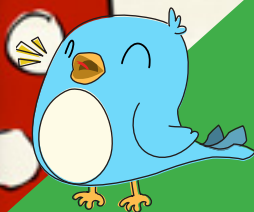


LIFE'S A PARADE

DON'T LET
IT PASS
YOU BY

By Ken Revenaugh



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LIFE'S A PARADE, DON'T LET IT PASS YOU BY - GET IN THE ACT

Play it safe, do your job, stay on the sidelines.
Or join the show, learn new tricks, learn from
your mistakes and advance your career.

By Ken Revenaugh

Every kid loves a parade. I did.

I grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, where rodeos and parades were big events. Clowns were a big part of the act. I loved their costumes and big shoes and especially liked to see how many clowns would fit in a Volkswagen bug. My mom reminds me that I always came home from those events talking about how I wanted to be a clown someday.

Even as a kid, I always wanted to join the parade. In high school, a great teacher named Mark Schultz, who worked as a clown on the side, offered to teach me what it took to be a great entertainer.

The illustration on the cover of this article is of me at my first parade in 1988. Strangely

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enough, the lessons I learned as a clown have paid off big time in corporate America.

JOIN THE PARADE

There are always people who know more than you do – the experts. There are plenty of them in the business of clowning.

Most notable was anyone trained at the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Clown College, which trained around 1,400 clowns in the “Ringling style” from 1968 to 1997.

Statistically, admission to Clown College was more challenging than being accepted to Harvard Law School. Most years, over 5,000 applicants would audition for 50 openings. My first thought? How could I compete? I soon

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realized that I didn’t have to compete – I needed to focus my goals and define my own success. I approached my goal with zeal and determination. I learned how to apply makeup and designed my clown character’s face. I picked one skill, juggling, and practiced all the time. I watched a few other clowns and decided on a costume. I talked my grandmother into quite a sewing project. Of course, Mr. Schultz gave me hints and tips along the way. I took it from there. Some key lessons I learned that serve me in the business world to this day...

LEARN NEW TRICKS

Juggling was going well, but I needed more. After all, an audience tires of a one-trick clown.

First, I added new items to my juggling repertoire. Those bowling pins really took some time to master. It took practice. Everything in business requires repetition and practice to become an expert.

Balloon animals were a great crowd pleaser. I learned how to form a few animals and tested my skills on a live audience. I expanded my repertoire and delighted my audience with balloon elephants, dogs, alligators and more.

Next came magic. I mastered an easy trick quickly and tried it out on a few family members. I held a cup full of water from a pitcher over a volunteer’s head. While this willing person cowered in nervous anticipation, I said the magic words... “Oopsy Doopsy” (because my clown name was Oopsy), flipped the cup over, and (magically), the water had disappeared – no spill! The trick was a chemical in the cup that turned the liquid into a gelatin that stuck to the

inside of the cup. Everyone loved it. In fact, I still have a cousin who talks about how amazed she was. Magic was, well, “working like magic,” so I went on to learn more.

I found a buzzer that went in my glove so that every time I touched a child’s nose, she would think her own nose honked. When the child was still trying to make her own nose honk,

I had mastered a little sleight of hand and would make coins or a ball appear behind her ears. My box of tricks expand every week, and my show improved.

In business, I always like to learn a new tip or trick, and find a new method or tool that makes the job easier. In fact, I have been collecting those for the past 20 years and share many of them on my website www.fasttracktools.com.

But it’s not just enough to have the latest tool; you have to practice and become an expert. Remember . . . the goal is to get to the front of the parade!

LEARN FROM MISTAKES

We all make monumental mistakes that stick with us. The question is, do the mistakes make us better or impede our ability to move forward?

Even when you’re wearing a clown suit, not everyone laughs at every blooper. My high school friends all convinced me to enter our town’s talent show. After all, I had even been on the local evening news. Surely, I could come up with a great act.

I spent weeks planning my act. I talked my buddies into helping me put together a slapstick routine, complete with flying pies and spraying seltzer – a well-choreographed show. It got a few laughs.

The laughter really came when the stage began to sway and crumbled to bits as we all fell to the ground. It was made of particleboard, and when it got wet, it disintegrated. The initial laughter

quickly turned to jeers and boos when we ruined the stage, and the show was cancelled.

Failing in front of your peers is tough, but it was a life lesson that stuck with me. Since then:

- I have led multi-million dollar productions, sales meetings with thousands of attendees, and tradeshows that introduced new brands to huge audiences.
- Before every production, we have a planning session called “Scenario X.” It’s a brainstorming session to think about everything that could go wrong before it happens. It doesn’t have to be a big, formal session – just a get-together to address potential questions, negatives and surprises.
- No more stages have fallen apart since that fateful high school talent show, but that was not my last failure. I make a point to learn from each mistake and try to focus on how I can turn that knowledge into my next success.

In John Maxwell’s book, “Failing Forward,” he writes, “In more than 30 years of working with people, I have yet to meet a successful person who continually dwelled on his past difficulties.” Failure may stop or slow us on our journey, but it does not have to be the end. It could be a new beginning.

FUNNY MONEY

Surprisingly, there was a lot of money to be made in the business of clowning around. But most other clowns I met made it a hobby.

This is where I first learned there are two distinct groups of people in this world:

- Those who know how to turn one dollar into two dollars.
- Those who are happy with one dollar.

First, I started performing at birthday parties (mostly for kids). I was lucky to earn \$100 for a party. Since it took two hours just to put on my

makeup and more time to drive to and from the gig, my hourly rate didn’t seem worth the effort. I soon realized there was a market for adult birthday parties that often had kids in attendance (plus the older crowd who just wanted to be kids themselves). So, my price jumped to \$200 for a 45-minute show.

Word got around, and the officer’s club at the nearby Air Force base asked me to come in for the Sunday brunch. They balked at the quote of \$500 for a 90-minute show. So, I did the first show for free. It was so successful, they invited me back every other week for two years.

Along the way, I approached a Mexican restaurant named Amigo’s and offered to perform at their family night. They also had a hard time with the cost. Again, I performed a free show and their customers wanted me back. But at the time, they couldn’t afford the almost \$200 an hour I requested. So, as a high school kid with a bottomless pit for a stomach, I settled on a lower rate and as much food as I could carry away after the performance. (My friends and I ate a lot of tacos that year.)

In those days, I always looked for the best way to monetize my skills. Skills I used then serve me today:

- Creativity and recognizing business potential are key to success.
- Knowing where to find an audience for your product or service and convincing them of your value.
- Calculating appropriate risks (such as offering a show for free in hopes of securing paying business).
- Knowing when to be flexible (taking food in lieu of money).
- Recognizing when it isn’t worth the effort and it is time to change direction (when kids’ parties weren’t paying enough to justify my time).

**“Whatever costume you put
on every morning, make sure
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It all comes down to business acumen and know-how. When I’m building teams in corporate America, I look for that same know-how. Many people are happy just doing their jobs. When I come across someone that wants to help me do more – develop new products, find better systems and processes, acquire new clients – I’m ready to take them under my wing.

If you know how to help your company turn one dollar into two, make your voice heard! You are in a rare group.

**SUMMARY: YOU DON'T
HAVE TO DRESS UP AS A
CLOWN, BUT YOU DO HAVE
TO JUMP INTO “LIFE’S PARADE”**

- I arrived early for my parade and got in line to keep learning. Yes, I just got in line. I’ve been doing it ever since.

At every turn in my career, I am the one to stand up and say, “I’ll do it.” Somebody else may be an expert, but I’m the one willing to get in the parade and learn new tricks as I go.

- In a very short time, you can usually teach yourself more about a topic than many of those around you. You just have to have the drive and ambition to make it happen.

The working title of this article was, “I learned everything I needed to know from a clown.” Well, not everything, but it was significant. I thank my high school teacher, Mark Schultz, for all that he taught me. In those days, I never imagined that I was learning lessons to propel my future career as a corporate executive.

Remember. . .whatever costume you put on every morning, make sure you jump into the parade, learn new tricks, learn from your mistakes and focus on turning one dollar into two.

These are simple lessons that have catapulted my career and continue to give me the personal satisfaction of conquering every role and making a difference.