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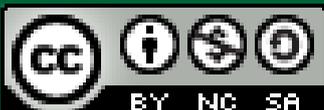
"SURVIVING YOUR SERENGETI:
7 SKILLS TO MASTER BUSINESS AND
LIFE"

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Many years ago I visited Serengeti National Park at Kenya; one of the most important World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve. It was an extraordinary, unique experience which makes me want to re-live it!! It was just like a miracle coming so close to elephants, giraffes, crocodiles, cheetah, panther... and to observe how they live, how they react...how biodiversity is balanced in this ecosystem... how nature works.

Nine years later, I found out through a post at PMI's internet site (Project Management Institute) that Stefan Swanepoels, a writer and successful businessman, wrote a book in 2011 entitled: "Surviving your Serengeti-7 Skills to Master Business and Life". I was curious of reading it so I ordered it via internet (not published yet in Greek language) and believe me I read it in one day!!!

It follows the story of corporate executive Sean Spencer as he embarks on a three-day visit to Africa. Without cell phone coverage or any other form of technology to keep him worked in, Sean is forced to disconnect from the worries of his troubled business thousands of miles away. Instead, he becomes engrossed in the animals that rule this untamed land and the wisdom the Serengeti has to offer having as guide Zachariah. Zachariah is a man that studied business administration and after years he began to realize that much of what he had learned in business school seemed to correlate to various aspects of nature. So, he with some friends formed a company to study unique animal skills.

Surviving your Serengeti provides a larger-than-life metaphor for the problems and struggles humans and companies experience. The story reveals the primordial skills for overcoming adversity, conquering one's fears and ultimately triumphing over all challenging conditions.

So, are you ready to make a small journey to Serengeti National Park and learn how to learn from nature???

Let me first give you the "big picture":

The Serengeti shows us how different animals each possess a unique skill-skills that we all need to master in our own lives, but usually don't.

Studying each animal's particular skills, we can develop techniques to better comprehend our own strengths and weaknesses. We can learn how to apply them and gain the most from each skill. What makes Serengeti exceptional is that it isolates the core survival skills so unmistakably.

The goal is to understand animals' world as a means to gaining insight into our own.

Let's meet our animals...our skills!!!

The Communicating Elephant: Effective communication is the art of successfully delivering your message.

Communication: Just as it is for elephants, successful relationships between people-in life and business-depend on good Communication. Effective communicators understand that it's not always best to use a lot of words when relaying an idea. In fact, the more words we use, the more our message can be obscured.

Elephants group together in herds, where one female like this old gal-usually the eldest with the most experience-maintains order. They have a unique social structure with clearly defined roles for each animal: caring, sharing, expertise, and protecting the next generation. Those smaller elephants are probably about four to six years old and will learn all they need to know during their childhood. Being the largest mammal on land means they have no natural enemies-and they have demonstrated the ability to sustain long-term cooperative and mutually beneficial relationships with many of the other animals. Elephants demonstrate a remarkable capacity to converse effectively with one another in order to pass their extensive knowledge down to the next generation. They can receive and interpret some 70 different sounds from each other and their environment. Their communication skills even include humor, mourning and an ability to lead others. They use their expertise and ability to communicate efficiently. But what makes them even more unique is their ability to communicate through touch. Communicating the key elements of survival down through the generations by sight, sound and feel is quite a remarkable ability.

Make sure your message is clear and concise. You need to determine the most appropriate and effective medium for your message. Every piece of information will allow you to tailor your message accordingly.

And remember!!! Effective communication is the art of mastering words, tone, and body language.

The Efficient Cheetah: Efficiency is the optimization of all resources to achieve the best results

Efficiency: Similar to the cheetah, efficiency is all about finishing the job in the shortest possible time with a minimum amount of wasted energy and resources.

Cheetah's young cubs will take a long time to reach maturity and they are highly dependent on their mother for

food and protection for as much as eighteen months after their birth. There are a very few animals that can survive a chase by a cheetah. She is the fastest land predator on the planet. She uses a tremendous amount of energy to run at top speed, which causes her body temperature and heart rate to rise rapidly. So she cannot keep up this speed for a long time. She hunts during the hottest hours of the day because it diminishes the odds that she'll encounter other predators. You might say that she fills a niche that would otherwise be empty. As the saying goes, nature abhors a vacuum.

Although being fast undeniably has many advantages, its greatest value comes when you temper it with efficiency. Think of it in terms of “getting the desired result or finishing the job” in the shortest possible time, with minimum wasted resources. Humans’ efficiency depends on how well we recognize and respond to both internal and external factors. Things like interruptions, distractions, mistakes, mental and physical fatigue, or lack of experience, or expertise can cause us to lose focus. Our unrealistic assumptions can occasionally keep us from making good decisions. We race to meet a deadline, become distracted, lose focus, consume our resources, unwisely and then complete the task before the deadline-but with significant errors.

And remember!!! We can’t be as effective when they constantly work at high speed. Speed and efficiency are separate elements but when properly blended they are an unstoppable combination. Finding that balance is the challenge.

The Enduring Wildebeest: Endurance is the steadfast capacity to hold on for one more day

Endurance: Like the wildebeest, Endurance-in its simplest form-is our ability to apply ourselves for relatively long periods of time. It keeps our minds going when our bodies want to quit and gives us the mental capability to continue moving forward despite the obstacles, hardships, pain, fatigue, or stress in our path.

Imagine it’s a beautiful February morning under an infinite royal blue sky in the Serengeti. The temperature grows cooler as autumn sets in, much to the wildebeest’s relief. Yet cooling temperatures also mean that winter is approaching and with it the dry season. Since wildebeest need water daily, this forces them to migrate. The 1000 mile journey they are forced to undertake every year offers no guarantees and hundreds of thousands of wildebeest will die. There is no certainty that there will be rain over the next hill, or for that matter that they will even make it over that hill. It’s simply just a matter of moving forward.

Consider the immense odds that the wildebeest have to overcome on their journey, as well as the endurance and resilience required to overcome each day’s challenges-and you will begin to identify the wildebeest’s distinctive skill.

Think about the migration in different terms for a moment. Imagine it to be a road map for your life. It illustrates the challenges, threats, changing environment, and shifting paradigms that we all encounter.

And remember two things!!! (a) People who exhibit single-minded determination understand that it’s often not the fastest or the strongest one that wins the race-it’s the one that stays the course and goes the full distance. It’s the one that is not afraid of being faced with fear and uncertainty. (b) The wildebeest doesn’t run alone. Enduring together is much easier. Give to the others motivation and encouragement on a regular basis.

Fighting spirit is what we can learn from wildebeest. A more defined common goal and commitment to support each other through these tough times.

The Enterprising Crocodile: An enterprising person explores all options and boldly seizes every opportunity.

Enterprising: it means showing initiative, a willingness to undertake new projects, and a strong desire for success and achievement—all qualities that support the role of the entrepreneur. Like the crocodile, enterprising people possess the energy, creativity and ambition required to see the possibilities in the future that others cannot see. Enterprising individuals are passionate about their work, learn from mistakes, understand their weaknesses as well as their strengths, recognize opportunity and make strategic decisions with limited data.

Unlike lion, crocodile can't chase after his prey. He has to wait for

it to come to him. And to make matters even more complicated, all animals sense the crocodile's presence in the water. So the crocodile has to be very stealthy and enterprising to obtain its meal. Although the wildebeest migration brings the crocs and abundance of food, it's also dangerous for them, since the crocs could easily be trampled to death by thousands of hooves. They have to identify the stragglers and the weak ones and then seek out the best moment to grab their prey before they get in the way of the next wildebeest crossing the river. Crocodiles take advantage of an opportunity that presents itself. It isn't simply "taking" advantage. It's developing a mind-set to actively seek opportunities.

And remember!!!! Enterprising people understand exactly what to do when opportunity knocks.

The Graceful Giraffe: Grace is more than style and finesse, it's doing the right thing.

Grace: The word Grace tends to vary in meaning from one person or situation to another, often depending upon the context in which it is used. While many see the grace of the giraffe in human-like terms such as elegance, charm, or a positive attitude, others consider it to be divine in origin. They believe that it represents that indispensable gift for the development, improvement, and expansion of one's character.

Giraffe towering height is so impressive. It's a long way to the top of those trees, yet they seem to soar comfortably

above them. They generally spend most of their day eating, as it takes them that long to get full. They are very congenial and quiet animals, but they do communicate with coughing or barking sounds. The species we have here on the Serengeti are called the Masai or Kilimanjaro giraffe. They can be a very difficult and dangerous choice of prey. One well-placed kick can shatter a predator's skull or break its spine. Lions are the only ones that really pose a serious threat to an adult giraffe. However, once they get galloping they are very tough to stop. They called the "watchtowers of the Serengeti". Their height gives them ample warning of approaching predators. That's why many other animals like to remain close to them. Here's another fascinating fact—they sleep less than two hours a day. It's the

tallest animal in the world and simultaneously it is the most elegant. Their sociable behavior also reinforces their role as the most gracious of all animals on the Serengeti. It reinforces that beauty, elegance and style comes in all sizes. Their skill is grace. It emphasizes the fact that we must be grateful, even when things aren't going our way.

Grace teaches us to have patience, patience produces understanding, understanding results in acceptance and acceptance allows us to move past the stressful situation at hand. Grace is the golden thread that allows us to keep our lives in balance. It can often serve as our purpose and motivation. It helps us with our relationships-which we all know are one of the most difficult things to manage. Grace is expressed through so many different qualities. Compassion, benevolence, goodness and generosity. It is the key ingredient in determining how competently we interact with others. That's why it's so important to be gracious not only toward those we love and care about-but also the people who come into our lives every day.

Grace is imperative in business. It's how our company interacts with our customers, competitors, suppliers and even those within our own team. It's so much more than style, finesse and good taste. It's about doing the right thing, even if it's not required.

What we do and how we do it reflects our expertise, experience, and values. Your actions must personify dignity, honor and grace. Grace should be central to any business. Some people understand it better if we refer to grace as professionalism.

And remember!!! Grace is the key foundation of any form of success.

The Risk Taking Mongoose: Taking calculated risks is an essential part of every journey.

Risk taking: Succeeding in troubled times often involves being a risk taker. But like the mongoose, you need to evaluate all the options involved with the chance you are taking before you make a decision.

The mongoose spends the majority of its day searching for food. They are very adventurous and daring-even fearless at times-and will often

boldly venture into unknown territory. As a general rule, the mongooses will outmaneuver their predators. They are very quick and agile and can climb trees and swim if they have to. But it's their courage and willingness to take risks that makes them so unique. Life out the Serengeti doesn't stand still. Taking risks is an integral part of every-day survival. If you look closely, taking chances is as normal as breathing. Though our little mongoose is more of a risk taker than most animals his size, make no mistakes. He evaluates his options very carefully first.

The level of risk has a lot to do with the direction you take. Sometimes the path with highest risk leads to the highest reward. You have to explore the unknown, remain open to opportunities, and not let fear hold you back. That means not allowing ourselves to be

limited by the social and emotional boundaries, opinions, beliefs, and self-imposed restrictions society establishes.

And remember!!! It all comes down to how you manage life and each decision you make.

The Strategic Lion: Strategy is the road map you need to define and achieve your goals.

Strategy: For lions, it's all or nothing. If their Strategy fails, they go hungry. For us, however, it's all about organizing our thoughts, ideas, experiences, skills, expertise and expectations to accomplish a desired goal.

There is always one lioness within their hierarchy that leads the hunt as the primary provider for the pride. Lions have to plan to have breakfast. Witnessing lions hunting zebras is violent yet amazing. It's all about survival.

Strategy is much more than a once-a-year ritual. Business leaders need to reduce the overall strategy down to its smaller bit size components. But it's more than simply having a strategy. It requires that you adopt a strategic mind-set irrespective of whom and what you are.

We always create a detailed set of blueprints to show us the way. Success is seldom an accidentally discovered treasure. Rather, it's the result of following a predetermined set of steps by utilizing a combination of various skills.

The lead lioness developed the strategy and resulting plan of attack. But when the herd began to move off, she made an adjustment. That means that planning includes considering alternatives and options.

And remember!!! Each decision impacts the next and so on. And, visionary leadership is needed and not crisis control.

To conclude....

The seven skills provide exceptional insight into surviving and thriving. Not because we are animals, and not because we should strive to be like them. But in the harsh reality of the Serengeti, life and death dramas have accentuated their unique survival skills in a way that allows us to learn from them. Often, our comfortable existence lets us become complacent- and we fail to identify or grow our skills.

We owe it to all of humanity to live every day to the fullest and to share what we know with those around us.

Surviving your own Serengeti requires identifying and using your dominant survival skill to its fullest potential.

You must constantly strive to improve yourselves throughout the course of your lives. Each of you must be willing to learn from anyone and everyone while accepting the responsibility

to share your unique skills to help others-just as each of the animals do. We are all conduits through which life passes. It is our duty both to be mentored and to be a mentor.

If you are willing to listen, nature has much to share.

And in order to see if you are right about what animal are you, you can take the following quiz:[link to the quiz](#)