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Making A Change

Fortune magazine asks leaders to share the "Best Advice I Ever Got." Eric Schmidt, Chairman and CEO of Google, feels his was to hire a coach. "I initially resented the advice, because after all, I was a CEO," he said. "My

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The first album I ever bought, using allowance money, was the newly released *ABC*. In college a decade later, my roommate played "Rock With You" and "Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough" for hours. On a hot July night in 1984, I sweated with 40,000 at Texas Stadium to witness the *Victory Tour*. When I acquired a CD player two years later, the disc I purchased first was *Diana Ross Presents the Jackson Five*. Check out my iPhone, and you'll find "Thriller," "Billie Jean," "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'" and other hits by the world's best performer.

Obviously, I am a fan of the music of the King of Pop; however, the man in the mirror he became is another in a long list of celebrities who grew famous, rich and miserable...then flamed out spectacularly. Erratic behavior drove 'Wacko Jacko' into exile, and most people probably hadn't given him much thought the past decade. Like the original King, prescription drug abuse appears to have caused his heart to stop too soon. Had Michael Jackson taken his own advice, the media might be celebrating this month's scheduled comeback instead of covering his death: *"If you wanna make the world a better place / Take a look at yourself and then make a change."*

[Deal Or No Deal](#) After nearly three years of looking and avoiding, we finally bought a new car on the final day of the second quarter. A major reason I hesitate to complete car transactions is the experience of dealing with dealers. However, things have changed in the decade since our last new car purchase. So, whether you're in the car market – or just interested in how others handle their sales techniques – here is how we acquired a 2009 Honda Accord:

1) I frequently listen to a Saturday morning radio show featuring a gentleman who owned one of the most successful Ford franchises in the nation. Jerry Reynolds offers to "help you avoid the hassles of buying a car." I was skeptical, yet sent him an e-mail anyway... asking about the fee for his services. He quickly replied, "No charge. Just keep listening." Half an hour later a firm "walk away" offer from his preferred Honda advertiser appeared in our In Box.

2) Armed with information, I went to the Web sites of two other dealers and requested quotes. To our surprise both were significantly more than Jerry's contact. Kathy and I headed to a fourth dealer – the one nearest our house – and test drove the car. We waited a couple of days (didn't want to appear anxious!) before contacting that sales rep and asking for "your best price." It took two follow-up calls to get an answer, which was \$600 too high.

3) So I said, "Right now I'm going to drive to you or go another 30 minutes farther and buy from them. Match their price and I'll do business with you." His reply: "That's our final offer." Then he

argument was 'How could a coach advise me if I'm the best person in the world at this?'

That's a misconception to which I respond by saying coaching is not 'here's your answer.' Instead, it's an opportunity for you, as leader, to have another person help you find clarity on the best way to overcome your challenges. Allowing someone detached from your organization to provide honest and candid feedback opens the door to superior performance.

"A coach is somebody who looks at something with another set of eyes, describes it to you in [his] words, and discusses how to approach the problem," said Schmidt. The signature on my e-mails says, "Tiger Woods has a coach. Why don't you?" He's 'the best person in the world' in sports, yet understands the importance of making the investment to be better.

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To read previous issues of *Fast:Forward* – which has subscribers in 18 countries (USA, Canada, England, Germany, Australia, South Africa, Norway, Romania, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, India, China, Taiwan, South Korea, Argentina, Ecuador, Columbia) – visit www.successhandler.com and look in Archives.

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rambled on about how the other dealer would "include hidden fees" and "get to you in financing" and "don't you think I should make something for the hour I spent with you?"

"Thanks and goodbye" were my final words, then I made a brief phone call to Russell & Smith Honda, and off we headed. When we arrived, the Alabaster Silver Metallic EX-L V6 was sitting on the red carpet. The Internet manager, Hang Na, handed us the key and said, "Drive it as long as you want, then let me know." A few minutes later we returned, and within an hour were heading home in our new sedan. No hassles, no surprises.

There may be a reason why the dealer near our house chose to let us walk; however, with year-over-year sales down 30 percent, it's surprising they didn't try harder to close a deal. Then there's the decision to bad-mouth their competition: bad idea. For your business, remember dollars you might leave on the table could be returned to you many times over in referrals. I've told several friends about Russell & Smith Honda. Now you and 1,999 other readers know about them too.

Words of Wisdom Listening to another radio talk show shortly after Michael Jackson's death, I heard the host share a quote from one of his friends. This perspective captures the challenge faced by all who seek to leave this place better than you found it:

"God gives gifts to everyone. For some, the gift is greater than their character can handle." ~ Pastor Randy Weaver – Cowboy Church, Montgomery, Texas

Regardless of your spiritual belief, remember that your talents are gifts to share. In dealing with life's daily pressures – at home and at work – it is essential to nurture and develop your uniqueness, so you can continue to inspire those you touch for many years.

Celebrating Success Two decades ago, I awakened from a dream with this thought: "How do people get to Notre Dame football games?" A few months later, my lifelong friend and his sister took that inspiration and opened a two-person office in Dallas, with the vision of becoming the company that traveled Fighting Irish fans and teams. Within 18 months, my friend relocated to South Bend and became the official travel service of the University of Notre Dame.

That entrepreneurial endeavor now has more than 100 employees serving 30 universities, and in 2007, a leading industry organization voted it the best travel company in North America. Congratulations John, your wonderful wife Kate and everyone at Anthony Travel on 20 years of sharing your gifts as the leader in university and sports travel management.

Until next month, continued success in all things.

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