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Postcards from Professional Paradise

Your Passport to Professional Paradise

POWs and WOWs - the Signs of Prison and Paradise - Part 1



In January and February, I talked all about Professional Paradise, Prison and Parole and you had a chance to figure out where you are on the Paradise Continuum. This month, I'll focus on the signs (POWs and WOWs) along the journey to Professional Paradise so you can recognize what's moving you forward and what's holding you back.

The Random House Unabridged Dictionary tells us that a pow is "a heavy blow." Have you ever experienced a figurative heavy blow at work - an event, situation or interaction that sucker punches you, distracts you, aggravates you and just plain leaves you feeling bad? That's a POW in a nutshell. It's **something bad or negative that happens to you** - a metaphorical body blow or right uppercut to the chin. I would have to say that the economy these days seems to be a gigantic POW if there ever was one.

Think of a specific POW you've recently experienced at work.

POWs are either internally or externally generated. Internal POWs are self-inflicted, created by you, such as showing up late for a meeting to find everyone waiting on you, losing a sale because you weren't prepared or making a careless mistake on a report. Some internal POWs come from your mindset - how you perceive things and react to them. Being so worried about a situation that you can't focus on your work or assuming a colleague is blowing you off because he or she hasn't responded to your email are good examples.

External POWs, on the other hand, are the result of non-controllable situations or other people's actions. They happen *to* you instead of *within* you. Examples might include a traffic jam that makes you late for an appointment, a copier that breaks down minutes before the report is due, or a PDA that quits working on a business trip. Many of the external POWs we experience are related to change, lack of control or rules and regulations. POWs caused by other people can originate with total strangers, customers, vendors, competitors, coworkers, direct reports or leaders. For instance, an angry customer calls to complain, one of your team members is out sick during crunch time, or the supplier suddenly announces they can't meet your deadline.

When you get hit with a POW, either you get riled up or you shut down. It's the innate "fight or flight" reaction. You might get angry or annoyed, or become filled with anxiety. POWs sap your energy and enthusiasm, and leave you feeling disheartened, disappointed, distrustful and disengaged. You often experience physical changes as well. Your heart rate increases, your blood pressure might shoot up and your palms start to sweat. When POWs pile up day after day, you become imprisoned.

Over time, the negative events, thoughts and reactions lead to a sense of hopelessness and create the feeling of being trapped. A few POWs here and there are no big deal. Everyone - even those in Professional Paradise - experience POWs from time to time. It's the perpetual presence of POWs that packs you into Professional Prison.

POWs are like ripples in a pond - their impact extends beyond you to affect coworkers, customers, teams, even entire organizations. Think of a recent encounter where a teammate perhaps overreacted, jumped all over you and then apologized, saying something like, "Sorry. I'm in a bad mood because (fill in the blank)." That's the ripple effect of POWs.

What POWs do you frequently experience at work? Get out a piece of paper and jot down a three common POWs you get hit with and identify each one as internal or external.

Example: Wondering about changes that might happen at work - Internal POW

Example: Hearing from your boss about changes at work - External POW

Notice that the outcome is the same in the two example POWs, even though one is internal and one is external - there is uncertainty about what will happen next! If you create the worry yourself, you might beat yourself up over it. The situation plays out differently if your boss is indeed conveying information about upcoming changes. You'd likely still be worried, but you'd blame someone else. Either way, you have work to do and life to live. And either way, you can control your reaction and find a solution using the *SHIFT* steps.

Look back at any external POWs you wrote down. Are they within your control? Probably not. But guess what? It doesn't matter! What is within your control is how you respond to them - your mindset and your actions. That may sound idealistic, but it doesn't mean it isn't true.

We all encounter POWs at work - sometimes they are small irritants like waiting for a client to call back and other times they are devastating, like losing your job. Either way, you get to choose what you'll do next. For now, start to notice the POWs you encounter and if they are internal or external. For the internal ones - take a look at what's causing you to inflict this "pain" on yourself and *SHIFT* to a more productive state of mind. For the external POWs make a conscious effort to manage your reactions.

Next month, I'll talk more about WOWs - the opposite end of the Professional Paradise spectrum. Want to know exactly how to *SHIFT* your POWs to WOWs now? Click [here](#) to download FREE tools.

Signing off from Professional Paradise-



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