

A Parable about Performance Improvement



Once upon a time there lived a man named Clarence who had a pet frog named Felix. Clarence lived a modestly comfortable existence on what he earned at Wal-Mart, but he always dreamed of being wealthy.

"Felix!" he exclaimed one day. "We're going to be rich! I'm going to teach you how to fly!"

Felix, of course, was terrified at the prospect. "I can't fly. I'm a frog, not a canary!"

Clarence, disappointed at Felix's reaction, told him: "Your negative attitude could be a problem. I'm sending you to class."

So Felix went to a three-day seminar and learned about problem solving, time management, and effective communication—but nothing about flying.

On the first day of "flying lessons," Clarence explained to Felix that their apartment had 15 floors and each day Felix would jump out of a window starting with the first floor eventually getting to the top floor.

After each jump, Felix would analyze how well he flew, identify the most effective flying techniques, and implement the improved process for the next flight. By the time they reached the top floor, Felix would know how to fly.

Felix pleaded for his life, but his pleas fell on deaf ears.

Felix doesn't understand how important this is, thought Clarence, but he was determined not to be defeated by a negative attitude. So he opened the window and threw Felix out—he landed with a thud.

On the second day, Felix again begged not to be thrown out the window. But Clarence opened his *Pocket Guide to Managing More Effectively* and showed Felix the part about how one must always expect resistance when implementing new programs.

Out went Felix from the second floor and he hit the ground in an even more painful landing.

On the third day, Felix tried a ploy. He asked for a delay in the project until the weather was more favorable for flying. But Clarence pulled out a timeline, pointed to the third milestone, and asked: "You don't want the schedule to slip, do you?"

Felix knew that if he didn't jump today he would have to jump twice tomorrow so he jumped from the third floor.

On it went to higher and higher floors, and Felix tried his best.

By the seventh day, Felix no longer begged for mercy "You know you're killing me, don't you?" he said.

Clarence replied that Felix's performance so far had been less than exemplary. He had failed to meet any of the milestones Clarence had set for him.

Felix, resigned to his fate, said: "OK, open the window." With that, he leapt out, taking care to aim for a jagged rock that was sure to put him out of his misery. He hit it perfectly and was instantly dispatched from the mortal world.

Clarence was upset. His project had failed to meet a single goal. Felix not only failed to fly, he didn't even take well to training or setting goals. And he didn't seem to understand when Clarence told him to "fall smarter, not harder."

To put a cap on the project, Clarence analyzed the process to determine where it had gone wrong. He finally concluded that he simply needed a smarter frog.

*Editorial from **Machine Design**, May 23, 1996*