



Blue Collar University®

It's Not The Color of the Collar – It's What's Above the Collar That Counts!

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Everyone Has a Story – The Question Is...

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Image by the author.

Everyone Has a Story – The Question Is...

Imagine you are standing in the emergency room of your local trauma center and you're watching a man on a gurney.

This man is overweight and under-dressed. Not under-dressed as in low class. Under-dressed because he's wearing what they call a one-size-fits-all gown. It doesn't. He's exposed and he's feeling it.

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sounds of the emergency room in a trauma hospital are not very comforting, even to you.

It's a world you are somewhat familiar with because of television, but unless you have ever been a patient in an ER, you can't fully grasp the overwhelming emotions.

The beeps and blips of monitors, the hiss of oxygen, the muted shuffle of bootied feet, that damned melodic, robotic voice saying in hushed tones, "Code Blue. Code Blue." And you say to the man, "Could that be for you?"

The calm demeanor of nurses and doctors bely the fact that his future, his life, may well be in their hands. Just being in an ER raises your adrenaline level, which increases your heart rate, which adds to the anxiety. None of which help if you've ever had a heart attack, right?

I was 38 years old when I ended up in the ER, not as a witness to the happenings, but as a patient with a suspected heart attack. I was way too young. I mean, heart attacks happen to old farts, don't they? Like, in their 40's and 50's?

The doctor smiled as he came in. He looked at my chart and asked, "What brings you in here today?" *Did he not read my chart?*

I said, "The advice nurse thought I might have had a heart attack."

He said, "Let's get some background. Tell me your story." He asked me about my symptoms. I shrugged and answered, "Just some back pain. The advice nurse said I had to get in here right away."

He asked me about my lifestyle.

As an operations manager for a specialty refinery repair and service company, working 10-hour days was a treat, and 12-hour days normal. I had personally worked on engineering designs for 36 hours without sleep or a proper meal. 'Proper' meaning a hot hamburger and fries, or a super-burrito, fast food for sure.

The effects of working eighteen-hour days, drinking a pot of coffee every morning, two liters of soda every afternoon, and smoking two packs of cigarettes every day had taken their toll.

"Do you exercise?"

"A little."

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· little."

The doctor said, “Good news – no heart attack. But this is a massive wake-up call. You need to make a change or the next time your story may not end so well.”

Then I had an epiphany and hoped surgery wouldn’t be required. I got the bright idea to quit it all; the smoking, coffee, sodas, fast food, all of it, and all at once. BAM! Cold turkey!

Which lasted one day.

The next morning my boss and crew were gathered in my office waiting for me. On my desk were a hot cup of coffee, a pack of cigarettes and a lighter, a clean ashtray, and a copy of Dale Carnegie’s book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. My boss looked at me, shook his head, said, “No more Mr. Bad Guy – learn to deal with people.” and then they all walked out.

I know a hint when I’m hit over the head with it. I was in trouble, not because of my technical skills, not because of my work ethic, not because of my production or missing my numbers. Those were all fine.

I wasn’t in trouble because I was good at managing schedules, working with data, and handling logistics. I wasn’t in trouble because I was a great troubleshooter and problem-solver.

I was in trouble because I didn’t know how to deal with people. I was failing because I didn’t understand what it takes to be a good manager or leader.

I didn’t understand that managers *are* leaders.

And it felt like I was the only manager that ever sucked at their job. For a long time, this was my story and I wasn’t proud of it. ***I knew I had to take action and change my story.***

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Photo by [Ann H](#) from Pexels.

Fast forward to 2006. I was sitting in my office one morning working on a draft of the workbook that would eventually become Blue Collar University®. I was designing it to help blue-collar workers become world-class leaders. The phone rang.

A panicked voice said, “I think my boss is going to fire me. Can you help me?” That panicked voice belonged to a young man by the name of Michael.

I said, “Michael, I need some history here. Tell me your story.”

Michael’s life hadn’t been the greatest. His parents weren’t the best role models. He’d had two failed marriages and a child from each, and had finally cleared his name from some serious encounters with the law. And he was just about to clean up years of debt and bad credit.

He was now married to the love of his life, with a third child, a daughter, to care for. He was still financially underwater, but working his way through the debt. His dream was much like most of us – own a house free and clear, take his wife on vacations, and give his children a head start in life. He wanted his family to have a better life than he had.

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ver given up trying to better himself. He had worked his way up from laborer to apprentice to
efitter.

He was then promoted to manager because he was good at his job, technically.

I finally asked him, “Michael, how do you know you’re about to be fired?”

He said, “I have been the manager of my department for over a year now and just received my first evaluation. This is what it says: “Michael has met none of the criteria for being a manager in this company. He has ninety days to get his act together.”

I said, “That’s it? Nothing else?”

“Nothing else.”

“Well Michael, what are the criteria for being a manager at your company?”

“I don’t know the criteria!” he answered. “I don’t know what the goal is and I sure don’t know how to get there.”

I asked him, “What do you most want from this job?”

He said, “Respect. Respect for a job well done.”

“What does respect look like to you?” I probed.

“I want my boss’s boss to come to my office and tell me I am doing a great job.”

That was Michael’s’ story back then.

Michael has changed his story. With coaching, mentoring, self-discipline, and constantly learning, he now runs a region that spans one-fourth of the state of California. And he mentors other managers that aren’t even in his region.

Everyone has a story. I have a story, Michael has a story, and you have a story. When people talk about their boss they tell stories about them. So, if you are in a leadership position, people are talking about you. They’re telling stories about you.

Single , are they telling a story you want your family and friends to hear?

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How would you feel if your spouse, parents, or children heard your story? Would they be proud of you? Are you proud of your story? If not, why not?

If your story isn't one that you want to be repeated, you can do something about it.

Here are three questions you can answer to change your story:

1. What is your story – take five minutes and write out a paragraph, phrases, or words that people would use to talk about *how you deal with people*.
2. What do you need to do to change your story?
3. What are you willing to do to change your story?

You can't change your history.

You CAN change your future.

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