

# A DECISION OF TRANSCENDENCE: AN UGLY MOMENT TRIGGERS A WAKE-UP CALL

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*Most of us have "hit the wall" or had some other form of rude awakening, discovering our self caught in a life not of our choosing. Recently, in a call with Brad Masek, Maintenance Support Manager at Luminant's Sandow Power Plant, he shared a powerful personal story of a life-changing event. I found his story so powerful and inspiring that I invited Brad to put it in writing for us to use as a teaching story. No matter where you are on the journey toward self-actualization, I believe you will find Brad's story inspiring and well worth the read!*



As a young 27-year-old engineer with only three years of experience, I was given significant responsibilities related to improvement projects at our facility. I actively worked in five major areas: plant capital improvement projects, new plant construction coordination, a very large environmental upgrade project, plant operations/maintenance support, and coordination with a company providing demolition services to the old plants. These duties required a significant amount of time dedicated to accomplishing them on a consistent basis. The environmental upgrade project required me to travel to South Carolina for two weeks each month for two years during the design phase. These duties would normally be expected of a team of three to five engineers.

My life was more complicated than many in that my wife was in law school at this time. Our marriage was certainly not normal, as we did not live together during the week while she was in school, I also operated as a single dad during the week for our daughter, providing all the home duties that were needed.

In 2008, work was at the fastest pace I had ever experienced yet and the stress was mounting. I was not actively aware of the person I was becoming, but I knew I was not happy. I did not enjoy coming to work each day. I was at odds with some of the leadership team in place at the time. I often felt unappreciated and untrusted on the decisions I was required to make, which were often made during times of high pressure. I was constantly given new tasks on top of the full plate I already had, and I never pushed back or said no. I received

very low marks on my performance appraisals without descriptions of where I was lacking. I am a proud person, and I expect a lot of myself and my performance. This was not acceptable for me. It added to my spiral into a victim cycle. I blamed others. I made excuses. I still worked hard, but did not enjoy one minute of it. I looked for work at other companies and would have left if I were given the opportunity.

This all came to a head one evening at home when my daughter dropped a cup of milk. I yelled and barked at her. This sweet little girl crumbled under my verbal abuse. Through her tears, I quickly saw what I had become, and it was not the man I wanted to be. I worked to correct that wrong immediately, but that night as I talked with my wife, I sought to understand what was really going on in my life. I saw that I was wearing all the stress of my job and taking it out on the people I loved most. As we talked, I made the decision that I was either going to find a way to be happy in my job and in my life or I would find a new job where I could be happy. This was a turning point in my life, my family's life and my career.

I approached work in a new way. I would give my all during the time I was at work and do all I could to accomplish what was humanly possible. I would do it with a smile. I would learn to say "No." I would ensure that I chose to be happy each morning and throughout the day. My approach changed in that I found ways to recruit others who could help me get the jobs done. My stress levels went down significantly, and I found that I was leading

more than I was working. I was changing from an individual worker in a silo to one that worked in a team, and I found that my teammates made the jobs better and easier. Their talents made both me and them successful.

I approached my home life differently as well. When I left work, I left the stresses there too. When I came home, I made sure my daughter knew I loved her. I made sure my wife knew the same. I spent the time I needed to in order to have a good home. I made them my priority. While I still had to do some work at home, it was always after they went to bed. I wanted to dedicate my time to those that deserved it most.

I transcended the victim cycle by making a simple decision and promise to myself: I will determine what is most important to me and make that my priority. I began to use work as the means to my end, which was to live my life as I wanted to. In doing this, my family immediately noticed a difference. We were happy again. At work, the change was noticed as well. People looked up to me to be the steady voice in the storms that we faced each day. They sought my expertise and wanted to have me be a part of their teams, regardless of whether the normal conventions would have me there or not. As my career has progressed, this approach to work and life has served me well. My employees enjoy working with me and for me. I ensure that those feelings I had are not repeated. I appreciate those who help me with what we need to do each day and year.