

The Sandcastle Principle

By: Steven Gaffney

I was jogging back and forth on the hotel's beach one afternoon in Ixtapa, Mexico, when one of those life insights—an aha moment—hit me. Oh, what insights a vacation can bring!

As I was running, I noticed some children diligently building an enormous sandcastle with a bit of help from their parents. The children were clearly having great fun. I surmised the whole project had taken hours. Later that day, I returned to the beach to watch the sunset and I realized that the grand sandcastle was gone. No sign of it remained. The tide had washed away all the children's hard work.

The next day, I went for another run. Again I saw the same children playing in the sand. They were laughing and seemed to be having just as much fun as the day before. There was no mention that their great sandcastle was gone. No tears of sorrow that all their hard work was washed away. No complaining about how life could treat them this way. No moping around or bellyaching about how great yesterday was. Then it dawned on me how these children could teach us all something -- a very important life principle. I call it the Sandcastle Principle.

As adults, we work so hard each day, investing our time, effort, and creativity in many projects and priorities -- some of which remain and some of which get washed away. But the truth is that what lingers long after the priorities and goals are or are not achieved are the memories we have of our interactions with others. Hence the Sandcastle Principle.



Think about it. In today's work world, we are seeing that money and employment can come and go. Fortunes may be lost, businesses may be shuttered, but what will never be lost is our legacy and the impressions we leave with others.

I'm sure if you thought about it, you could tell me who your best teacher, boss, or mentor was. I am sure you might even be able to tell me who saw things in you that you did not even see in yourself; or you could name someone who gave you a break when no one else would.

For that reason, I have two questions for you: Who are you building sandcastles with? What memories are you creating and what impressions are you leaving behind?

The Shocking Reality

Unfortunately, if we look at our lives and the way we spend our time, most of us would discover that we spend too much of our time with people who waste our time. These people come in many forms. Some are self-righteous and not open to accepting other points of view. Some are pessimists, some are complainers, and some are bellyachers. Some are the people who love to point out why something can't be done but don't offer any solutions of what *could* be done. Some are the ones who ask us for advice but don't use it. All are Time Wasters.

It is easy to fall prey to these Time Wasters, especially when we enjoy helping people and want to make a difference. But in the end it is always a frustrating and draining experience.

Oddly enough, we often expend a lot of effort on Time Wasters, even to the detriment of the time we spend with people who really nurture, replenish, and enhance our lives—the Life Enhancers. In fact, we often are willing to make withdrawals from the bank of time that we spend with these Life Enhancers and deposit it in the Time Wasters.

To make matters worse, the Time Wasters may leave us so emotionally exhausted that we have less to give of ourselves—less patience, less guidance, less support, and less happiness – to our Life Enhancers. Our exhaustion and frustration with our Time Wasters may even lead us to be short-tempered or rude to our friends and loved ones. It's a trap most of us have fallen into at one time or another.

What an interesting reward system! We reward our time to those who don't deserve it and take away our time from the people who are worth it. What a shocking reality!

The Great Switch Multiplier

What if we reversed this tendency and took time from the Time Wasters and invested it in the Life Enhancers?



What if we invested that time by focusing on mentoring, coaching, and advising people who want and will

do something with our wisdom, advice, and counsel? Besides feeling more gratified and satisfied, we would probably produce more results. Why? Because as the most effective leaders and managers know, if we invest in the Life Enhancers, they will pay it forward. What we give to them is multiplied because as they grow, they reach out and invest in the lives of other Life

Enhancers. An investment in a Life Enhancer is like dropping a pebble in a pond -- the ripple expands ever outward. I call this the Great Switch Multiplier.

I consult with numerous organizations, and everywhere I go, effective employees tell me they wish they had more face time with their boss and members of upper management. What is even more striking is how often leaders allow their time to get swallowed up by the Time Wasters. If they would only refocus their time on the Life Enhancers -- those who would appreciate and make use of more guidance, coaching, and mentoring -- the impact to the organization would be profound.

The Most Important Investment

In these economic times, when investments in the financial markets seem risky and uncertain, there are some surefire investments we can make. We can invest in the Life Enhancers. These are the people you want to build your sandcastles with.

Some things may be lost during this economic downturn, but much of that can be regained. Time, however, is not one of those commodities. Once it's gone, it's gone. So invest your time wisely.



Here are **four immediate actions** you can take for profound, long-term impact:

1. Distance yourself from the Time Wasters.
2. Share this article with your Life Enhancers.
3. Thank them for all that they have contributed to you and to your organization.
4. Let them know that this year they will be your priority.

This is how you can multiply your effect and make a difference in the quality of your life and the lives of others. Implement the Sandcastle Principle and reward your time to the people who are worth your time. Then watch the results multiply in the lives of the people around you.

Steven Gaffney is a leading expert on honest, interpersonal communication, influence and leadership. He is one of the recognized authorities on the subject of honesty. He is also the author of two ground-breaking books, *Just Be Honest: Authentic Communication Strategies that Get Results and Last a Lifetime* and *Honesty Works! Real-World Solutions to Common Problems at Work and Home*.

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Deatra@StevenGaffney.com