

# The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 0: **Author's Preface**

## *Lost*

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 0.2

*By Tom Brown*

*To Rita (editor-in-chief) and Nora —  
you two always kept the home fire burning*



Since the start of this e-book in February, 1997 (and through the “millennium edition” of 2002) , two people were instrumental in bringing this project to life. **Dave Pierson**, MG’s Webmaster, was the first person to urge me to start writing on the Internet; he has also been a “coach” on every technical aspect of Webbing. Perhaps someday he will award me “the third pebble.” About **Mac Thornton** enough praise cannot be spoken. This talented man joined the project before the first e-words were posted. As I survey all that he has done to add to the depth and character of the e-book, I remain in awe of his creative capacity. Mac, you have now proven that you are much more than an illustrator. You *are* a cyber-artist!

**John Willig** was always — always — there when the project seemed to be sagging. His optimism, buoyancy, confidence, and overall guidance have been immeasurably important. It should always be noted that John joined the project without even seeing one word or one graphic; such confidence in the potential of this e-book, I hope, has not been betrayed.

**Duane Murner**, you were the only one who critiqued, without fail, each and every chaplet. You are proof that one can read this entire e-book and still survive. More than that, you are proof that some friendships know no bounds. Your critiques sometimes stung, but they were always helpful. You were my reader-in-chief!

**Ted and Donna Kinni**, when I sat in your living room in 1996 and said “e-book,” you

didn’t laugh — and since its start, you have given solid, helpful advice. **Kyle Pierson**, you gave me the longest and deepest analyses of key chaplets; I believe you saw more in my poems than I did! Likewise, **Beverly Goldberg** (a noted author in her own right), stayed up very late lots of nights to offer critiques that made me consider all future chaplets in a new light. **Debra Steele-Johnson**, your deep knowledge of leadership scholarship provided insights I could never have uncovered in any library; someday I want to take your course! **Larry Brotzge**, you saved your comments for telephone or personal visits, but your responses reassured me many times. **Rich McLaughlin**, you graced the early chaplets with perspectives I really needed. And **Steve Ruffing**, do you still think it’s like *Motorcycle Maintenance*?

And how do I thank all the other published authors, people who have their own writing obligations, yet who made time for my humble experiment in publishing? **Jim Collins, Alan Downs, Cliff Hakim, Debbe Kennedy, Bernie Nagle, Perry Pascarella, Robert Penman, Jerry Pepper, Dick Richards, Wess Roberts, Jane Seiling, Eileen Shapiro** — I am not only indebted to you; I stand in your shadows.

Lastly, to **my many Internet readers** — people I’ve never met or talked to, around the world — who logged on and asked to be alerted to all future chaplets. You gave me your time. Is anything today more precious, save human life? You joined the journey, and believe me, because of that, I never felt alone. — **Tom Brown**

**A**t the time, I was working my way through college as a catch-all reporter in a bureau of *The St. Petersburg Times* in Florida, where I had lived since I was seven.

At the time, I was driving 30 miles home. It was Sunday, almost 9:30PM. An emergency radio scanner in the car, standard equipment, allowed me to overhear transmissions by police, fire, and other agencies; all was silent.

At the time, I was right by the small, mid-county airport. The scanner channels lit rapidly with one grim message after another: “Plane down! Plane down! Crash landing! Survivors? Unknown. Dispatch ambulance.” Someone queried, “Ambulance? How many?” I shook as I heard: “Lots! Just keep sending them. Send ambulances. *Send ambulances!*”

I knew what I had to do. I was a paid journalist; though a rookie, there were relatives and others who needed to know what had happened, no matter how sad and tragic.

*There* it was: through dark night, a half mile from me, the flashing lights of sheriffs’ cars signalled the crash site. There wasn’t enough light to see any plane; to get there, I’d have to hike across swampy terrain. Without four-wheel-drive, there was no other way.

I radioed *Times*’ City Desk; unaware of the crash, the editors immediately switched to crisis mode. Regular news deadlines had passed; for any report to make tomorrow’s paper, I had to get what information I could, and file copy by radio. I started trudging through muck. I could not see where I was walking; all I could see were flashing lights — *way* ahead.

The officer at the scene expressed great surprise at my arrival. There were deputies with high-powered rifles ringing the perimeter of the crash. “What are *you* doing here? How did you *get* here?” Easy questions: “I walked. What’s with the rifles?” He replied, “They’re killing all the rattlers this crash stirred up. Those rattlers are everywhere.”

News story filed, I remained fitful — never really sleeping, thinking how close I came to joining those unfortunate crash victims. It was my first real brush with death, in many ways. In case you’re

wondering what some journalists think while writing about such terrible events, let me assure you: tears *do* form as tragedies become vivid, as lost lives become verified. The crash opened my eyes; I learned that there should be some other calling for me. Nearness to death has a way of auditing how you're spending your life.

Looking back, however, I recollect a powerful calling to be writing news *that* night. Though I became repulsed at the thought of doing such work again, I still recall the commitment, the dedication,

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## In the best tradition of career dedication, I was fueled by an inner fire.

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the drive, the insistence on getting vital information — and getting it right — which clutched me. One can argue that, over the decades, journalism has become considerably less professional. But if plane safety, airport procedures, pilot training — or any other civic need — were at jeopardy and might be revealed by this crash, it was important for someone to write about it. In the best tradition of career dedication, I was fueled by an inner fire.

Years later, I pursued a different calling with even greater fervor. “Management”

and “leadership” became part of my daily vocabulary as the director of management development for Honeywell Aerospace in Minneapolis. There, I began reading, discussing, and debating different approaches to managerial leadership. What a time! Who has *not* been affected by the radical thinking of Peter Drucker, Tom Peters and Bob Waterman, Ken Blanchard, Eileen Shapiro, John Kotter, W. Edwards Deming, Michael Hammer and James Champy, Margaret Wheatley, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, Scott Adams, Danah Zohar — and many others — all of whom have shaped the pulse and pattern of modern organizational life?

My journalistic roots were reborn when I started writing the management column for *IndustryWeek*, which I continued for 10 years. Now, having written for many other publications — from The Conference Board's *Across The Board* to Harvard's *Management Update Newsletter* to the “Manager's Journal” spot for *The Wall Street Journal* — I have had the unique privilege of interacting with hundreds of management thinkers. Moreover, I have been able to speak with thousands of on-the-job managers and executives in organizations large and small, private and public, profit and non-profit.

What's haunted me over two decades has not been my decision to leave newspapers; instead, what etched deep is the scant number of people, anywhere, who radiate such commitment, verve,

passion, and sense of calling that they, too, could be described as “on fire.” The immense and growing popularity of “Dilbert,” worldwide, is not coincidental; Dilbert’s rise is directly proportional to a dispirited and angry workplace. Sixty years after Charlie Chaplin filmed *Modern Times*, the management profession hit rock bottom, for me, when the esteemed Warren Bennis wrote in *The Los Angeles Times* (February 20, 1996) that “A demoralizing sense of powerlessness is what many jobholders are feeling.” Bennis added, “Worried workers do not engage in the kind of creative problem-solving that contemporary business requires”; and he predicted, as a consequence, “a period of social unrest unequalled in this century... [with] public expressions of rage and fear....”

*These are all effects; what are the causes?* What’s haunted me has been the parallel deterioration of respect for leaders; laments about “lack of leadership” are now pandemic. I found myself asking repeatedly, “What’s *wrong* with organizations? Can they *change* for the better? Where are *the leaders*?”

I was lost.

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*Newsweek*’s premier columnist, Robert J. Samuelson, wrote *The Good Life And Its Discontents* (Times Books, 1995). He catalogs the immense technological progress made in the United States since

World War II. Between 1945 and 1994, television moved into 97 percent of all homes. Jet travel went from a unique experience for the very-privileged in 1958 to a 400-million-passengers-a-year industry in 1995. In 1945, only 46 percent of the population had a telephone; more than 150 million enjoyed that privilege a half century later. Samuelson cites more examples: air conditioning, interstate highways, automatic washers and dryers, antibiotics, social security and private pensions, health insurance, and birth control.

Though the points of social progress represent staggering achievements, surely fueled by *some* level of personal and professional “fire,” Samuelson dismisses the value of managerial leadership as “a myth”:

The idea of management is a myth: a figment of our collective imaginations. It projects business (especially big business) as we would like to see it, not as it actually is. It converts our major corporations into vehicles for social progress, because they fulfill our individual wants for security and material well-being, while satisfying society’s need for ever greater national wealth. In popular consciousness, good management involves the realization of these obviously desirable goals.... Otherwise, it’s hard to say what management actually is and what it does. It is certainly not a precise set of skills, a body of knowledge, or a

bundle of business techniques that apply to all companies. To “manage” is to run something. Beyond that, the word does not mean much...

Management is what management does. It consists of prevailing practices, attitudes, and approaches that business leaders take toward their needs. In this sense, it is always self-serving.

These words triggered *many* fitful nights, weeks, and months. Is social progress an independent variable completely detached from the profession of managerial leadership? If Samuelson is right, what *is* a leader? Did we once have leaders — and now they’re gone? Could the avowed absence of leadership be why so many people seem to be lacking a “fire” in their personal and professional lives?

I was lost.

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Fitful on the inside, I comported myself for a long time in a business-as-usual

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**... So many people seem to be lacking a “fire” in their personal and professional lives ...**

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fashion on the outside. Back in 1995, I could not answer the challenges Samuelson had thrust at me, and I could not answer the questions his book raised. I gulped. Can it be that the world is but a few years from the dawn of a new century and is going forward — *leaderless*?

- *I could not see then* that there is something very important, very fundamental, and very real called “leadership.”
- *I could not see then* that leadership is contradistinct from “placeholdering.”
- *I could not see then* that it is taproot ideas, not technology per se, that have always ruled our planet’s development and defined its social progress: we grow via immense churn.
- *I could not see then* that all people have the capacity to “glow” at what they do, at how they’re investing their lives. When it comes to leadership potential, we are all born to glow.
- *I could not see then* that the leader’s art is in the leader’s heart.
- *I could not see then* that there are some people so dedicated to and driven by the search for new ideas that they are discoverers in

the truest sense of the word.

- *I could not see then* that discovery is but one facet of leadership: there's also enthusiasm, resourcefulness, and resolve — and a genuine commitment to making an enduring contribution.
- *I could not see then* that leadership may be alive in the boardrooms of the Fortune 500, but it might more likely be found way out West in a town of just 1,000 people, in the hearts of people who believe they have found a whole new concept for a drugstore.

I see all this, and more — now. When reading Samuelson, I had been searching for some incarnation of leadership, *the anatomy of fire*, but I was lost. Then I had the fortune to begin another personal journey; it would take me through a valley of dejection and despair and bring me to a peak of exhilarating reaffirmation.

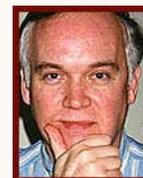


*Ideas Rising*

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On a family trip to Yellowstone, toward nightfall, as steam exploded from a white-hot geyser, I started looking *through* the vaporous cloud rising before me. Hazy and indistinct, yet growing ever stronger in shape and spirit, I saw the face of leadership peering back at me.

**To learn more about the author...**



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