



HOLLYWOOD MORALS

5 Life and Business Lessons from the Silver Screen

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Assisted in publishing by PublishMe

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Published by Kellett Solutions Group

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Introduction

This eBook is an extract from our book, *Hollywood Morals*. It is not a discussion of the morals (or lack of) of the inhabitants of Tinseltown (that's a very different, and much more scurrilous, book!) Instead, it is a light-hearted look at the various lessons we can learn from different movies and which can be applied to our lives and businesses.

A lot of movies have a 'moral', some of which echo those found in 'self help' or business books. In some cases, the moral we have chosen to discuss in this book is the basis for the movie's plot. In other cases, the moral may be less obvious or related to an aspect of film-making rather than the plot. Some of the morals we've taken from the films are likely to be the exact opposite of the makers' intention.

In this book the moral that we have gleaned from each movie is shown as an indented paragraph, with italic font.

Throughout, we have included quotes that are relevant to the points that we're making. If someone has already carefully picked their words and crafted a great phrase, why would we want to try to recreate that?

While we don't recount in full the plots of the movies featured in this book, it's quite possible that there will be some spoilers of plot points, so if you haven't watched the film in question, you may like to rent it first.

Many of the lessons in this book are discussed and expanded on during Andrew's people-skills training workshops offered through Kellett Training Solutions Limited. A list of these can be found at the back of the book.

We hope you enjoy reading this book as much as we enjoyed researching and writing it.

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The Devil Wears Prada

(2006)

In this movie, Andy Sachs (Anne Hathaway) accepts a job as second assistant to Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep), the ‘devilishly’ demanding editor of *Runway* magazine. The job was one she applied for because there were no job opportunities in her chosen field. As Andy continues in the role, she begins to change: her appearance, her priorities, who she spends her time with, how she treats people. Near the end, she realises that she’s become very similar to the woman she hated and feared.

Before you start climbing the ladder to success, make sure it’s up against the right wall.

It’s a great deal easier (and will save you a lot of time) if you consider the ultimate goal of your course of action before you get started, rather than spending a lot of time working towards something, only to discover that the end result is actually not what you had wanted.

This is a concept that Dr Stephen Covey calls “Beginning with the End in Mind” in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. He recommends imagining your 50th wedding anniversary or your funeral (which is rather macabre), and taking the opportunity to eavesdrop on what people are saying about you; or rather, deciding what you would like them to be saying. Once you’ve pictured this, you can then apply this insight to make sure that what you’re working towards is what you actually want.

Another exercise to get this kind of clarity (and to make sure that your life is balanced) is to consider the six areas of work-life balance:

1. Work
2. Family
3. Social
4. You
5. Health
6. Spiritual.

For each area, picture what a ‘perfect 10’ would look like.

Taking work as an example, what job would you like to be doing? (If you don’t know what career path you’d like to follow, decide on which skills you’d like to be using or developing, how much people contact you’d like – and what kind, or age, of people – the kind of environment you’d like to work in, as well as money, how challenging you’d like it to be, what kind of contribution you’d like to make, and so on.) Would you prefer the security of working for someone else or the autonomy of self-employment? What kind of hours would you like to be working? How much would you like to be earning?

This is a great activity to do and then discuss with your significant other (if you don't have one yet, that may be something to consider in your 'family' area!) It's going to be much less stressful if family members know and understand the ideal situation that you're working towards, and if you discuss and resolve any goals that different family members may have that may clash with yours.

Performing this exercise will enable you to evaluate each decision to see whether it's likely to be moving you further towards your 'perfect 10' life.

This concept may sound like it's contradicting the great quote by Dr Martin Luther King: "You don't need to see the whole staircase in order to take the first step in faith".

However, by figuring out in advance what principles you'd like to live by, what goals you'd like to work towards, and by actively looking at the decisions that confront you, and listening to your gut and conscience, you can hugely reduce the risk of working hard only to achieve a result that is actually not what you wanted. (So, even if you can't see the end point of your action, as Dr King suggests, you will be able to feel whether that first step – and the following ones – are moving you towards something that will fit into your goals for the life you would like.)

Another possible interpretation of Dr King's words is that when you start on a course of action, you may be able to see what the likely end result will be, but not necessarily all the steps to get there. Sometimes it won't be until you're halfway towards your goal that you'll be able to figure out what the next step should be.

Jaws

(1975)

Jaws has a lasting impact in two separate ways. The first is a slight discomfort relating to swimming in (or being on) the ocean. The second is a nervous feeling whenever you hear the theme tune's "dah-dum, dah-dum, da-da-da-da..."

If you watch the first scene (approximately 5 minutes) of this movie without the sound on, the tension is hugely reduced.

As a complete contrast, in *The China Syndrome* (1979), a sense of unease is created but it's not until the final credits roll that you may realise that this was in part because there was no music at all during the movie.

By choosing the music and sounds you surround yourself with, you can have a huge impact on your emotional state.

You can use this in your life in several different ways.

Firstly, just being aware of the sounds around you, and making deliberate choices about what you choose to listen to can make a huge difference.

In many homes, the TV or the radio is always on, often with no one paying any attention, just providing a constant noise. Simply turning these off, and allowing some quiet can make an amazing difference to the atmosphere.

Similarly, changing the nature of the sound; turning off the TV and turning on your choice of CD means you can control the mood, whether your aim is a mellow calmness or a raucous party.

There's been a lot of research on use of certain types of classical music to assist with learning; the symmetry and driving rhythms of Baroque music (Bach, Handel and Haydn) are believed to assist with retention and recall during study.

From the authors' personal experience, we can also testify to the soothing effects soft music (Mozart and lullabies) can have on babies and young children's sleep patterns. (Whether it's the nature of the music or the night-time routine could perhaps be debated; however, if it works, why change it?)

In a workplace environment, sometimes your job requires you to do something when you really don't feel like it. Sometimes you can choose when to do things, but other times they have to be done now, and the fact that you're in completely the wrong frame of mind for the task is unfortunate, but irrelevant.

Under these circumstances, and with your employer's approval, the judicious use of music (possibly using earphones) to align your mood with the mindset required to successfully tackle the task may be helpful. If you've had a very frustrating meeting, and you now need to be calm and patient, a piece of calming music can help. Or if you're feeling flat, and need to make some sales calls, playing your favourite high-energy song can get you in the right positive frame of mind.

Mrs Henderson Presents

(2005)

One possible moral from this movie, set before and during World War II, is that young men should be allowed to see a naked woman before they die, as expounded by Mrs Henderson in a rousing speech. This is not the moral that we will be exploring!

When Mrs Henderson (Judi Dench) decides to open a theatre (the Windmill) after her husband dies, she realises that she needs to have something to differentiate her theatre from the others.

Firstly, the theatre introduces a continuous 24-hour review (the first in London), which is a roaring success. When the other theatres follow suit, the Windmill's seats are half-empty and so they look for another innovation, coming up with the idea of nudes, which, unsurprisingly, fills the house again.

Use (and maintain) a 'unique selling proposition' (USP) to distinguish yourself from your competition.

This applies both to businesses, for use in their marketing, and also to individuals.

Tom Poland (author and business coach) refers to a USP as having an offering that's a 'black jellybean'. There are a lot of people who don't like black jellybeans, and will try to avoid them. However, there will be others who will actively seek them out. Having a smaller set of customers whose needs you meet exactly will distinguish you from competitors who offer blander products or services that suit, but don't excite, more people.

Historically, there are many great examples of businesses who have used USPs very successfully in their marketing.

One of the best was Domino's Pizza in the United States which, in the 1980s and early 1990s, guaranteed that your pizza would be delivered to you within 30 minutes or it would be free. This policy was abandoned in 1993 due to the number of lawsuits resulting from hurrying pizza delivery drivers. Nevertheless, it is an example of a way that one pizza company chose to do something different to distinguish itself from the rest of the field.

Wherever possible, you would include your USP in your marketing and promotional materials and all your stationery to really maximise the benefit of your firm's unique service or product.

For individuals, if you have a point of difference which you can easily articulate, and which is memorable, your chances of standing out from, say, a stack of job applicants, are much higher. A personal USP may also increase your profile in your organisation and therefore your chances of being considered for a promotion.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show

(1975)

In this camp, cult musical, Dr Frank-N-Furter (Tim Curry) is the ‘master’ of a spooky castle filled with strange people, who eventually turn out to be aliens from the planet Transylvania. He is served by a butler, Riffraff (Richard O’Brien), and maids, including Magenta (Patricia Quinn).

Frank-N-Furter treats the ‘help’ almost as slaves. But what goes around, comes around, and at the end of the film, Riffraff and Magenta take control of the castle, which they’re going to transport back to Transylvania. At first Frank-N-Furter is thrilled (“I’m going home”), until they tell him that only Magenta and Riffraff are going back; they’re going to kill him.

Treat people with consideration and respect, regardless of their rank or any other factor.

If you do, they’re more likely to support and assist you if you need their help. You never know whose help you might need in

the future, or who may, one day, be in a situation to have control over you.

Esther Pauline Lederer, in the *Chicago Sun-Times*' syndicated advice column "Ask Ann Landers" said this beautifully:

"The true measure of an individual is how he treats a person who can do him absolutely no good."

Of course, there's no guarantee that the person who you think can do you no good may not end up in a position of authority later in life, so you don't know who can do you 'absolutely no good'.

Why risk stepping on the toes of people who you may need to ask for a helping hand later? Also, the toes you step on on your way up may be attached to the foot that kicks you on your way down.

English writer, society hostess and noted conversationalist, Lady Dorothy Nevill (1826 – 1913) explained how this concept can be applied to conversation:

"The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."

Even if nothing else, by treating others well, you're likely to have much more friendly and enjoyable relationships.

As the old adage says, respect cannot be demanded, it must be earned. Respect is earned only by giving it away.

The Terminator

(1984)

In a brilliant piece of casting, Arnold Schwarzenegger stars as the Terminator, a cyborg sent from the year 2029 by Skynet, a self-aware computer system which has seized control of the planet and all but exterminated the human race. The Terminator's orders are to kill Sarah Connor (played by Linda Hamilton), the mother of the future hero of the human resistance, John Connor, before he is even conceived.

At this stage in his career (we won't comment on his career overall), Arnold's acting was a trifle wooden, his Austrian accent was still very thick, and his physique was very impressive. In other words, he was the perfect choice to play an emotionless robot with a live-tissue overlay.

Identify what your strengths are and play to them. Look for ways to work with others who are strong in areas that you find more challenging. Don't waste your precious time doing tasks you're overqualified for: delegate.

Throughout the schooling process, the emphasis is on turning out well-rounded students. While there's no doubt that you want children to leave school able to read, write and do basic maths, often pupils who aren't academically inclined aren't encouraged to pursue the interests or aptitudes that could form their careers later.

Similarly, in most performance appraisals at work, employees are asked to identify any weaknesses that they'd like to work on. While this is almost certainly appropriate, a more productive attitude towards achieving the best results for the organisation might be to ask the following:

- What do you feel are your strengths?
- What can be done to enable you to make better use of your strengths?
- What areas are you struggling with?

Management might then like to consider whether it is possible to reallocate some of the tasks that challenge staff members so they can spend more time on what they're good at.

This kind of approach would ensure maximum productivity for the organisation, since as many staff as possible would be engaged in activities they excel in, thereby increasing efficiency.

In a large organisation with lots of staff, it's easy to see how this might work, but it can work equally well in smaller, even one-person businesses, or in home environments.

Woodrow Wilson adopted this philosophy:

“I not only use all the brains I have, but all that I can borrow.”

For example, a self employed professional could free up their time by hiring a part-time assistant to do typing, filing, accounts etc.

Similarly, if a family has very limited time together (for example, if both parents work outside the home), for the parents to spend that limited free time in housework might not be ideal.

One possibility is to hire a cleaner for just a few hours a week. Another is ‘hiring’ the children to do some chores. This has a couple of great advantages; they’ll develop skills that will serve them well later in life, they’ll take more responsibility for the state of the home, and finally, they will be much cheaper than a professional (just don’t expect perfection!).

The key thing to consider here is how much value you put on your time. For some professionals, it’s very clear how much each hour is worth, since they charge by the hour. However, you also need to take into account the value of other areas of your life: your family and friends, your health and fitness, stress relief.

After factoring all these things into account, it’s worth looking at the various things that you’re doing in all areas of your life and asking whether you’re the best person to be doing them.

One other possible consideration is whether you can change the way you’re doing some of the activities so that they achieve more than one aim.

For example, cooking dinner could be an opportunity to spend quality time with another family member and provide them with useful life skills. You could combine personal exercise with family time by including your family in your tennis game, bike ride, or whatever. Similarly, gardening, whether alone or with a friend or family member could become an opportunity to express some creativity, get some fresh air and some exercise.

However, especially if you’re trying to balance work and looking after children, it may be worth considering some child care arrangements so that you can be focused on work part of

the time, and then that family time will be clearly identified and able to be enjoyed without guilt.

A few possible ways of delegating or outsourcing, at home or work:

- Delegation (to someone better equipped to handle the task, not necessarily a subordinate)
- Outsourcing to a specialist (debt collection, accounts maintenance, bookkeeping)
- Hiring a part timer (cooking, cleaning, gardening, filing, PA duties)
- Using a child care or babysitting service
- Online shopping.

People often think that the cost of hiring someone or outsourcing a task is too high to justify. It can be very interesting to figure out what your hourly rate is, and once you've done this, you may feel differently. The other consideration is that a person who specialises in providing a service may be able to do it much more quickly than you can, either because they're more skilled or practised, or simply because they have better tools.

Finally, consider what you can do in the time that you're freeing up by outsourcing. It could mean you can spend more time with loved ones or give you some much needed time alone to recharge your batteries.



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