

Finally, the Moment of Truth (Part 1)

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I recall my freshman year in college when I took a popular math course. Early in the course the instructor, a legendary professor with a long tenure, announced plans for the first of a series of weekly tests. He stated that the tests would consist of only one question—a relief for most of us—and he concluded that it would be an open-book test and we were welcome to bring all the books in the world to class! Many of us snickered at his remark, including me, and then I quickly processed the subtle message behind his statement. Soon after the end of the first test, a few of my classmates and I quickly discovered that none of us (in our group) received identical questions. The professor apparently had distributed over ten different tests in a manner that ensured that no two students sitting adjacent to one another received identical questions! We were all left to our own means as we faced a moment of truth every week throughout the course. We either knew the stuff we were being taught, or we didn't; and your buddy next to you could do nothing to help you during the tests.

In many ways life is a patchwork of many moments of truth. Some moments of truth are completely out of our control while others are well within our control, and often of our own making. In the case of my college freshman year weekly tests, that situation was within my control, but not of my own making—you can thank my professor for that. On a different occasion I once found myself preparing to leave home for the airport on a sunny afternoon to catch a flight for a very important business meeting scheduled early the following morning out of town. The hour-long drive (to the airport) was rather routine and I estimated a three hour lead time would be sufficient. As luck would have it, there was a serious automobile accident on the highway that caused a major traffic jam. I arrived at my departure gate just in time to watch the plane pushing back! I had three options — (i) get on the waiting list for the next and last flight, (ii) catch the next available flight at an airport one hour drive away, or (iii) cancel my meeting with significant consequences. With assistance from my travel consultant I chose the second option, secured a seat on a last flight, and found myself with 90 minutes to traverse a major city rush hour traffic to be strapped to an airplane seat bound for Texas. I was faced with a moment of truth with circumstances totally out of my control.

But then, there are many moments of truth that are of our own doing and that are completely within our control. Such moments may carry significant consequences that can result in a loss of self-respect or a loss of the respect of other people. At times like these we often find ourselves alone with our thoughts and our conscience, and we wonder how and why we brought ourselves to such a place at the time. The key to successfully navigating a moment of truth—of this type—lies in the awareness of the true expectations that prevail and in the level of preparation that precedes the moment. Unfortunately, most often we are not aware of the true expectations that prevail when we create these moments ahead of ourselves, and other

Sailing Past a Moment of Truth

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times we are least prepared knowing fully well that the moment will come to pass. The following scenario is based on a true story.

It was late in the morning, just before noon, and all the members of a family gathered in the great room waiting anxiously. It had only been a few weeks since the burial and the laying to rest of their beloved father who finally succumbed to old age. The surviving wife—mother and grandmother—sat calmly on the end seat of the long sofa as her children made their way around the room to open seats. The grandchildren were kept away with their older relatives as part of a pre-arrangement—this was not an affair for them to witness. Soon the oldest daughter emerged from the adjacent room accompanied by a middle aged man dressed in a suit. He had a folder in his hand. She gazed around the room looking to ensure that everyone who was expected there was indeed there as she prepared. Everyone was present, including her brothers, younger sister and older half-sister. She then looked toward the gentleman in the suit and gave a nod of approval.

The man promptly greeted everyone and introduced himself. The introduction was a formality since everyone knew who he was—executor of the will left in place by their late father. He was there to open the last will before the family and to announce the names of the beneficiaries of designated assets within the estate. He gave a brief speech and promptly opened the folder in his hand revealing a sealed white envelope. He opened the envelope as everyone watched intently. The room was totally silent.

Very soon he began to announce the names of each member of the family, identifying assets that were bequeathed to them. The announcement went on steadily for over half an hour and soon he began to slow. Every asset that was known to the family had been mentioned and everyone had received a share of the estate; everybody, but one—the older half-sister. She (the half-sister) looked puzzled as she stared at the executor, unsure of what to say. And then the executor turned to her and said, “I have a statement here that I am to read to you.”

To be continued in Part 2.

About the Author



Niyi Taiwo is the founder of EKTIMIS and the lead editor for the EKTIMIS eLibrary articles. He is the author of several books, including the EKTIMIS Top Ten Laws series. He is a continuous improvement expert with over 21 years of industry experience – operational, management and consulting. He holds an undergraduate degree from WPI and a master's degree from RPI. He is a certified Lean Expert and an ASQ-certified Six Sigma Black Belt.