

## LAW 28

### ENTER ACTION WITH BOLDNESS

#### JUDGMENT

*If you are unsure of a course of action, do not attempt it. Your doubts and hesitations will infect your execution. Timidity is dangerous: Better to enter with boldness. Any mistakes you commit through audacity are easily corrected with more audacity. Everyone admires the bold; no one honors the timid.*

#### THE TWO ADVENTURERS

*The path of pleasure never leads to glory! The prodigious achievements of Hercules were the result of high adventure, and though there is little, either in fable or history, to show that he had any rivals, still it is recorded that a knight errant, in company with a fellow adventurer, sought his fortune in a romantic country. He had not traveled far when his companion observed a post, on which was written the following inscription: "Brave adventurer, if you have a desire to discover that which has never been seen by any knight errant, you have only to pass this torrent, and then take in your arms an elephant of stone and carry it in one breath to the summit of this mountain, whose noble head seems blended with the sky." "But," said the knight's companion, "the water may be deep as well as rapid, and though, notwithstanding, we should pass it, why should we be encumbered with the elephant? What a ridiculous undertaking!" And philosophically and with nice calculation, he observed that the elephant might be carried four steps; but for conveying it to the top of the mountain in one breath, that was not in the power of a mortal, unless it should be the dwarf figure of an elephant, fit only to be placed on the top of a stick; and then what honor would there be in such an adventure? "There is," said he, "some deception in this writing.*

*It is an enigma only fit to amuse a child. I shall therefore leave you and your elephant.”*

*The reasoner then departed; but the adventurous man rushed with his eyes closed across the water; neither depth nor violence prevented him. and according to the inscription he saw the elephant lying on the opposite bank. He took it and carried it to the top of the hill, where he saw a town. A shriek from the elephant alarmed the people of the city, who rose in arms; but the adventurer, nothing daunted, was determined to die a hero. The people, however, were awed by his presence, and he was astonished to hear them proclaim him successor to their king, who had recently died. Great enterprises are only achieved by adventurous spirits. They who calculate with too great nicety every difficulty and obstacle which is likely to lie in their way, lose that time in hesitation, which the more daring seize and render available to the loftiest purposes.*

FABLES, JEAN DE LA FONTAINE, 1621-1695

### **BOLDNESS AND HESITATION: A Brief Psychological Comparison**

Boldness and hesitation elicit very different psychological responses in their targets: Hesitation puts obstacles in your path, boldness eliminates them. Once you understand this, you will find it essential to overcome your natural timidity and practice the art of audacity. The following are among the most pronounced psychological effects of boldness and timidity.

**The Bolder the Lie the Better.** We all have weaknesses, and our efforts are never perfect. But entering action with boldness has the magical effect of hiding our deficiencies. Con artists know that the bolder the lie, the more convincing it becomes. The sheer audacity of the story makes it more credible, distracting attention from its inconsistencies. When putting together a con or entering any kind of negotiation, go further than you planned. Ask for the moon and you will be surprised how often you get it.

**Lions Circle the Hesitant Prey.** People have a sixth sense for the weaknesses of others. If, in a first encounter, you demonstrate your willingness to compromise, back down, and retreat, you bring out the lion even in people who are not necessarily bloodthirsty. Everything depends on perception, and once you are seen as the kind of person who quickly goes

on the defensive, who is willing to negotiate and be amenable, you will be pushed around without mercy.

**Boldness Strikes Fear; Fear Creates Authority.** The bold move makes you seem larger and more powerful than you are. If it comes suddenly, with the stealth and swiftness of a snake, it inspires that much more fear. By intimidating with a bold move, you establish a precedent: in every subsequent encounter, people will be on the defensive, in terror of your next strike.

**Going Halfway with Half a Heart Digs the Deeper Grave.** If you enter an action with less than total confidence, you set up obstacles in your own path. When a problem arises you will grow confused, seeing options where there are none and inadvertently creating more problems still. Retreating from the hunter, the timid hare scurries more easily into his snares.

**Hesitation Creates Gaps, Boldness Obliterates Them.** When you take time to think, to hem and haw, you create a gap that allows others time to think as well. Your timidity infects people with awkward energy, elicits embarrassment. Doubt springs up on all sides.

Boldness destroys such gaps. The swiftness of the move and the energy of the action leave others no space to doubt and worry. In seduction, hesitation is fatal—it makes your victim conscious of your intentions. The bold move crowns seduction with triumph: It leaves no time for reflection.

**Audacity Separates You from the Herd.** Boldness gives you presence and makes you seem larger than life. The timid fade into the wallpaper, the bold draw attention, and what draws attention draws power. We cannot keep our eyes off the audacious—we cannot wait to see their next bold move.

## **OBSERVANCES OF THE LAW**

### **Observance I**

In May of 1925, five of the most successful dealers in the French scrap-metal business found themselves invited to an “official” but “highly confidential” meeting with the deputy director general of the Ministry of Post and Telegraphs at the Hotel Crillon, then the most luxurious hotel in Paris. When the businessmen arrived, it was the director general himself, a Monsieur Lustig, who met them in a swank suite on the top floor.

The businessmen had no idea why they had been summoned to this meeting, and they were bursting with curiosity. After drinks, the director explained. “Gentlemen,” he said, “this is an urgent matter that requires complete secrecy. The government is going to have to tear down the Eiffel Tower.” The dealers listened in stunned silence as the director explained that the tower, as recently reported in the news, desperately needed repairs. It had originally been meant as a temporary structure (for the Exposition of 1889), its maintenance costs had soared over the years, and now, in a time of a fiscal crisis, the government would have to spend millions to fix it. Many Parisians considered the Eiffel Tower an eyesore and would be delighted to see it go. Over time, even the tourists would forget about it—it would live on in photographs and postcards. “Gentlemen,” Lustig said, “you are all invited to make the government an offer for the Eiffel Tower.”

He gave the businessmen sheets of government stationery filled with figures, such as the tonnage of the tower’s metal. Their eyes popped as they calculated how much they could make from the scrap. Then Lustig led them to a waiting limo, which brought them to the Eiffel Tower. Flashing an official badge, he guided them through the area, spicing his tour with amusing anecdotes. At the end of the visit he thanked them and asked them to have their offers delivered to his suite within four days.

Several days after the offers were submitted, one of the five, a Monsieur P., received notice that his bid was the winner, and that to secure the sale he should come to the suite at the hotel within two days, bearing a certified check for more than 250,000 francs (the equivalent today of about

\$1,000,000)—a quarter of the total price. On delivery of the check, he would receive the documents confirming his ownership of the Eiffel Tower. Monsieur P. was excited—he would go down in history as the man who had bought and torn down the infamous landmark. But by the time he arrived at the suite, check in hand, he was beginning to have doubts about the whole affair. Why meet in a hotel instead of a government building? Why hadn't he heard from other officials? Was this a hoax, a scam? As he listened to Lustig discuss the arrangements for the scrapping of the tower, he hesitated, and contemplated backing out.

Suddenly, however, he realized that the director had changed his tone. Instead of talking about the tower, he was complaining about his low salary, about his wife's desire for a fur coat, about how galling it was to work hard and be unappreciated. It dawned on Monsieur P. that this high government official was asking for a bribe. The effect on him, though, was not outrage but relief. Now he was sure that Lustig was for real, since in all of his previous encounters with French bureaucrats, they had inevitably asked for a little greasing of the palm. His confidence restored, Monsieur P. slipped the director several thousand francs in bills, then handed him the certified check. In return he received the documentation, including an impressive-looking bill of sale. He left the hotel, dreaming of the profits and fame to come.

Over the next few days, however, as Monsieur P. waited for correspondence from the government, he began to realize that something was amiss. A few telephone calls made it clear that there was no deputy director general Lustig, and there were no plans to destroy the Eiffel Tower: He had been bilked of over 250,000 francs!

Monsieur P. never went to the police. He knew what kind of reputation he would get if word got out that he had fallen for one of the most absurdly audacious cons in history. Besides the public humiliation, it would have been business suicide.

## Interpretation

Had Count Victor Lustig, con artist extraordinaire, tried to sell the Arc de Triomphe, a bridge over the Seine, a statue of Balzac, no one would have believed him. But the Eiffel Tower was just too large, too improbable to be part of a con job. In fact it was so improbable that Lustig was able to return to Paris six months later and “resell” the Eiffel Tower to a different scrap-iron dealer, and for a higher price—a sum in francs equivalent today to over \$1,500,000!

Largeness of scale deceives the human eye. It distracts and awes us, and is so self-evident that we cannot imagine there is any illusion or deception afoot. Arm yourself with bigness and boldness—stretch your deceptions as far as they will go and then go further. If you sense that the sucker has suspicions, do as the intrepid Lustig did: Instead of backing down, or lowering his price, he simply raised his price higher, by asking for and getting a bribe. Asking for more puts the other person on the defensive, cuts out the nibbling effect of compromise and doubt, and overwhelms with its boldness.

*Always set to work without misgivings on the score of imprudence. Fear of failure in the mind of a performer is, for an onlooker, already evidence of failure.... Actions are dangerous when there is doubt as to their wisdom; it would be safer to do nothing.*

BALTASAR GRACIÁN, 1601-1658

## THE STORY OF HUH SAENG

*In a lowly thatched cottage in the Namsan Valley there lived a poor couple, Mr. and Mrs. Huh Saeng. The husband confined himself for seven years and only read books in his cold room.... One day his wife, all in tears, said to him: “Look here, my good man! What is the use of all your book reading? I have spent my youth in washing and sewing for other people and yet I have no spare jacket or skirt to wear and I have had no food to eat during the past three days. I am hungry and cold. I can stand it no more!” ... Hearing these words, the middle-aged scholar closed his book... rose to his feet and... without saying another word, he went out of doors.... Arriving in the*

*heart of the city, he stopped a passing gentleman. "Hello, my friend! Who is the richest man in town?" "Poor countryman! Don't you know Byôn-ssi, the millionaire? His glittering tile-roofed house pierced by twelve gates is just over there." Huh Saeng bent his steps to the rich man's house. Having entered the big gate, he flung the guest-room door open and addressed the host: "I need 10,000 yang for capital for my commercial business and I want you to lend me the money." "Alright, sir. Where shall I send the money?"*

*"To the Ansông Market in care of a commission merchant." "Very well. sir. I will draw on Kim, who does the biggest commission business in the Ansông Market. You'll get the money there." "Good-bye. sir." When Huh Saeng was gone, all the other guests in the room asked Byôn-ssi why he gave so much money to a beggarlike stranger whose family name was unknown to him. But the rich man replied with a triumphant face: "Even though he was in ragged clothes, he spoke clearly to the point without betraying shame or inferiority, unlike common people who want to borrow money for a bad debt. Such a man as he is either mad or self-confident in doing business. But judging from his dauntless eyes and booming voice he is an uncommon man with a superhuman brain, worthy of my trust. I know money and I know men. Money often makes a man small, but a man like him makes big money. I am only glad to have helped a big man do big business."*

BEHIND THE SCENES OF ROYAL PALACES IN KOREA, HA TAE-HUNG, 1983

## Observance II

On his deathbed in 1533, Vasily III, the Grand Duke of Moscow and ruler of a semi-united Russia, proclaimed his three-year-old son, Ivan IV, as his successor. He appointed his young wife, Helena, as regent until Ivan reached his majority and could rule on his own. The aristocracy—the boyars—secretly rejoiced: For years the dukes of Moscow had been trying to extend their authority over the boyars' turf. With Vasily dead, his heir a mere three years old, and a young woman in charge of the dukedom, the boyars would be able to roll back the dukes' gains, wrest control of the state, and humiliate the royal family.

Aware of these dangers, young Helena turned to her trusted friend Prince Ivan Obolensky to help her rule. But after five years as regent she suddenly died—poisoned by a member of the Shuisky family, the most fearsome boyar clan. The Shuisky princes seized control of the government and threw Obolensky in prison, where he starved to death. At the age of eight, Ivan was now a despised orphan, and any boyar or family member who took an interest in him was immediately banished or killed.

And so Ivan roamed the palace, hungry, ill clothed, and often in hiding from the Shuiskys, who treated him roughly when they saw him. On some days they would search him out, clothe him in royal robes, hand him a scepter, and set him on the throne—a kind of mock ritual in which they lampooned his royal pretensions. Then they would shoo him away. One evening several of them chased the Metropolitan—the head of the Russian church—through the palace, and he sought refuge in Ivan's room; the boy watched in horror as the Shuiskys entered, hurled insults, and beat the Metropolitan mercilessly.

Ivan had one friend in the palace, a boyar named Vorontsov who consoled and advised him. One day, however, as he, Vorontsov, and the newest Metropolitan conferred in the palace refectory, several Shuiskys burst in, beat up Vorontsov, and insulted the Metropolitan by tearing and treading on his robes. Then they banished Vorontsov from Moscow.

Throughout all this Ivan maintained a strict silence. To the boyars it seemed that their plan had worked: The young man had turned into a terrified and obedient idiot. They could ignore him now, even leave him



alone. But on the evening of December 29, 1543, Ivan, now thirteen, asked Prince Andrei Shuisky to come to his room. When the prince arrived, the room was filled with palace guards. Young Ivan then pointed his finger at Andrei and ordered the guards to arrest him, have him killed, and throw his body to the bloodhounds in the royal kennel. Over the next few days Ivan had all of Andrei's close associates arrested and banished. Caught off-guard by his sudden boldness, the boyars now stood in mortal terror of this youth, the future Ivan the Terrible, who had planned and waited for five years to execute this one swift and bold act that would secure his power for decades to come.

## **Interpretation**

The world is full of boyars — men who despise you, fear your ambition, and jealously guard their shrinking realms of power. You need to establish your authority and gain respect, but the moment the boyars sense your growing boldness, they will act to thwart you. This is how Ivan met such a situation: He lay low, showing neither ambition nor discontent. He waited, and when the time came he brought the palace guards over to his side. The guards had come to hate the cruel Shuiskys. Once they agreed to Ivan's plan, he struck with the swiftness of a snake, pointing his finger at Shuisky and giving him no time to react.

Negotiate with a boyar and you create opportunities for him. A small compromise becomes the toehold he needs to tear you apart. The sudden bold move, without discussion or warning, obliterates these toeholds, and builds your authority. You terrify doubters and despisers and gain the confidence of the many who admire and glorify those who act boldly.

### Observance III

In 1514 the twenty-two-year-old Pietro Aretino was working as a lowly assistant scullion to a wealthy Roman family. He had ambitions of greatness as a writer, to enflame the world with his name, but how could a mere lackey hope to realize such dreams?

That year Pope Leo X received from the king of Portugal an embassy that included many gifts, most prominent among them a great elephant, the first in Rome since imperial times. The pontiff adored this elephant and showered it with attention and gifts. But despite his love and care, the elephant, which was called Hanno, became deathly ill. The pope summoned doctors, who administered a five-hundred-pound purgative to the elephant, but all to no avail. The animal died and the pope went into mourning. To console himself he summoned the great painter Raphael and ordered him to create a life-sized painting of Hanno above the animal's tomb, bearing the inscription, "What nature took away, Raphael has with his art restored."

Over the next few days, a pamphlet circulated throughout Rome that caused great merriment and laughter. Entitled "The Last Will and Testament of the Elephant Hanno," it read, in part, "To my heir the Cardinal Santa Croce, I give my knees, so that he can imitate my genuflections.... To my heir Cardinal Santi Quattro, I give my jaws, so that he can more readily devour all of Christ's revenues.... To my heir Cardinal Medici, I give my ears, so that he can hear everyone's doings...." To Cardinal Grassi, who had a reputation for lechery, the elephant bequeathed the appropriate, oversized part of his own anatomy.

On and on the anonymous pamphlet went, sparing none of the great in Rome, not even the pope. With each one it took aim at their best-known weakness. The pamphlet ended with verse, "See to it that Aretino is your friend / For he is a bad enemy to have. / His words alone could ruin the high pope / So God guard everyone from his tongue."

## Interpretation

With one short pamphlet, Aretino, son of a poor shoemaker and a servant himself, hurled himself to fame. Everyone in Rome rushed to find out who this daring young man was. Even the pope, amused by his audacity, sought him out and ended up giving him a job in the papal service. Over the years he came to be known as the “Scourge of Princes,” and his biting tongue earned him the respect and fear of the great, from the king of France to the Hapsburg emperor.

*Fear, which always magnifies objects, gives a body to all their fancies, which takes for its form whatever they conceive to exist in their enemies' thoughts; so that fearful persons seldom fail to fall into real inconveniences, occasioned by imaginary dangers.... And the duke, whose predominant character was to be always full of fear and of distrust, was, of all men I have ever seen, the most capable of falling into false steps, by the dread he had of falling into them; being in that like unto hares.*

CARDINAL DE RETZ, 1613-1679

The Aretino strategy is simple: When you are as small and obscure as David was, you must find a Goliath to attack. The larger the target, the more attention you gain. The bolder the attack, the more you stand out from the crowd, and the more admiration you earn. Society is full of those who think daring thoughts but lack the guts to print and publicize them. Voice what the public feels—the expression of shared feelings is always powerful. Search out the most prominent target possible and sling your boldest shot. The world will enjoy the spectacle, and will honor the underdog—you, that is—with glory and power.

## THE BOY AND THE NETTLE

*A boy playing in the fields got stung by a nettle. He ran home to his mother, telling her that he had but touched that nasty weed, and it had stung him. “It was just your touching it, my boy,” said the mother, “that caused it to*

*sting you; the next time you meddle with a nettle, grasp it tightly, and it will do you no hurt.”*

*Do boldly what you do at all.*

FABLES, AESOP, SIXTH CENTURY B.C.

## KEYS TO POWER

Most of us are timid. We want to avoid tension and conflict and we want to be liked by all. We may contemplate a bold action but we rarely bring it to life. We are terrified of the consequences, of what others might think of us, of the hostility we will stir up if we dare go beyond our usual place.

Although we may disguise our timidity as a concern for others, a desire not to hurt or offend them, in fact it is the opposite—we are really self-absorbed, worried about ourselves and how others perceive us. Boldness, on the other hand, is outer-directed, and often makes people feel more at ease, since it is less self-conscious and less repressed.

This can be seen most clearly in seduction. All great seducers succeed through effrontery. Casanova's boldness was not revealed in a daring approach to the woman he desired, or in intrepid words to flatter her; it consisted in his ability to surrender himself to her completely and to make her believe he would do anything for her, even risk his life, which in fact he sometimes did. The woman on whom he lavished this attention understood that he held nothing back from her. This was infinitely more flattering than compliments. At no point during the seduction would he show hesitation or doubt, simply because he never felt it.

Part of the charm of being seduced is that it makes us feel engulfed, temporarily outside of ourselves and the usual doubts that permeate our lives. The moment the seducer hesitates, the charm is broken, because we become aware of the process, of their deliberate effort to seduce us, of their self-consciousness. Boldness directs attention outward and keeps the illusion alive. It never induces awkwardness or embarrassment. And so we admire the bold, and prefer to be around them, because their self-confidence infects us and draws us outside our own realm of inwardness and reflection.

## HOW TO BE VICTORIOUS IN LOVE

*But with those who have made an impression upon your heart, I have noticed that you are timid. This quality might affect a bourgeoisie, but you must attack the heart of a woman of the world with other weapons.... I tell you on behalf of women: there is not one of us who does not prefer a little*

*rough handling to too much consideration. Men lose through blundering more hearts than virtue saves. The more timidity a lover shows with us the more it concerns our pride to goad him on; the more respect he has for our resistance, the more respect we demand of him. We would willingly say to you men: "Ah, in pity's name do not suppose us to be so very virtuous; you are forcing us to have too much of it..."*

*We are continually struggling to hide the fact that we have permitted ourselves to be loved. Put a woman in a position to say that she has yielded only to a species of violence, or to surprise: persuade her that you do not undervalue her, and I will answer for her heart....A little more boldness on your part would put you both at your ease. Do you remember what M. de la Rochefoucauld told you lately: "A reasonable man in love may act like a madman, but he should not and cannot act like an idiot."*

## LIFE, LETTERS, AND EPICUREAN PHILOSOPHY OF NINON DE LENCLOS, NINON DE LENCLOS, 1620-1705

Few are born bold. Even Napoleon had to cultivate the habit on the battlefield, where he knew it was a matter of life and death. In social settings he was awkward and timid, but he overcame this and practiced boldness in every part of his life because he saw its tremendous power, how it could literally enlarge a man (even one who, like Napoleon, was in fact conspicuously small). We also see this change in Ivan the Terrible: A harmless boy suddenly transforms himself into a powerful young man who commands authority, simply by pointing a finger and taking bold action.

You must practice and develop your boldness. You will often find uses for it. The best place to begin is often the delicate world of negotiation, particularly those discussions in which you are asked to set your own price. How often we put ourselves down by asking for too little. When Christopher Columbus proposed that the Spanish court finance his voyage to the Americas, he also made the insanely bold demand that he be called "Grand Admiral of the Ocean." The court agreed. The price he set was the price he received—he demanded to be treated with respect, and so he was. Henry Kissinger too knew that in negotiation, bold demands work better than starting off with piecemeal concessions and trying to meet the other person halfway. Set your value high, and then, as Count Lustig did, set it higher.

Understand: If boldness is not natural, neither is timidity. It is an acquired habit, picked up out of a desire to avoid conflict. If timidity has taken hold of you, then, root it out. Your fears of the consequences of a bold action are way out of proportion to reality, and in fact the consequences of timidity are worse. Your value is lowered and you create a self-fulfilling cycle of doubt and disaster. Remember: The problems created by an audacious move can be disguised, even remedied, by more and greater audacity.

Image: The Lion and the Hare. The lion creates no gaps in his way—his movements are too swift, his jaws too quick and powerful. The timid hare will do anything to escape danger, but in its haste to retreat and flee, it backs into traps, hops smack into its enemies' jaws.

Authority: I certainly think that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, if you wish to master her, to conquer her by force; and it can be seen that she lets herself be overcome by the bold rather than by those who proceed coldly. And therefore, like a woman, she is always a friend to the young, because they are less cautious, fiercer, and master her with greater audacity. (Niccolò Machiavelli, 1469-1527)



## REVERSAL

Boldness should never be the strategy behind all of your actions. It is a tactical instrument, to be used at the right moment. Plan and think ahead, and make the final element the bold move that will bring you success. In other words, since boldness is a learned response, it is also one that you learn to control and utilize at will. To go through life armed only with audacity would be tiring and also fatal. You would offend too many people, as is proven by those who cannot control their boldness. One such person was Lola Montez; her audacity brought her triumphs and led to her seduction of the king of Bavaria. But since she could never rein in her boldness, it also led to her downfall—in Bavaria, in England, wherever she turned. It crossed the border between boldness and the appearance of cruelty, even insanity. Ivan the Terrible suffered the same fate: When the power of boldness brought him success, he stuck to it, to the point where it became a lifelong pattern of violence and sadism. He lost the ability to tell when boldness was appropriate and when it was not.

Timidity has no place in the realm of power; you will often benefit, however, by being able to feign it. At that point, of course, it is no longer timidity but an offensive weapon: You are luring people in with your show of shyness, all the better to pounce on them boldly later.