



# **The Best of Kevin's Blog**

**An Anniversary Celebration**

From The Kevin Eikenberry Group  
<http://KevinEikenberry.com>

It is hard to believe that it has been a year.

One year ago I decided, due to my curiosity and a desire to see if there was another way to build my credibility and our business, I decided to start blogging.

The first entry wasn't very earth shattering:

### **My First Blog**

Starting my blog... is a strange thing. I'm excited to share my thoughts on business, personal and professional growth and achievement, and ideas I have and read from others. All will be meant to help you and your organization reach your goals and objectives. I am considering this a grand adventure, and a great opportunity for learning. Adventure and learning - a pretty good combination!

It has certainly been an adventure. I have learned a great deal about myself through sharing journal entries that never used to be completely fleshed out, or that were never read by anyone but me.

My guiding purpose, developed over the first couple of months of posting, has been to provide value to readers so they would want to come back and continue to read. And in terms of creating a voice for this writing I have relied on the feedback of a colleague and Client who once said, "Reading your blog is just like talking to you Kevin."

So I intend to continue writing this blog, for my own learning, for your benefit and to help those who don't know me, get to know me a bit better.

I hope these 12 handpicked posts – one from each month – will be valuable to you, and I hope that the day will come when I am sitting in your office, discussing a training or consulting project and you will say, "it feels like I already know you Kevin."

Yours in Learning,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Kevin Eikenberry', written in a cursive style.

## Playing with Time Web Site March 2004

I saw an interesting website recently. It is called Playing with Time. I found myself engaged in their Gallery (click on Things to See and Do, then click on Gallery). Here they have short digital time-lapse films of all sorts of events. Some of them are short, 0.7 seconds for a cat lapping milk, to the shifting of the Continental Plates over 240 million years.

While I enjoyed several of them, the one that took a woman's face through 69 years of life in 10 seconds really struck me. In particular it occurred to me that the picture was a representation of her life and all that had happened to her during that time. 69 years in 10 seconds.

We are all "playing with time" every day. Often we want to fast forward time towards our goals, or slow down time spent on vacations or with loved ones. In fact, I believe that our ability to play with time to our advantage is one of the most important skills we can learn. My suggestion? Go to the website and enjoy some of the very interesting effects. But while you are there, think about time, your thoughts about it, and your abilities to manage and use it. It will be time well spent!

“I believe our ability to play with time to our advantage is one of the most important skills we can learn.”



## A Leadership Lesson April 2004

The May 2004 issue of Fast Company has an article about Jet Blue the new airline with great results and success so far. The article talks about the challenges they face and also talks a great deal about the culture they created at the start and are working hard to foster now. One of the many things that set Jet Blue apart is their focus on teamwork. Here's one example. They have no cleaning crews - every employee on the flight (including pilots and those not working but on the flight) clean up the plane. This saves time and money - both things very important to any business.

“You can’t ask employees to do something you aren’t willing to do yourself!”

When I say everyone helps clean, I mean everyone - including the CEO, David Neeleman. Neeleman helps the flight attendants hand out snacks and helps clean up. This takes Neeleman's words about teamwork and turns them into action. He is quoted as saying, "You can't ask employees to do something you aren't willing to do yourself."

I learned this lesson from my father growing up on a farm. There were many tasks I was asked to do - some of them much more unpleasant than picking up newspaper and snack wrappers on a plane - but all of them were done knowing that my Dad had done them and was willing to do them still, even if he had higher priority work to do.

This is an extremely important lesson for us as leaders. Being willing to do the grunt work, the dirty work (call it whatever you want - on the farm there was some VERY dirty work) builds commitment and shows that all of the work in the organization is important.

As a leader, please don't push this off saying you want to delegate and make people responsible for their own work. Delegation and ownership is important to be sure. If you always delegate the unpleasant stuff, but always want to help with the more glamorous tasks, your comments of delegation will fall on deaf ears.

Help. Show up for clean up. Be a part of the team. These actions will make you a better leader.



## **A Model of Happiness May 2004**

Everyone I've ever met considers happiness to be desirable. There is a whole wing of psychology called "positive psychology" studying things like happiness. One of the luminaries of this field is Dr. Martin Seligman, who wrote both Learned Optimism and Authentic Happiness. His group publishes a newsletter called Authentic Happiness Coaching Newsletter (you can learn more at: <http://www.authentic happiness.org>).

“We can actively impact our happiness, based on our decisions and actions.”

The most recent issue of this newsletter discusses a Model of Happiness developed by Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky and others. This model describes our happiness as coming from three components.

**Our Set Point (50%).** This is our natural happiness state. We all know people who seem to always be happy, and others who seldom laugh or seem joyful.

**Circumstances (10%)** Our life circumstances also influence our happiness. Things like winning the lottery or spraining our ankle both influence our happiness, but typically over a short time period. Humans are very adaptable and so major boosts or dips in our happiness are generally short lived.

**Intentional Activity (40%).** For this description, let me quote from the newsletter. "The term intentional activities refer to those thoughts and behaviors that require effort. This effort may be apparent only to us (for example, making a list of goals for the week) or it may be visible to others (for example, doing a favor for a friend). They suggest that intentional activities are the key to making lasting changes in happiness because such activities are more resistant to adaptation (the process by which we get used to something and become unaffected by it). We can deliberately engage in activities that make us happy while varying them enough to ward off adaptation."

This brief summary of this model leaves me with two important conclusions:

1. Most people's world views on happiness rest with either Set point (we are either born happy or not) or circumstances (it's easy for them to be happy, look at what they have going for them). Either of these world views is too limiting and fatalistic.
2. We can actively impact our happiness, based on our decisions and actions!

If you want to be happier you can take action to do just that - it is in your control!

How do you do that?

There are many ways you can intentionally improve your happiness. One way suggested by the article is to engage in random (or perhaps intentional) acts of kindness. Make

these actions something that benefit others and require use of a personal resource of yours (time, effort, energy, money, food, etc.).

Happiness matters to us as individuals. If we are happier we will likely be much more productive as individuals and as leaders of others too! Once we understand that a big part of our happiness is in our control, we put ourselves on track to be not just happier, but more effective productive and move more rapidly towards our potential.



### The Power of Napping June 2004

Last night I was the guest expert on the "Mentoring with the Masters" tele-seminar series. (You can listen to a replay or sign up for future tele-seminars for free at <http://mentorsmagazine.com>). As we talked about creativity, I was asked about my chapter in ***Walking with the Wise***, where I talk about using a "power nap" as a way to stimulate my creativity.

“Improve your happiness...engage in random (or perhaps intentional) acts of kindness .”

Many people may find this approach to be ridiculous, or perhaps even lazy. You might be thinking, "How can a self-respecting business person take a nap when they should be working?" That is an understandable response. However during the tele-seminar I pulled out an article I read in the Wall Street Journal, on 7/23/03 in the Cubicle Culture section. The article is entitled "As Bosses Power Nap, Cubicle Dwellers Doze Under Clever Disguise"

The article talks about trends of napping and how it is especially hard to get a nap if you work in a cubicle. But beyond this it cites some interesting research that leaves me feeling vindicated (ok, almost feeling smug). In one NASA study, Mark Rosekind, former Director of NASA's Fatigue Countermeasure Program, found that airplane pilots who fell asleep for an average of 26 minutes experienced a 34 % improvement in performance and a 54% improvement in alertness.

Ok, so maybe the thought of airline pilots sleeping is a concern, but hey, they have co-pilots, and nothing was mentioned about sleeping during landing...

Think about it - what other program could give us a 34% improvement in productivity?

If your situation allows, I encourage taking a quick nap. To get the greatest benefit from it, I drift off thinking about a particular issue or challenge. I immediately write down my thoughts or work on this issue upon awaking. I also keep the nap short - for me 10-15 minutes at the most. The number of ideas and insights that I have gained in this way is amazing.

Want to learn more about napping in the workplace? Want to convince your boss of this option? Go to <http://napping.com>.

“...a 34% improvement in productivity...I encourage taking a quick nap.”

I encourage you to try a power nap as a way to increase your productivity, solve problems more creatively and make the rest of your day more enjoyable. It works for me!



### **Above My Desk July 2004**

Above my desk is a bulletin board. I won't tell you everything that is on it - I'm not sure I want the whole world doing a psychological evaluation of me based on the contents of the board!

There is something there though that I think is instructive and worth writing about - my buttons. I have several buttons on my bulletin board. They read:

- Dream Bigger! (the button we produce)
- Just DO It!
- Who are "They" Anyway?
- Go For It!
- I'Mpossible

- Blazingly good
- Ingenious
- Ask!
- Bring Your Brain

What do these buttons have in common (other than a very large percentage of them having exclamation points?) They are all positive, empowering messages that I read every day that I am at my desk.

Why should this matter to you?

Because it is a good practice to fill our minds with positive, affirming messages!

“Because it is good practice to fill our minds with positive, affirming messages... Put a quotation, saying or other positive message in your work environment.”

Try it for yourself. Put a quotation, saying or other positive message in your work environment. Post similar things in the environment where others work. Want people to keep their Customers in Focus? Choose messages that help reinforce the Customer Service focus that you are creating. Use the bulletin board, your office doors, or a space in your break room to share those messages with others.

If you need ideas or quotations, check out my two quotation services, [Powerquotes](#) and [Powerquotes Plus](#). These are two of many sources you could go to stock your work area with positive messages.



### Thank Goodness Its Friday August 2004

What would your work day be like if you sent or received no emails?

In today's *Wall Street Journal* Marlon Walker wrote about how one manager at Veritas Software has declared Friday as no email day. His staff of 240 aren't allowed to email internally (yes, they can still email clients, other departments, etc.) on Fridays. What happens if they do?

“What would your work day be like if you sent or received no emails?”

They are fined \$1/email which is put in a fund to be given to charity.

This story intrigues me on two levels...

As a leader, it is important to get people face to face. In the article they talked about greater interpersonal interaction, more phone call and more face to face meetings on Fridays. While the article is focused on the email slant, the benefits of the greater interaction (if only on Fridays) can't be ignored. Even in a small office like ours we tend to email too often when we could discuss several items over a Coke, at the white board or in some other way.

The story is instructive from a creativity standpoint as well.

Take away a tool and people will find ways to adapt. By people interacting in new ways new patterns of thoughts and synergies will emerge.

Think about your email usage and habits - and think about how you can make your email more about productivity and less about habit. Think too the next time you start to send an email to a person down the hall (or in the next cubicle) and make a conscious choice about using email or talking face to face.



### **Things To Do...Before You Die September 2004**

Staffers at MSN put together lists of things to do and place to go - a top ten for 39 different cities. Then they created a TOP ten. You can read this ten (and get links to the 39 other lists) at:

<http://local.msn.com/special/beforeyoudie.asp>.

Most people love lists, and so do I. As I read this list, I kept track. I've done 6 of 10; a couple more are on my list, and a couple I haven't heard of (until now).

What is your score?

“New experiences  
give our brains  
more connections  
we can use when  
trying to solve  
problems.”

More importantly than your score is that you have lists of places you want to visit and things you want to do.

If you write down these lists, the chances of you doing them goes way up. (If you don't want to call it goal setting, don't. But it is!)

Beyond goal setting though, there is another good reason to think about and then experience these places/events -- these experiences can help you exercise your creativity. New experiences give our brains more connections we can use when trying to solve problems. They help us be more curious and new experiences keep our minds active. All of these things can spur our creativity.

Make your list... check it twice. And make plans to get one of your items checked off before the end of the year you will benefit in many ways!



### **The Meaning of the Word October 2004**

It is my experience, and I suspect it is true for most everyone else too, that certain words bring a whole cloud of emotions and connections and meanings to my head. In other words, when I hear certain words, it isn't like my brain just processes a Webster definition for me.

Such is the case for me with this word:

Heretic.

I feel and sense religious zealots with opinions far outside of the norm. Beyond that I get a bit of a sense of danger in association with this word.

Contrast that with the definition that arrived in my inbox yesterday morning from [Wordsmith.org](http://Wordsmith.org):

heretic (HER-i-tik) noun. One who holds unorthodox or unconventional beliefs.

“New words give us new thoughts – nuances and new ways to describe and think about things.”

adjective. Not conforming to established beliefs.

[From Middle English heretik, from Middle French heretique, from Late Latin haereticus, from Greek hairetikos (able to choose), from haireisthai (to choose).]

I clearly value "one who holds an unorthodox or unconventional beliefs." Without these people we would never make progress, improve things or challenge the way we've always done things.

The more I thought about it, the more I want to be seen as a heretic!

Yes, there are definitions of the word that contain a religious connection, and I am sure this is about the only connection I've ever made in the past.

Is everyone who challenges conventional wisdom right? Of course not.

Are some of those people dangerous if they act on their nonconventional beliefs? Certainly, though it is rare (think many terrorist groups or their founders).

What struck me most is that a word I've shunned mentally in the past is a word and has a meaning that can contribute to positively to my worldview and thoughts.

I share this experience for two reasons.

1. What I experienced as I learned new meanings for this word explains one reason why we should all work to build our vocabulary. New words give us new thoughts - nuances and new ways to describe and think about things. This is very powerful in communication for sure, but equally helpful to our thinking.

2. I wanted to share the insight with you! Want to be more creative or come up with a host of new solutions to a vexing problem? Be a heretic. Lose the preconceived notions and choose to think in new ways!



## The Average American Reader November 2004

Last Monday's Wall Street Journal had the annual Top 10 Trends in Ten Industries Report. Publishing was one of the industries listed. At the start of the article they showed the downward trend in books shipped each year since 1999. The trend is down, which in itself, being an avid reader makes me sad.

“If you want to advance in any area of your life make reading a part of your daily routine.”

This simple bar graph shows that the estimated number of books published (this doesn't mean sold because not all books that are printed get sold.) this year will be something more than 750 million - I'll use 800 million as my number of published books for the year.

After reading this I went to the U.S. Census site to see if I could determine how many people there are of reading age in the U.S. As of 5:09 EST on Nov 26 there were 294,842,504 people in the U.S. (an estimate of course). With some digging I got the rough breakdown of our population by age group. By assuming none of the 4 year olds were reading, one third of the 5-19 year olds weren't reading anything significant, and that 20% of the 65-84 year olds aren't in the reading population (and none of those over 85), I came up with 244,000,000 readers in the U.S.

Before I go any further, I know you could argue with my assumptions... and that is fine... stay with me.

244 million readers, 800 million books published this year. That is roughly 3.25 books published per reading American per year. Of course some of the books published aren't sold, and many sold aren't read, but let's use this 3.25 number for comparison.

Are you reading your average?

If not, why not?

If you want to advance in any part of your life, make reading a part of your daily routine. If you were to read one

“All of us as  
Customers want to  
be treated as  
though it is just  
you and me.”

book per month in an area of interest or professional growth, you would be reading at 400% of the average person (actually since you would be focusing your reading in a specific area it would be more like 1000% above average).

You could make that book a month goal by reading 30 minutes a day.

What would it be worth to you to be advancing 400-1000% faster than the average person? Is that worth 30 minutes per day?



### **It's Just You and Me December 2004**

I was at Best Buy last night and the lines were long - much longer than I expected. As I stood in the serpentine line I was near register 9 and overheard Allison with a flustered Customer. She said, "Take your time. Don't worry about those other people in the line. Right now, it is just you and me."

I secretly hoped that when I got to the front of the line I would be directed to register 9.

I got my wish.

I told Allison that I had overheard her conversation and I applauded her. After getting over her shock at getting this kind of feedback from a Customer, she said, "She couldn't find her card in her purse and she seemed to be stressed out so I tried to calm her down."

Best Buy is fortunate to have Allison at register 9.

And I was fortunate to witness this truth in action: All of us as Customers want it to be treated as if, "It's just you and me."

Thanks Allison.

**The Present  
January 2005**

“Only when your consciousness is totally focused on the moment you are in can you receive whatever gift, lesson, or delight that moment has to offer.”

Yesterday I had a conversation about trying to be more present in the things that I do - that I am trying to be more focused on the current task in the current moment. This is something I know is important, and while in some situations I think I am very good at it, in others I've been trying to get better.

Then, last night, as I was exercising, my 12 year old son Parker came in and said, "You know Dad, the past and the future is only in our mind. Only this moment is real." I agreed with him and smiled, realizing that this was like a profound riddle, and didn't think any more about it, until this morning when I was writing Powerquotes Plus.

The quotation I selected was:

"Only when your consciousness is totally focused on the moment you are in can you receive whatever gift, lesson, or delight that moment has to offer."

-- Barbara De Angelis, author

As I wrote the associated Questions to Ponder and Action Steps, I couldn't help thinking how truly profound Parker's comment was.

Which shouldn't be surprising - after all I just got back from his Honors Breakfast.

Congrats to Parker.

And to all of you, I encourage you to be present today.

## Applause, Applause, Applause February 2005

“How might our country benefit from extra hours of good parenting, extra hours of volunteer work, extra hours of productive work done, or extra hours of personal development time?”

Since I talked about tradition yesterday, I have another thought about it today.

I watched the President's State of the Union Address last night (no this isn't a political commentary you can find plenty of those elsewhere). At the end, one of the first things Brian Williams of NBC said was, "The speech went 54 minutes and was interrupted by applause 66 times."

66 times!

Now, I know this clapping is tradition, and there were clearly sometimes I understood why half or the entire chamber chose to applaud. But 66 times?

According to my research the four major networks had 15 shares for the speech. Add the cable outlets to this and you have upwards of 20% of the televisions watching the President. (Granted my numbers may get off as I go through this analysis - I couldn't find the numbers on what the ratings points equate to, but bear with my logic...)

This rough research leads me to estimate that 20% of the televisions were tuned to the President - 60 million televisions. If the applause breaks had been cut in half, I estimate the total time of the speech would have been reduced by at least 5 minutes. So, that means 60 million x 5 minutes = 5 million hours of us collectively watching extra applause.

Let's assume my numbers are way off, some people were watching while doing their jobs, or were otherwise engaged, so let's halve it - 2.5 million hours of people watching applause when they might have otherwise been doing something else more productive. How might our country benefit from:

- an extra 2.5 million hours of good parenting?
- an extra 2.5 million hours of volunteer work?
- an extra 2.5 million hours of productive work done (what is the economic impact of that?)
- an extra 2.5 million hours of personal development time (how does that translate into economic development?)

“As adults, just like when we were kids, we need to divert our attention, blow off some steam and exercise a bit.”

Economists smarter than I could dollarize this time, and I know all of this is hypothetical. Thinking about it though, prompted me to wonder if our elected officials accomplished anything yesterday that could have the impact on the nation than the opportunity cost of 2.5 million hours of American time spent doing something productive. And all they would have had to do was clap less.

Important p.s. I believe more people should watch these events. I am proud to live in a country where we have traditions such as the State of the Union address, required by our Constitution. Please don't take my pondering as a comment about the process or the speech.

My thoughts are meant to spur your thoughts as they did mine, which is one of the reasons I write this blog to start with.



### **Blowing Off Steam March 2005**

While we didn't get much snow here, much of the Eastern U.S. is blanketed with the results of a late winter snowstorm. Which got me thinking about snow storms when I was a kid.

No school...  
Playing all day...  
and by late in the afternoon...

Mom wanting us to get out of the house!

While I'm sure part of the reason she wanted us outdoors is to give herself a break, she also knew that after having been "cooped up all day" we needed some fresh air and a way to run off some of our energy.

I'm guessing everyone reading this is nodding their heads...whether they grew up around snow or not. We all know that kids need to get up, get out of the house and run off some energy.

Guess what?

“...I believe that if we would get up from our desks more, get out of our routine and DO something, we will return to work more refreshed, more creative and more able to be productive.”

That same advice pertains to us as adults too. Some companies have game rooms for people to go during the day to "blow off a little steam" and get refocused. Other companies encourage people to do active things at lunch, providing volleyball or basketball courts, etc. (I even played in a croquet league at lunch years ago - it was great!)

All of this isn't frivolous. As adults, just like when we were kids, we need to divert our attention, blow off some steam and exercise a bit. Doing these things will make us more productive than sitting at our desk through EVERY lunch, plowing away at email or preparing for our next meeting.

Many of us don't do anything physical in our work like our grandparents (or parents) did. We work with our minds and so I believe that if we would get up from our desks more, get out of our routine and *DO* something, we will return to our work more refreshed, more creative and more able to be productive.

If you are a leader - do this yourself and make it "OK" for those you lead to do this sort of thing. (Nothing will stop it faster than you questioning what they are doing.)

If you are a part of a team, talk about ways the team can blow off steam, and/or set expectations that make these actions understood by everyone.

If you are a trainer, recognize that not all of your participants are used to sitting in your classroom all day, and so plan for more activity as a part of your learning process.

## About Kevin Eikenberry

Kevin Eikenberry is a speaker, trainer, consultant, author, entrepreneur and Chief Potential Officer of The Kevin Eikenberry Group.

**The Kevin Eikenberry Group** is a learning consulting company that provides a wide range of services, including training delivery and design, facilitation, performance coaching, organizational consulting, and speaking services. They have worked with Fortune 500 companies, smaller firms, universities, government agencies and more. His client list include: various Chevron companies, John Deere, Purdue University, the Red Cross, Southwest Airlines, the U.S. Marine Corp, and the U.S. Mint.

Kevin has spent the last 11 years helping organizations all across North America reach their potential. His specialties include: teams and teamwork, creativity, developing organizational and individual potential, leadership and mentoring, facilitation, training trainers, presentation skills, consulting and the consulting process and more. Kevin's students and clients consistently rave about his effectiveness, many calling him "the best trainer I've ever experienced."

Kevin is a contributing author to the best-selling book, "Walking with the Wise" and publishes four ezines, read by over 90,000 people worldwide. His goal is to reach organizations and individuals who believe in the power of action – organizations and individuals who are passionate about succeeding at their highest level.

If Kevin can help you or your organization in any way, call him at 317.387.1424 / 888.LEARNER (toll free in the U.S.) or email [Kevin@KevinEikenberry.com](mailto:Kevin@KevinEikenberry.com).



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