

## LAW 34

BE ROYAL IN YOUR OWN FASHION: ACT LIKE A KING TO  
BE TREATED LIKE ONE

### JUDGMENT

*The way you carry yourself will often determine how you are treated: In the long run, appearing vulgar or common will make people disrespect you. For a king respects himself and inspires the same sentiment in others. By acting regally and confident of your powers, you make yourself seem destined to wear a crown.*

## TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW

In July of 1830, a revolution broke out in Paris that forced the king, Charles X, to abdicate. A commission of the highest authorities in the land gathered to choose a successor, and the man they picked was Louis-Philippe, the Duke of Orléans.

From the beginning it was clear that Louis-Philippe would be a different kind of king, and not just because he came from a different branch of the royal family, or because he had not inherited the crown but had been given it, by a commission, putting his legitimacy in question. Rather it was that he disliked ceremony and the trappings of royalty; he had more friends among the bankers than among the nobility; and his style was not to create a new kind of royal rule, as Napoleon had done, but to downplay his status, the better to mix with the businessmen and middle-class folk who had called him to lead. Thus the symbols that came to be associated with Louis-Philippe were neither the scepter nor the crown, but the gray hat and umbrella with which he would proudly walk the streets of Paris, as if he were a bourgeois out for a stroll. When Louis-Philippe invited James Rothschild, the most important banker in France, to his palace, he treated him as an equal. And unlike any king before him, not only did he talk business with Monsieur Rothschild but that was literally all he talked, for he loved money and had amassed a huge fortune.

As the reign of the “bourgeois king” plodded on, people came to despise him. The aristocracy could not endure the sight of an unkingly king, and within a few years they turned on him. Meanwhile the growing class of the poor, including the radicals who had chased out Charles X, found no satisfaction in a ruler who neither acted as a king nor governed as a man of the people. The bankers to whom Louis-Philippe was the most beholden soon realized that it was they who controlled the country, not he, and they treated him with growing contempt. One day, at the start of a train trip organized for the royal family, James Rothschild actually berated him—and in public—for being late. Once the king had made news by treating the banker as an equal; now the banker treated the king as an inferior.

Eventually the workers' insurrections that had brought down Louis-Philippe's predecessor began to reemerge, and the king put them down with force. But what was he defending so brutally? Not the institution of the monarchy, which he disdained, nor a democratic republic, which his rule prevented. What he was really defending, it seemed, was his own fortune, and the fortunes of the bankers—not a way to inspire loyalty among the citizenry.

*Never lose your self-respect, nor be too familiar with yourself when you are alone. Let your integrity itself be your own standard of rectitude, and be more indebted to the severity of your own judgment of yourself than to all external precepts. Desist from unseemly conduct, rather out of respect for your own virtue than for the strictures of external authority. Come to hold yourself in awe, and you will have no need of Seneca's imaginary tutor.*

#### BALTASAR GRACIÁN, 1601-1658

In early 1848, Frenchmen of all classes began to demonstrate for electoral reforms that would make the country truly democratic. By February the demonstrations had turned violent. To assuage the populace, Louis-Philippe fired his prime minister and appointed a liberal as a replacement. But this created the opposite of the desired effect: The people sensed they could push the king around. The demonstrations turned into a full-fledged revolution, with gunfire and barricades in the streets.

On the night of February 23, a crowd of Parisians surrounded the palace. With a suddenness that caught everyone by surprise, Louis-Philippe abdicated that very evening and fled to England. He left no successor, nor even the suggestion of one—his whole government folded up and dissolved like a traveling circus leaving town.

## Interpretation

Louis-Philippe consciously dissolved the aura that naturally pertains to kings and leaders. Scoffing at the symbolism of grandeur, he believed a new world was dawning, where rulers should act and be like ordinary citizens. He was right: A new world, without kings and queens, was certainly on its way. He was profoundly wrong, however, in predicting a change in the dynamics of power.

The bourgeois king's hat and umbrella amused the French at first, but soon grew irritating. People knew that Louis-Philippe was not really like them at all—that the hat and umbrella were essentially a kind of trick to encourage them in the fantasy that the country had suddenly grown more equal. Actually, though, the divisions of wealth had never been greater. The French expected their ruler to be a bit of a showman, to have some presence. Even a radical like Robespierre, who had briefly come to power during the French Revolution fifty years earlier, had understood this, and certainly Napoleon, who had turned the revolutionary republic into an imperial regime, had known it in his bones. Indeed as soon as Louis-Philippe fled the stage, the French revealed their true desire: They elected Napoleon's grand-nephew president. He was a virtual unknown, but they hoped he would re-create the great general's powerful aura, erasing the awkward memory of the "bourgeois king."

Powerful people may be tempted to affect a common-man aura, trying to create the illusion that they and their subjects or underlings are basically the same. But the people whom this false gesture is intended to impress will quickly see through it. They understand that they are not being given more power—that it only *appears* as if they shared in the powerful person's fate. The only kind of common touch that works is the kind affected by Franklin Roosevelt, a style that said the president shared values and goals with the common people even while he remained a patrician at heart. He never pretended to erase his distance from the crowd.

Leaders who try to dissolve that distance through a false chumminess gradually lose the ability to inspire loyalty, fear, or love. Instead they elicit contempt. Like Louis-Philippe, they are too uninspiring even to be worth

the guillotine—the best they can do is simply vanish in the night, as if they were never there.

## OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

When Christopher Columbus was trying to find funding for his legendary voyages, many around him believed he came from the Italian aristocracy. This view was passed into history through a biography written after the explorer's death by his son, which describes him as a descendant of a Count Colombo of the Castle of Cuccaro in Montferrat. Colombo in turn was said to be descended from the legendary Roman general Colonius, and two of his first cousins were supposedly direct descendants of an emperor of Constantinople. An illustrious background indeed. But it was nothing more than illustrious fantasy, for Columbus was actually the son of Domenico Colombo, a humble weaver who had opened a wine shop when Christopher was a young man, and who then made his living by selling cheese.

Columbus himself had created the myth of his noble background, because from early on he felt that destiny had singled him out for great things, and that he had a kind of royalty in his blood. Accordingly he acted as if he were indeed descended from noble stock. After an uneventful career as a merchant on a commercial vessel, Columbus, originally from Genoa, settled in Lisbon. Using the fabricated story of his noble background, he married into an established Lisbon family that had excellent connections with Portuguese royalty.

Through his in-laws, Columbus finagled a meeting with the king of Portugal, João II, whom he petitioned to finance a westward voyage aimed at discovering a shorter route to Asia. In return for announcing that any discoveries he achieved would be made in the king's name, Columbus wanted a series of rights: the title Grand Admiral of the Oceanic Sea; the office of viceroy over any lands he found; and 10 percent of the future commerce with such lands. All of these rights were to be hereditary and for all time. Columbus made these demands even though he had previously been a mere merchant, he knew almost nothing about navigation, he could not work a quadrant, and he had never led a group of men. In short he had absolutely no qualifications for the journey he proposed. Furthermore, his petition included no details as to how he would accomplish his plans, just vague promises.

When Columbus finished his pitch, João II smiled: He politely declined the offer, but left the door open for the future. Here Columbus must have noticed something he would never forget: Even as the king turned down the sailor's demands, he treated them as legitimate. He neither laughed at Columbus nor questioned his background and credentials. In fact the king was impressed by the boldness of Columbus's requests, and clearly felt comfortable in the company of a man who acted so confidently. The meeting must have convinced Columbus that his instincts were correct: By asking for the moon, he had instantly raised his own status, for the king assumed that unless a man who set such a high price on himself were mad, which Columbus did not appear to be, he must somehow be worth it.

### HIPPOCLEIDES AT SICYON

*In the next generation the family became much more famous than before through the distinction conferred upon it by Cleisthenes the master of Sicyon. Cleisthenes... had a daughter, Agarista, whom he wished to marry to the best man in all Greece. So during the Olympic games, in which he had himself won the chariot race, he had a public announcement made, to the effect that any Greek who thought himself good enough to become Cleisthenes' son-in-law should present himself in Sicyon within sixty days—or sooner if he wished—because he intended, within the year following the sixtieth day, to betroth his daughter to her future husband. Cleisthenes had had a race-track and a wrestling-ring specially made for his purpose, and presently the suitors began to arrive—every man of Greek nationality who had something to be proud of either in his country or in himself.... Cleisthenes began by asking each [of the numerous suitors] in turn to name his country and parentage; then he kept them in his house for a year, to get to know them well, entering into conversation with them sometimes singly, sometimes all together, and testing each of them for his manly qualities and temper, education and manners.... But the most important test of all was their behaviour at the dinner-table. All this went on throughout their stay in Sicyon, and all the time he entertained them handsomely. For one reason or another it was the two Athenians who impressed Cleisthenes most favourably, and of the two Tisander's son Hippocleides came to be preferred.... At last the day came which had been fixed for the betrothal, and Cleisthenes had to declare his choice. He marked the day by the sacrifice of*

*a hundred oxen, and then gave a great banquet, to which not only the suitors but everyone of note in Sicyon was invited. When dinner was over, the suitors began to compete with each other in music and in talking in company. In both these accomplishments it was Hippocleides who proved by far the doughtiest champion, until at last, as more and more wine was drunk, he asked the flute-player to play him a tune and began to dance to it. Now it may well be that he danced to his own satisfaction; Cleisthenes, however, who was watching the performance, began to have serious doubts about the whole business. Presently, after a brief pause, Hippocleides sent for a table; the table was brought, and Hippocleides, climbing on to it, danced first some Laconian dances, next some Attic ones, and ended by standing on his head and beating time with his legs in the air. The Laconian and Attic dances were bad enough; but Cleisthenes, though he already loathed the thought of having a son-in-law like that, nevertheless restrained himself and managed to avoid an outburst; but when he saw Hippocleides beating time with his legs, he could bear it no longer. "Son of Tisander," he cried, "you have danced away your marriage."*

THE HISTORIES, HERODOTUS, FIFTH CENTURY B.C.

A few years later Columbus moved to Spain. Using his Portuguese connections, he moved in elevated circles at the Spanish court, receiving subsidies from illustrious financiers and sharing tables with dukes and princes. To all these men he repeated his request for financing for a voyage to the west—and also for the rights he had demanded from João II. Some, such as the powerful duke of Medina, wanted to help, but could not, since they lacked the power to grant him the titles and rights he wanted. But Columbus would not back down. He soon realized that only one person could meet his demands: Queen Isabella. In 1487 he finally managed a meeting with the queen, and although he could not convince her to finance the voyage, he completely charmed her, and became a frequent guest in the palace.

In 1492 the Spanish finally expelled the Moorish invaders who centuries earlier had seized parts of the country. With the wartime burden on her treasury lifted, Isabella felt she could finally respond to the demands of her explorer friend, and she decided to pay for three ships, equipment, the salaries of the crews, and a modest stipend for Columbus. More important, she had a contract drawn up that granted Columbus the titles and rights on which he had insisted. The only one she denied—and only in the contract's



fine print—was the 10 percent of all revenues from any lands discovered: an absurd demand, since he wanted no time limit on it. (Had the clause been left in, it would eventually have made Columbus and his heirs the wealthiest family on the planet. Columbus never read the fine print.)

Satisfied that his demands had been met, Columbus set sail that same year in search of the passage to Asia. (Before he left he was careful to hire the best navigator he could find to help him get there.) The mission failed to find such a passage, yet when Columbus petitioned the queen to finance an even more ambitious voyage the following year, she agreed. By then she had come to see Columbus as destined for great things.

## Interpretation

As an explorer Columbus was mediocre at best. He knew less about the sea than did the average sailor on his ships, could never determine the latitude and longitude of his discoveries, mistook islands for vast continents, and treated his crew badly. But in one area he was a genius: He knew how to sell himself. How else to explain how the son of a cheese vendor, a low-level sea merchant, managed to ingratiate himself with the highest royal and aristocratic families?

Columbus had an amazing power to charm the nobility, and it all came from the way he carried himself. He projected a sense of confidence that was completely out of proportion to his means. Nor was his confidence the aggressive, ugly self-promotion of an upstart—it was a quiet and calm self-assurance. In fact it was the same confidence usually shown by the nobility themselves. The powerful in the old-style aristocracies felt no need to prove or assert themselves; being noble, they knew they always deserved more, and asked for it. With Columbus, then, they felt an instant affinity, for he carried himself just the way they did—elevated above the crowd, destined for greatness.

Understand: It is within your power to set your own price. How you carry yourself reflects what you think of yourself. If you ask for little, shuffle your feet and lower your head, people will assume this reflects your character. But this behavior is not you—it is only how you have chosen to present yourself to other people. You can just as easily present the Columbus front: buoyancy, confidence, and the feeling that you were born to wear a crown.

*With all great deceivers there is a noteworthy occurrence to which they owe their power. In the actual act of deception they are overcome by **belief in themselves**: it is this which then speaks so miraculously and compellingly to those around them.*

*Friedrich Nietzsche, 1844-1900*

## KEYS TO POWER

As children, we start our lives with great exuberance, expecting and demanding everything from the world. This generally carries over into our first forays into society, as we begin our careers. But as we grow older the rebuffs and failures we experience set up boundaries that only get firmer with time. Coming to expect less from the world, we accept limitations that are really self-imposed. We start to bow and scrape and apologize for even the simplest of requests. The solution to such a shrinking of horizons is to deliberately force ourselves in the opposite direction—to downplay the failures and ignore the limitations, to make ourselves demand and expect as much as the child. To accomplish this, we must use a particular strategy upon ourselves. Call it the Strategy of the Crown.

The Strategy of the Crown is based on a simple chain of cause and effect: If we believe we are destined for great things, our belief will radiate outward, just as a crown creates an aura around a king. This outward radiance will infect the people around us, who will think we must have reasons to feel so confident. People who wear crowns seem to feel no inner sense of the limits to what they can ask for or what they can accomplish. This too radiates outward. Limits and boundaries disappear. Use the Strategy of the Crown and you will be surprised how often it bears fruit. Take as an example those happy children who ask for whatever they want, and get it. Their high expectations are their charm. Adults enjoy granting their wishes—just as Isabella enjoyed granting the wishes of Columbus.

Throughout history, people of undistinguished birth—the Theodoras of Byzantium, the Columbuses, the Beethovens, the Disraelis—have managed to work the Strategy of the Crown, believing so firmly in their own greatness that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The trick is simple: Be overcome by your self-belief. Even while you know you are practicing a kind of deception on yourself, act like a king. You are likely to be treated as one.

The crown may separate you from other people, but it is up to you to make that separation real: You have to act differently, demonstrating your distance from those around you. One way to emphasize your difference is to

always act with dignity, no matter the circumstance. Louis-Philippe gave no sense of being different from other people—he was the banker king. And the moment his subjects threatened him, he caved in. Everyone sensed this and pounced. Lacking regal dignity and firmness of purpose, Louis-Philippe seemed an impostor, and the crown was easily toppled from his head.

Regal bearing should not be confused with arrogance. Arrogance may seem the king's entitlement, but in fact it betrays insecurity. It is the very opposite of a royal demeanor.

Haile Selassie, ruler of Ethiopia for forty or so years beginning in 1930, was once a young man named Lij Tafari. He came from a noble family, but there was no real chance of him coming to power, for he was far down the line of succession from the king then on the throne, Menelik II. Nevertheless, from an early age he exhibited a self-confidence and a royal bearing that surprised everyone around him.

At the age of fourteen, Tafari went to live at the court, where he immediately impressed Menelik and became his favorite. Tafari's grace under fire, his patience, and his calm self-assurance fascinated the king. The other young nobles, arrogant, blustery, and envious, would push this slight, bookish teenager around. But he never got angry—that would have been a sign of insecurity, to which he would not stoop. There were already people around him who felt he would someday rise to the top, for he acted as if he were already there.

Years later, in 1936, when the Italian Fascists had taken over Ethiopia and Tafari, now called Haile Selassie, was in exile, he addressed the League of Nations to plead his country's case. The Italians in the audience heckled him with vulgar abuse, but he maintained his dignified pose, as if completely unaffected. This elevated him while making his opponents look even uglier. Dignity, in fact, is invariably the mask to assume under difficult circumstances: It is as if nothing can affect you, and you have all the time in the world to respond. This is an extremely powerful pose.

A royal demeanor has other uses. Con artists have long known the value of an aristocratic front; it either disarms people and makes them less suspicious, or else it intimidates them and puts them on the defensive—and as Count Victor Lustig knew, once you put a sucker on the defensive he is doomed. The con man Yellow Kid Weil, too, would often assume the trappings of a man of wealth, along with the nonchalance that goes with them. Alluding to some magical method of making money, he would stand

aloof, like a king, exuding confidence as if he really were fabulously rich. The suckers would beg to be in on the con, to have a chance at the wealth that he so clearly displayed.

Finally, to reinforce the inner psychological tricks involved in projecting a royal demeanor, there are outward strategies to help you create the effect. First, the Columbus Strategy: Always make a bold demand. Set your price high and do not waver. Second, in a dignified way, go after the highest person in the building. This immediately puts you on the same plane as the chief executive you are attacking. It is the David and Goliath Strategy: By choosing a great opponent, you create the appearance of greatness.

Third, give a gift of some sort to those above you. This is the strategy of those who have a patron: By giving your patron a gift, you are essentially saying that the two of you are equal. It is the old con game of giving so that you can take. When the Renaissance writer Pietro Aretino wanted the Duke of Mantua as his next patron, he knew that if he was slavish and sycophantic, the duke would think him unworthy; so he approached the duke with gifts, in this case paintings by the writer's good friend Titian. Accepting the gifts created a kind of equality between duke and writer: The duke was put at ease by the feeling that he was dealing with a man of his own aristocratic stamp. He funded Aretino generously. The gift strategy is subtle and brilliant because you do not beg: You ask for help in a dignified way that implies equality between two people, one of whom just happens to have more money.

Remember: It is up to you to set your own price. Ask for less and that is just what you will get. Ask for more, however, and you send a signal that you are worth a king's ransom. Even those who turn you down respect you for your confidence, and that respect will eventually pay off in ways you cannot imagine.

Image: The Crown. Place it upon your head and you assume a different pose—tranquil yet radiating assurance. Never show doubt, never lose your dignity beneath the crown, or it will not fit. It will seem to be destined for one more worthy. Do not wait for a coronation; the greatest emperors crown themselves.

Authority: Everyone should be royal after his own fashion. Let all your actions, even though they are not those of a king, be, in their own sphere, worthy of one. Be sublime in your deeds, lofty in your thoughts; and in all your doings show that you deserve to be a king even though you are not one in reality. (Baltasar Gracián, 1601-1658)

## REVERSAL

The idea behind the assumption of regal confidence is to set yourself apart from other people, but if you take this too far it will be your undoing. Never make the mistake of thinking that you elevate yourself by humiliating people. Also, it is never a good idea to loom too high above the crowd—you make an easy target. And there are times when an aristocratic pose is eminently dangerous.

Charles I, king of England during the 1640s, faced a profound public disenchantment with the institution of monarchy. Revolts erupted throughout the country, led by Oliver Cromwell. Had Charles reacted to the times with insight, supporting reforms and making a show of sacrificing some of his power, history might have been different. Instead he reverted to an even more regal pose, seeming outraged by the assault on his power and on the divine institution of monarchy. His stiff kingliness offended people and spurred on their revolts. And eventually Charles lost his head, literally. Understand: You are radiating confidence, not arrogance or disdain.

Finally, it is true that you can sometimes find some power through affecting a kind of earthy vulgarity, which will prove amusing by its extreme-ness. But to the extent that you win this game by going beyond the limits, separating yourself from other people by appearing even more vulgar than they are, the game is dangerous: There will always be people more vulgar than you, and you will easily be replaced the following season by someone younger and worse.