

The Little Red Book of Wisdom

By Mark DeMoss

Part One: Wisdom for Your Professional Life

1. A Matter of Death and Life

- What is it about human nature that we so blithely presume we will have seventy or eighty years of health and life? The Creator guarantees not another breath.
- I'm never so lost in living that I don't hear the clock tick or have an eye on the calendar – not in a paranoid sense, but with a sense of purpose.
- We are all wise to invest life's most precious commodity for the greatest return. When I die, whenever that moment comes, I hope my passing will echo the psalmist's saying, "Teach me to number my days, that I may present to You a heart of wisdom."

2. Stay Under the Umbrella

- Or in other words, know your calling and purpose. Don't let anything sidetrack you.
- I call it focus – that internal compass that keeps a person on track with his gifts, his purpose, his goals. If you own a business, stick to what you know and do it better than anyone else.
- Start by examining your passions, by asking what makes your heart leap. Write a brief mission statement, then begin a day at a time, a decision at a time, to forgo the good for the great.
- Set your focus and stay with it. Focus is the discipline to say no to anything off-mission – and that is true freedom. Find your umbrella and stay under it.

3. Tackle Something So Difficult You'll Never Want to Do It Again

- "You must do the thing you think you cannot do." Eleanor Roosevelt
- "Do what you fear most and you control fear." Jim Lorentzen
- By forcing yourself out of your comfort zone, you learn invaluable life lessons you wouldn't learn elsewhere.

4. The Amazing Power of Understatement

- "Under-promise, over-deliver," should be your motto. I have yet to see a company fail that promises less and delivers more. On the other hand, I have countless examples that prove bold predictions can snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory.

- After years of brushing up against all kinds of people in the public eye, I've learned that great leaders are first of all great servants – and that great service is modest, understated, in speech and action.
- Understatement is self-restraint, and self-restraint is hardly a sign of weakness. On the contrary, wisely used, few things carry more power.

5. Work Less, Think More

- The corporate world is naturally tilted toward furious doers rather than great thinkers. Everyone, it seems, is busy designing, writing, building, producing, implementing – unfortunately, too much of it is divorced from good thinking.
- Henry Ford called thinking, “the hardest work there is, which is probably why so few engage in it.”
- Where are the thinkers? They're bottlenecked behind two big challenges:
 - The lack of time and quiet that good thinking requires. Good thinking isn't one more task of a multitasker; it needs its own time.
 - Too few people and organizations value or demand it. Most people are busy doing what they've always done.
- Michelangelo stared at a marble block for three months. He would leave at the end of the workday and return the following morning, repeating the routine to the great puzzlement of onlookers. “What are you doing?” someone asked. “I'm working,” the master sculptor replied.

6. Buy Some Stamps

- For whatever reason, people no longer reach out and touch through thoughtful, lasting, handwritten words on paper.
- Two-thirds of all people surveyed do not expect to receive personal mail, but when they do, it makes their day.
- Words matter, and the words we take time to commit to paper matter even more – and occasions to write them abound.
- Now I could have said these same things in e-mail. But would it have meant as much?

7. Technology Isn't Everything

- The issue is not, technology vs. no technology, but how to use it wisely and well. As a guideline, I suggest that we, and not the technology, make the rules.
 - I will decide when I read your e-mail and answer it. You can waste the entire workday answering e-mails and get none of your intended work completed.

- I will not interrupt an in-person conversation when my telephone rings. Rather, I will continue my conversation and when it's done then I'll return the telephone call.
- I will determine when and where I will use technology and otherwise ignore it.
- I am determined to be where I am – in the room and in the present – not focused on my Treo replying to another cybermeeting via a text message.
- “The art of being wise,” wrote nineteenth century philosopher William James, “is the art of knowing what to overlook.”

8. Honesty Can Be Costly

- We built our practice by telling clients what they *need* to hear – the truth – not necessarily what they *want* to hear.
- When the gap between wishes and truth is severe, a public relations firm has three options:
 - Charge for what might happen and start the clock.
 - Counsel the client to change so that it moves closer to its goals.
 - Tell the client that no firm can get you what you want, at which point you decline the work or the client declines you.
- Over the years, our honesty has cost us a lot of lost business.
- I've never regretted not telling people what they want to hear. Even when it comes at a high cost, honesty is always a bargain.

9. Good People Are Everything; Money Isn't

- In business, how you treat your employees is more important than what you do with your clients, your schedules, your company planning, etc.
- Without good people – I have no firm. Early on I resolved to attract first-rate employees and keep them as long as possible.
- Four motivators for hiring and keeping good people:
 - **Mission** – The DeMoss Group is more than a job description with a dollar sign; it's a mission to do something that matters.
 - **Good Leader** – I've learned people have an easier time serving a leader who is wholeheartedly serving them.
 - **Corporate Culture** – the unwritten code of the work environment that either forces employees to protect their turf or frees them to help the entire group gain new ground.
 - **Compensation/Benefits** – salary, health insurance, retirement plans, and other perks.

- A leader does well to think less about being great and brilliant than being good and appreciative.
- Good people aren't just the main thing around here, they are *everything*.

10. *Everyone's In PR*

- Even without speaking, every person is a mouthpiece, a critic, a supporter, an endorsement, a testament for or against something.
- In the many roles we play each day, if we wish to be wise, we can increasingly be conscious of our off-hand potential to damage or bless. We should think twice, no, three times, before being openly critical or rude, or angry.
- In going about the work God has given us, we must treat every person well, regardless of station or potential benefit to us. Let us stay keenly aware of the endless ripple of just being ourselves. For good and bad, we're all in PR.

11. *Four Powerful Phrases*

- **"In My Opinion . . ."** – Those three words signal strength – for what I'm about to say, I take full responsibility. The more certain I am about something, the more likely I am to preface or conclude my words with "in my opinion."
- **"What Do You Think?"** One proverb says, "Where there is no counsel, the people fail; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety. The best counsel givers, are counsel seekers.
- **"Let Me Ask You a Question."** Someone put it this way: knowledge has right answers; wisdom has right questions. Used wisely, a question is your passage to new information, more time to think, and the regard of the people you're talking to.
- **"I Don't Know."** Admitting that you don't know the answer is better than being someone who has a know-it-all attitude. In an atmosphere of humility, people are more likely to collaborate, think out loud and work for a better solution than one could have developed all alone.

Part II – Wisdom for Your Personal Life

12. *God Owns It All*

- Ownership of our possessions is at best temporary. To the degree that we know and accept that, life holds considerably less surprise or stress. To the degree that we cannot accept it, our possessions own us.

- Awareness of God's ownership opens my hands, loosening my grip on stuff. The standard, "How much should I give?" gives way to "How much should I *keep*?"

13. The Wisdom of Firsts

- **The First Hour of the Day** – every morning spend time with God in prayer, listening to God and Bible reading.
- **The First Day of the Week** – practice giving back to God the first day of every week. Keep the Sabbath day holy.
- **The First Dime of Every Dollar** – Tithe.

14. A Turtle on a Fencepost

- Whenever you see a turtle on fencepost, you know he didn't get there by himself.
- Whenever you see a successful athlete, pastor, businessman, etc. you can be assured that they didn't gain their status by themselves. There was a supporting cast of people around them that helped them succeed in life.

15. There Are No Degrees of Integrity

- Webster's **definition of integrity**: "Strict adherence to a standard of value or conduct. Personal honesty and independence."
- There is no such thing as having a lot of integrity. Once we compromise ourselves, forgiveness is available, but something important is lost.
- In his book, *Integrity Is All You've Got*, Karl Eller says that in the ups and downs of his career, he has seen one constant: "the pivotal role of integrity in people's lives. Those who have it usually succeed; those who don't have it usually fail."
- Integrity is not what we do when it serves us. It is who we are in the dark and how we treat people who we cannot benefit from.

16. A Proverb A Day

- In my estimation, of the Bible's sixty-six books, Proverbs is the most provocative. Proverb is a Hebrew word meaning "to rule or to govern."
- This compilation of thirty-one chapters outstrips human understanding with insights into sex, anger management, slander, wealth, welfare, business ethics, intoxication, pride, etc. as relevant as tomorrow's blogs.
- I recommend that you undertake the brief discipline of reading one chapter of Proverbs each day.

17. The Wisdom of Age

- I've learned much from age, other people's age – about character, servanthood, the value of reading the entire Bible, people are what really matter, thinking big and overcoming adversity to name just a few.

- Our culture's broken compass is fixed on youth; when it's good direction you need, look up someone well down the right road.

18. *Shut Up and Listen*

- It's safe to say, that I have never learned a single thing while I was talking. My willingness to close my mouth and open my ears, on the other hand, has granted me free admission to a great education. "Let the wise listen," King Solomon said, "and add to their learning."
- Good listening is an act of the will and an exercise of the intellect. To dominate a meeting or conversation is not power; informed, good judgment is power.
- Another proverb says, "He who answers before listening – that is his folly and shame." The advice to shut up and listen contradicts the human desire to be noticed or known. To believe every moment requires my input is shortsighted and ultimately sad.

19. *The Best Defense . . . Is a Good Defense*

- One should go overboard to protect one's reputation, marriage, family, and work.
- While it may seem outdated, I submit a married person is wise never to be alone with a member of the opposite sex. This includes:
 - Riding in a car alone together
 - Having lunches or dinners alone together
 - Being in a room alone behind closed doors
- Having seen too many reputations destroyed, I offer this one simple observation: It is impossible to be physically involved with someone whom we are never alone.

20. *Anticipate Deathbed Regrets*

- Ultimately, we are what we do every day. What defines us is not one large intention to be a good person, or parent – it's a hundred thousand ongoing choices of every size that confront us each day.
- We must learn to live deliberately. To consciously make decisions to focus on our families over our profession. The American work schedule is not outright anti-family but we often work as if our spouses and children are what we do on those few occasions when professional pursuits subside.

21. *Here's To Not Drinking At All*

- Forgetting for a moment all morality, religion, judgment, and focusing solely on *wisdom*, I believe a case exists for not drinking at all. A few supporting numbers:
 - In the past year 33 million people drove their cars under the influence of alcohol.

- Alcohol related accidents kill more teens than anything else.
- Between 25 and 40 percent of all patients (excluding maternity or intensive care) are there for alcohol-related problems.
- Alcohol kills more people than all illegal drugs combined.
- Given our genetic predisposition, a first drink for some is like gambling with one's physiology. Since every known case of alcohol abuse begins with the first drink, what on earth is the potential upside of alcohol?

22. *Four More Simple Principles . . .*

- **The People You Meet, the Books You Read** – Charles "Tremendous" Jones is quoted as saying: "You will be the same person in five years as you are today except for the people you meet and the books you read."
- **After Midnight** – what we do after midnight generally accomplishes little good and often causes great harm.
- **I'm Sorry** – Deep hurts and potential disasters dissolve in the sunlight of those two words. I've also seen the person apologizing add, "if I offended you" and recharge the thunderclouds. An apology is not about the other person's feelings; it's fully about the speaker's actions. The best close to "I'm sorry" is "Please forgive me."
- **Don't Worry** – When I finally learned to relinquish personal responsibility for everything beyond my control, the ship of my emotions entered calm waters. All manner of concerns, even crises, shrank to manageable size along with my stress level.

23. *The Wisest Decision Anyone Can Make*

- This book is about wisdom. Wouldn't it be wise to take the steps now so that when you come to the end of your life, you *know* what comes next?
- The wisest decision anyone can make, ever, is to seal his or her eternal destiny: time forever with God.
- The decision is whether or not to hand over your life to God, through His Son, Jesus Christ. I am not talking about joining a church, getting baptized, obeying the Ten Commandments, or even living a good life.
- What I'm leading to is a real, personal relationship with the God who made you and loves you unconditionally.
- The Bible makes it clear that we cannot earn our way to heaven, for eternal life is not a reward for anything we have done; it is a free gift. As with any gift, we must accept it in order for it to be ours.
- Have you accepted that gift? The act of choosing God is as close as a prayer. Ask for his forgiveness, tell him you want to follow him and thank him for his wonderful gift of eternal life through his Son, Jesus Christ.