*®.

Percy's BIO

Percy has been helping hundreds of corporate executives and their teams boost their leadership and teamwork capabilities over the past ten years.

Before this, Percy spent close to three decades working for three multinational corporations, Procter & Gamble, IBM & Microsoft, in the United States and across several countries in Latin America.

Percy is a Certified Professional Coach from Wainwright Global, Authorized Partner for "The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" and "Everything DiSC", a Certified Go-Giver Speaker & Coach, and a practitioner of several methodologies from best-seller author Patrick Lencioni (e.g., "The Ideal Team Player", "The 6 Types of Working Genius", "Organizational Health" and others).

He published his first book in 2012-13 in English (*The Business Apostolate: Insights to Define and Achieve Your Mission in Life*) and in Spanish (*El Negocio Más Grande de su Vida*).

Percy is a Consulting Partner with Grupo Azimuth and the Chapter Director for the COO Forum in Southeast Florida.

He has lived in 9 different cities and 5 countries, and speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese fluently.

Percy is married, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren, and is a passionate runner & reader.

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