

LAW 11

LEARN TO KEEP PEOPLE DEPENDENT ON YOU

JUDGMENT

To maintain your independence you must always be needed and wanted. The more you are relied on, the more freedom you have. Make people depend on you for their happiness and prosperity and you have nothing to fear. Never teach them enough so that they can do without you.

TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW

Sometime in the Middle Ages, a mercenary soldier (a *condottiere*), whose name has not been recorded, saved the town of Siena from a foreign aggressor. How could the good citizens of Siena reward him? No amount of money or honor could possibly compare in value to the preservation of a city's liberty. The citizens thought of making the mercenary the lord of the city, but even that, they decided, wasn't recompense enough. At last one of them stood before the assembly called to debate this matter and said, "Let us kill him and then worship him as our patron saint." And so they did.

The Count of Carmagnola was one of the bravest and most successful of all the *condottieri*. In 1442, late in his life, he was in the employ of the city of Venice, which was in the midst of a long war with Florence. The count was suddenly recalled to Venice. A favorite of the people, he was received there with all kinds of honor and splendor. That evening he was to dine with the doge himself, in the doge's palace. On the way into the palace, however, he noticed that the guard was leading him in a different direction from usual. Crossing the famous Bridge of Sighs, he suddenly realized where they were taking him—to the dungeon. He was convicted on a trumped-up charge and the next day in the Piazza San Marco, before a horrified crowd who could not understand how his fate had changed so drastically, he was beheaded.

THE TWO HORSES

Two horses were carrying two loads. The front Horse went well, but the rear Horse was lazy. The men began to pile the rear Horse's load on the front Horse; when they had transferred it all, the rear Horse found it easy going, and he said to the front Horse: "Toil and sweat! The more you try, the more you have to suffer." When they reached the tavern, the owner said; "Why should I fodder two horses when I carry all on one? I had better give the one all the food it wants, and cut the throat of the other; at least I shall have the hide." And so he did.

FABLES, LEO TOLSIOY, 1828-1910

Interpretation

Many of the great *condottieri* of Renaissance Italy suffered the same fate as the patron saint of Siena and the Count of Carmagnola: They won battle after battle for their employers only to find themselves banished, imprisoned, or executed. The problem was not ingratitude; it was that there were so many other *condottieri* as able and valiant as they were. They were replaceable. Nothing was lost by killing them. Meanwhile, the older among them had grown powerful themselves, and wanted more and more money for their services. How much better, then, to do away with them and hire a younger, cheaper mercenary. That was the fate of the Count of Carmagnola, who had started to act impudently and independently. He had taken his power for granted without making sure that he was truly indispensable.

Such is the fate (to a less violent degree, one hopes) of those who do not make others dependent on them. Sooner or later someone comes along who can do the job as well as they can—someone younger, fresher, less expensive, less threatening.

Be the *only one* who can do what you do, and make the fate of those who hire you so entwined with yours that they cannot possibly get rid of you. Otherwise you will someday be forced to cross your own Bridge of Sighs.

OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

When Otto von Bismarck became a deputy in the Prussian parliament in 1847, he was thirty-two years old and without an ally or friend. Looking around him, he decided that the side to ally himself with was not the parliament's liberals or conservatives, not any particular minister, and certainly not the people. It was with the king, Frederick William IV. This was an odd choice to say the least, for Frederick was at a low point of his power. A weak, indecisive man, he consistently gave in to the liberals in parliament; in fact he was spineless, and stood for much that Bismarck disliked, personally and politically. Yet Bismarck courted Frederick night and day. When other deputies attacked the king for his many inept moves, only Bismarck stood by him.

THE CAT THAT WALKED BY HIMSELF

Then the Woman laughed and set the Cat a bowl of the warm white milk and said, "O Cat, you are as clever as a man, but remember that your bargain was not made with the Man or the Dog, and I do not know what they will do when they come home." "What is that to me?" said the Cat. "If I have my place in the Cave by the fire and my warm white milk three times a day, I do not care what the Man or the Dog can do." ... And from that day to this, Best Beloved, three proper Men out of five will always throw things at a Cat whenever they meet him, and all proper Dogs will chase him up a tree. But the Cat keeps his side of the bargain too. He will kill mice, and he will be kind to Babies when he is in the house, just as long as they do not pull his tail too hard. But when he has done that, and between times, and when the moon gets up and the night comes, he is the Cat that walks by himself, and all places are alike to him. Then he goes out to the Wet Wild Woods or up the Wet Wild Trees or on the Wet Wild Roofs, waving his wild tail and walking by his wild lone.

JUST SO STORIES, RUDYARD KIPLING, 1865-1936

Finally, it all paid off: In 1851 Bismarck was made a minister in the king's cabinet. Now he went to work. Time and again he forced the king's hand, getting him to build up the military, to stand up to the liberals, to do exactly as Bismarck wished. He worked on Frederick's insecurity about his manliness, challenging him to be firm and to rule with pride. And he slowly restored the king's powers until the monarchy was once again the most powerful force in Prussia.

When Frederick died, in 1861, his brother William assumed the throne. William disliked Bismarck intensely and had no intention of keeping him around. But he also inherited the same situation his brother had: enemies galore, who wanted to nibble his power away. He actually considered abdicating, feeling he lacked the strength to deal with this dangerous and precarious position. But Bismarck insinuated himself once again. He stood by the new king, gave him strength, and urged him into firm and decisive action. The king grew dependent on Bismarck's strong-arm tactics to keep his enemies at bay, and despite his antipathy toward the man, he soon made him his prime minister. The two quarreled often over policy—Bismarck was much more conservative—but the king understood his own dependency. Whenever the prime minister threatened to resign, the king gave in to him, time after time. It was in fact Bismarck who set state policy.

Years later, Bismarck's actions as Prussia's prime minister led the various German states to be united into one country. Now Bismarck finagled the king into letting himself be crowned emperor of Germany. Yet it was really Bismarck who had reached the heights of power. As right-hand man to the emperor, and as imperial chancellor and knighted prince, he pulled all the levers.

Interpretation

Most young and ambitious politicians looking out on the political landscape of 1840s Germany would have tried to build a power base among those with the most power. Bismarck saw different. Joining forces with the powerful can be foolish: They will swallow you up, just as the doge of Venice swallowed up the Count of Carmagnola. No one will come to depend on you if they are already strong. If you are ambitious, it is much wiser to seek out weak rulers or masters with whom you can create a relationship of dependency. You become their strength, their intelligence, their spine. What power you hold! If they got rid of you the whole edifice would collapse.

Necessity rules the world. People rarely act unless compelled to. If you create no need for yourself, then you will be done away with at first opportunity. If, on the other hand, you understand the Laws of Power and make others depend on you for their welfare, if you can counteract their weakness with your own “iron and blood,” in Bismarck’s phrase, then you will survive your masters as Bismarck did. You will have all the benefits of power without the thorns that come from being a master.

Thus a wise prince will think of ways to keep his citizens of every sort and under every circumstance dependent on the state and on him; and then they will always be trustworthy.

Niccolò Machiavelli, 1469-1527

THE ELM-TREE AND THE VINE

An extravagant young Vine, vainly ambitious of independence, and fond of rambling at large, despised the alliance of a stately elm that grew near, and courted her embraces. Having risen to some small height without any kind of support, she shot forth her flimsy branches to a very uncommon and superfluous length; calling on her neighbour to take notice how little she wanted his assistance. “Poor infatuated shrub,” replied the elm, “how inconsistent is thy conduct! Wouldst thou be truly independent, thou shouldst carefully apply those juices to the enlargement of thy stem. which thou lavishest in vain upon unnecessary foliage. I shortly shall behold thee

grovelling on the ground; yet countenanced, indeed, by many of the human race, who, intoxicated with vanity, have despised economy; and who, to support for a moment their empty boast of independence, have exhausted the very source of it in frivolous expenses.”

FABLES, ROBERT DODSLEY, 1703-1764

KEYS TO POWER

The ultimate power is the power to get people to do as you wish. When you can do this without having to force people or hurt them, when they willingly grant you what you desire, then your power is untouchable. The best way to achieve this position is to create a relationship of dependence. The master requires your services; he is weak, or unable to function without you; you have enmeshed yourself in his work so deeply that doing away with you would bring him great difficulty, or at least would mean valuable time lost in training another to replace you. Once such a relationship is established you have the upper hand, the leverage to make the master do as you wish. It is the classic case of the man behind the throne, the servant of the king who actually controls the king. Bismarck did not have to bully either Frederick or William into doing his bidding. He simply made it clear that unless he got what he wanted he would walk away, leaving the king to twist in the wind. Both kings soon danced to Bismarck's tune.

Do not be one of the many who mistakenly believe that the ultimate form of power is independence. Power involves a relationship between people; you will always need others as allies, pawns, or even as weak masters who serve as your front. The completely independent man would live in a cabin in the woods—he would have the freedom to come and go as he pleased, but he would have no power. The best you can hope for is that others will grow so dependent on you that you enjoy a kind of reverse independence: Their need for you frees you.

Louis XI (1423-1483), the great Spider King of France, had a weakness for astrology. He kept a court *astrologer* whom he admired, until one day the man predicted that a lady of the court would die within eight days. When the prophecy came true, Louis was terrified, thinking that either the man had murdered the woman to prove his accuracy or that he was so versed in his science that his powers threatened Louis himself. In either case he had to be killed.

One evening Louis summoned the astrologer to his room, high in the castle. Before the man arrived, the king told his servants that when he gave

the signal they were to pick the astrologer up, carry him to the window, and hurl him to the ground, hundreds of feet below.

The astrologer soon arrived, but before giving the signal, Louis decided to ask him one last question: “You claim to understand astrology and to know the fate of others, so tell me what your fate will be and how long you have to live.”

“I shall die just three days before Your Majesty,” the astrologer replied. The king’s signal was never given. The man’s life was spared. The Spider King not only protected his astrologer for as long as he was alive, he lavished him with gifts and had him tended by the finest court doctors.

The astrologer survived Louis by several years, disproving his power of prophecy but proving his mastery of power.

This is the model: Make others dependent on you. To get rid of you might spell disaster, even death, and your master dares not tempt fate by finding out. There are many ways to obtain such a position. Foremost among them is to possess a talent and creative skill that simply cannot be replaced.

During the Renaissance, the major obstacle to a painter’s success was finding the right patron. Michelangelo did this better than anyone else: His patron was Pope Julius II. But he and the pope quarreled over the building of the pope’s marble tomb, and Michelangelo left Rome in disgust. To the amazement of those in the pope’s circle, not only did the pope not fire him, he sought him out and in his own haughty way begged the artist to stay. Michelangelo, he knew, could find another patron, but he could never find another Michelangelo.

You do not have to have the talent of a Michelangelo; you do have to have a skill that sets you apart from the crowd. You should create a situation in which you can always latch on to another master or patron but your master cannot easily find another servant with your particular talent. And if, in reality, you are not actually indispensable, you must find a way to make it look as if you are. Having the appearance of specialized knowledge and skill gives you leeway in your ability to deceive those above you into thinking they cannot do without you. Real dependence on your master’s part, however, leaves him more vulnerable to you than the faked variety, and it is always within your power to make your skill indispensable.

This is what is meant by the intertwining of fates: Like creeping ivy, you have wrapped yourself around the source of power, so that it would cause

great trauma to cut you away. And you do not necessarily have to entwine yourself around the master; another person will do, as long as he or she too is indispensable in the chain.

One day Harry Cohn, president of Columbia Pictures, was visited in his office by a gloomy group of his executives. It was 1951, when the witch-hunt against Communists in Hollywood, carried on by the U.S. Congress's House Un-American Activities Committee, was at its height. The executives had bad news: One of their employees, the screenwriter John Howard Lawson, had been singled out as a Communist. They had to get rid of him right away or suffer the wrath of the committee.

Harry Cohn was no bleeding-heart liberal; in fact, he had always been a die-hard Republican.

His favorite politician was Benito Mussolini, whom he had once visited, and whose framed photo hung on his wall. If there was someone he hated Cohn would call him a "Communist bastard." But to the executives' amazement Cohn told them he would not fire Lawson. He did not keep the screenwriter on because he was a good writer—there were many good writers in Hollywood. He kept him because of a chain of dependence: Lawson was Humphrey Bogart's writer and Bogart was Columbia's star. If Cohn messed with Lawson he would ruin an immensely profitable relationship. That was worth more than the terrible publicity brought to him by his defiance of the committee.

Henry Kissinger managed to survive the many bloodlettings that went on in the Nixon White House not because he was the best diplomat Nixon could find—there were other fine negotiators—and not because the two men got along so well: They did not. Nor did they share their beliefs and politics. Kissinger survived because he entrenched himself in so many areas of the political structure that to do away with him would lead to chaos. Michelangelo's power was *intensive*, depending on one skill, his ability as an artist; Kissinger's was *extensive*. He got himself involved in so many aspects and departments of the administration that his involvement became a card in his hand. It also made him many allies. If you can arrange such a position for yourself, getting rid of you becomes dangerous—all sorts of interdependencies will unravel. Still, the intensive form of power provides more freedom than the extensive, because those who have it depend on no particular master, or particular position of power, for their security.

To make others dependent on you, one route to take is the secret-intelligence tactic. By knowing other people's secrets, by holding information that they wouldn't want broadcast, you seal your fate with theirs. You are untouchable. Ministers of secret police have held this position throughout the ages: They can make or break a king, or, as in the case of J. Edgar Hoover, a president. But the role is so full of insecurities and paranoia that the power it provides almost cancels itself out. You cannot rest at ease, and what good is power if it brings you no peace?

One last warning: Do not imagine that your master's dependence on you will make him love you. In fact, he may resent and fear you. But, as Machiavelli said, it is better to be feared than loved. Fear you can control; love, never. Depending on an emotion as subtle and changeable as love or friendship will only make you insecure. Better to have others depend on you out of fear of the consequences of losing you than out of love of your company.

Image: Vines with Many Thorns. Below, the roots grow deep and wide. Above, the vines push through bushes, entwine themselves around trees and poles and window ledges. To get rid of them would cost such toil and blood, it is easier to let them climb.

Authority: Make people depend on you. More is to be gained from such dependence than courtesy. He who has slaked his thirst, immediately turns his back on the well, no longer needing it. When dependence disappears, so does civility and decency, and then respect. The first lesson which experience should teach you is to keep hope alive but never satisfied, keeping even a royal patron ever in need of you. (Baltasar Gracián, 1601-1658)

REVERSAL

The weakness of making others depend on you is that you are in some measure dependent on them. But trying to move beyond that point means getting rid of those above you—it means standing alone, depending on no one. Such is the monopolistic drive of a J. P. Morgan or a John D. Rockefeller—to drive out all competition, to be in complete control. If you can corner the market, so much the better.

No such independence comes without a price. You are forced to isolate yourself. Monopolies often turn inward and destroy themselves from the internal pressure. They also stir up powerful resentment, making their enemies bond together to fight them. The drive for complete control is often ruinous and fruitless. Interdependence remains the law, independence a rare and often fatal exception. Better to place yourself in a position of mutual dependence, then, and to follow this critical law rather than look for its reversal. You will not have the unbearable pressure of being on top, and the master above you will in essence be your slave, for *he* will depend on *you*.