



The Appriser

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Breathing Free Again

Here are two examples of people who got gummed up and needed to breath free again:

1. My wife Lorie and I knew a restaurant owner of a little café that sat right next to the post office we needed to use every day. It was a convenient location for us to stop in four or five times a week as our mail was delivered just before noon, and because it was a convenient place to meet people. The fact it was just about the only place to grab a bite didn't hurt either. Our frequency made us some of her favorite customers. She would try new dishes out on us. She catered our daughter's graduation party for a low price. She hired our son for a summer. She had left a job to pursue the dream of opening a restaurant, but after a year it was clear she was unhappy. Before she owned it two years she sold it for a loss. Why? Because she wanted the enterprise to be profitable enough that she could earn what she was earning without having to be at the restaurant for every hour it was open.

She was profitable from the beginning, but not profitable enough to suit her, and the dream wasn't coming true fast enough for her to commit to work even harder for a time to take the restaurant to the next level and she could hire a reliable manager. Her perspective was that the restaurant was to perform just because it existed. She liked being her own boss but she did not like being an entrepreneur. She felt more burdened than she did working as an employee in a dead-end job. She wanted to breathe again and took the loss to get out.

2. I knew a man who became manager of an optical lab. He had worked there a long time. Everyone liked him. He knew the craft. He wanted the opportunity and the raise that came with it. Becoming manager made him miserable and he lasted just a couple of months in the role before he requested his old job back. He didn't like having to be responsible for the performance of others, and being seen as the responsible party if any tension erupted. He wanted to breath free again, even if it meant losing income he had hoped to earn.

There are many stories like this. The choices to sell a business or to refuse a promotion are not wrong choices to make and we shouldn't view the people in these stories critically.

In fact, you consider what might have happened had they continued in the role without making the changes they needed. The restaurant owner would have run herself and her restaurant into the ground, resenting customers who came in at the last minute and made her stay longer instead of seeing them as people who helped her meet her monthly numbers. The lab tech would have become a petulant and unpredictable manager, guiding the lab by what made him less miserable than by what pushed quality, timely product out the door. For them to have stayed in their roles, they would have needed to get help, invest in some education or expertise, push a little harder so it would get easier later, allow change in themselves as frightening as it might be, perhaps even give up a little control to the people working for them.

Leadership is the choice of new headaches to bear, not a chance to leave headaches behind. HR professionals, business owners, and even those institutions that give out business loans are wise to ferret out these rosy dreams of grandeur before the wreckage begins.

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