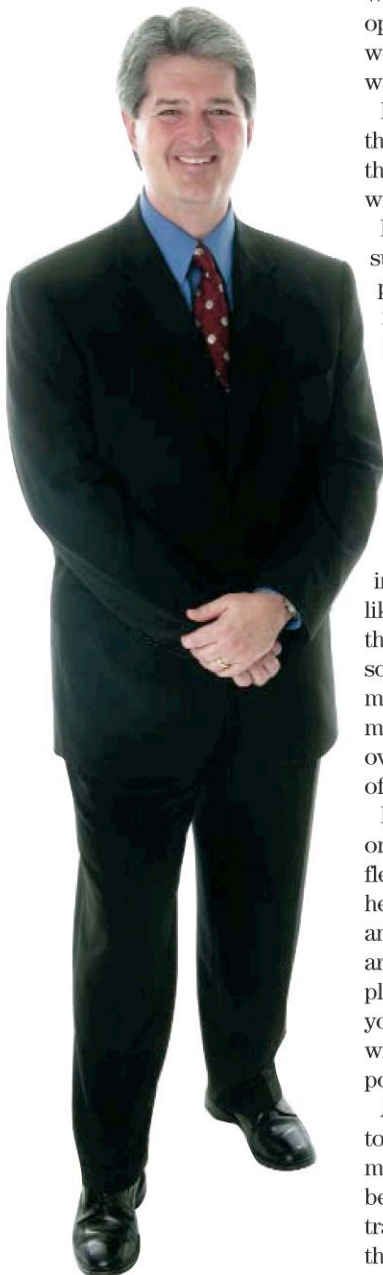


# Embracing interruptions

A knock on your door could be the beginning of your next great experience.



I heard a brief knock on my office door before Susan stepped in saying, “Have you got a minute?” Looking up into the troubled face of a person who was both an employee and a friend, I had an inner reaction that was all too familiar: “Oh great, what’s wrong now?”

It was a reaction that Susan would never have detected because I smiled and said, “Sure, what can I do to help?” and then spent the next 45 minutes listening and offering suggestions on a problem she was facing. When we finished, we had not only developed a good plan for addressing her issue, we had also strengthened our relationship. It was a productive meeting with a great result.

But when she left my office, I started to think about my initial reaction — a reaction that I could remember having not only at work but at home and with friends, as well.

Have you ever had the same reaction? I suspect, like all of us, you have. In the workplace, requests for “a minute” are so commonplace that you can seldom get through a day without one. Similar requests can come from your spouse, your friends or your children. And with uncanny accuracy, they arrive when it’s least convenient, whether you’re engrossed in your own responsibilities or you’ve just settled down for a few quiet moments.

Regardless of the source or the timing, interruptions can be frustrating. And yet, like my experience with Susan, interruptions that frustrated me initially have often led to some of my most satisfying and fulfilling moments. Understanding this paradox taught me one of the greatest lessons I’ve learned in over half a century of living: the importance of embracing interruptions.

Before you dismiss this advice as applying only to those with plenty of free time and flexibility, let me remind you that my life is as hectic and as full as yours. Each week, I balance my roles as husband, dad, CEO, martial artist, author, speaker and friend. I carefully plan each week and fill my calendar the way you would pack a suitcase for a long trip, with every space designated for some purpose.

And yet, learning to embrace interruptions, to welcome them as openings to the most meaningful moments, has enhanced my life beyond measure. The next time you feel frustrated by an interruption, here are a few things to remember.

## ■ Life doesn’t conform to your schedule.

The people in your life need you when the crisis occurs, not when you can fit them in. When a friend receives a frightening diagnosis or a member of your team detects a project about to go off track, you can’t say, “I’ve got an opening next Tuesday, can we talk then?”

You find a way to be there for those people in the same way you would expect them to be there for you. And when the situation is reversed, they will be likely to reciprocate.

## ■ People come to you because they believe you can help and that you care.

The day they stop coming, you’ve either lost your value or you’ve convinced them that they don’t matter to you.

Remember that leading is more about actions than words. Whether it’s your children or your teammates, stopping to help them solve a problem clearly communicates that they are important to you. And when you look back on your leadership and your life, the moments you stopped to help will be the ones you cherish most.

## ■ Staying accessible and available keeps you engaged.

Isolation and burnout are two of the most common factors that can lead you to disengage mentally, physically and even spiritually.

Interruptions force you to re-engage with the people in your life, to get outside the narrow circle of your own thoughts and schedule, and to find the renewed energy that sharing a challenge as well as a triumph with the people you care about will bring.

While you will always need times of focused concentration, learn to embrace interruptions when they occur. The knock on your door could be the beginning of your next great experience in the business of life.

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