

FORUM

No bull, eliminate the causes and the problem goes away



Nigel Alston
Motivational Moments

"The person who sets the frame of reference will be the one with the most influence."

- Anthony Robbins

It may sound strange, but watching the running of the bulls helped me understand decision making.

An instructor during a recent class called on the plight of those bulls to make us understand the process we should use to solve problems.

You have no doubt witnessed the curious spectacle "Encierro," or the running of the bulls. Each year, thousands of men and women risk life and limb in a dubious race down the streets of Pamplona, Spain.

Their mission is simple - to avoid being gouged to death by the overwrought bulls that are chasing them down the city's winding streets.

If you are like me, you've probably wondered a zillion times: what would possess an adult to try to outrun a pack of angry bulls.

It seems absolutely crazy, not to mention downright foolish.

Watching them is like watching a nightmarish tennis shoe commercial. Instead of graceful

athletes captured in full flight, groups of slow-moving average Joes hustle down the mile-long obstacle course, dodging spectators, bull droppings and the bulls themselves.

Instead of "Just do it," Encierro's slogan should be "Don't do it. Just watch."

Then, the bulls, which for obvious reasons typically make it to the arena unscathed, do battle with nattily dressed toradors, or bullfighters.

Not a particularly good day for the bull. After running a mile, being jeered by leering spectators and doing battle with a much smaller - but heavily armed - enemy the bull is stabbed in the neck and left to bleed to death.

It's a no-win situation for the bull.

If bulls could rationalize their dilemma, they would probably ask the four questions essential to solving problems.

Exactly what is the problem? What are the causes of the problem? What are the possible solutions? What is the best possible solution?

Problem identification is most important. A problem well stated is a problem half-solved. Once it is clearly stated and you gather the facts, you weigh them and then come to a decision.

It was during this discussion that the instructor asked the question: "Which is more serious, to make the wrong decision about the right problem or the right decision about the wrong

problem?" It was the example - the running and fighting of the bulls - he used to illustrate the point that captured my attention.

A bullfight begins in the late afternoon with the bullfighters' team of assistants using large, purple capes to see how the bulls move in the bull ring or the plaza de toros. The promoters understand how to create excitement that leads to the main event.

You can sit back in the arena and watch as lancers on horseback enter the ring and pierce the bull's neck.

Older bullfighters run toward the bull to make it charge. Their job is to insert two decorated, barbed, wooden sticks with spiked ends over the horns into the bull's neck.

This is not a good day to be a bull.

The torador enters the scene. He is dressed elegantly in his Traje de luces - a colorful, sequined suit. In complete control, he exchanges the different capes, purple and yellow - large capes for a smaller cape and curved sword.

He is responsible for the death of the bull.

Sports writers might use any number of terms to describe the details of the event and the various moves the matador uses.

Put yourself in the bull's position.

You are bred from birth to fight. You have the right attitude. You are tough. You have chased young men through the

streets on the way to the arena and you are ready for battle. You are in the best shape of your life and have been conditioned to chase and kill the moving object - the cape.

You don't notice the different colors the matador uses because you are colorblind. All you know is that it moves and you must attack it.

Today has been a pain in the neck and you have two wooden sticks to show for it. There is a sure sign that you will not survive. In the inner arena are horses prepared to quickly remove your body and distribute it for sale in butcher shops in the local market.

You have the right answer - chase after and attack the target - but the wrong problem. You are chasing the cape.

You don't realize that the cape can't hurt you. It's the matador who is the root of the problem. He and his team are the cause of your distress.

Remove them and the problem ceases to exist.

That's the best possible solution, but of course, the bull doesn't realize that.

"We don't solve problems," remarked the instructor. "We eliminate causes and the problem goes away."

Try telling that to the bull.

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Remembering the real Jr.



Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Guest Columnist

"I don't think I've seen as many of you in one place since they announced the results of my first bar exam."

This off-the-cuff quip by John F. Kennedy Jr. was his way of showing his displeasure at the mass media's glutinous feeding frenzy after his failure to pass the New York bar exam in 1989.

Kennedy had spent most of his adult years trying not to indulge the media's lustful attempt to shove down the public's throat the image of him as the "crown prince," "heir to Camelot" and an "American icon."

He thought he had found ways to beat the media's ploy. He quietly became a social and political activist. He warned about the dangers of environmental destruction. He founded Reaching Up, an organization dedicated to assisting poor and developmentally disabled youths through scholarships and grants. He established an educational foundation to bankroll programs to challenge South African apartheid.

He also tutored low-income children, served as a Peace Corp volunteer, founded a politically savvy magazine and founded the Profiles in Courage Award that was given to individuals for their service to humanity. In a back-door rebuke to Hollywood, he said he hoped that one day the ceremony for the award would be as big as the Academy Awards ceremonies.

He wisely resisted the pleas of Democratic Party regulars to

run for an office, any office. He understood that they were more interested in exploiting his name and image than his talents.

The sensible personal decisions he made about his life and his involvement in social and political causes have been drowned out in the ad nauseam deluge of mind-numbing references from the TV network talking heads to him as the most eligible bachelor, gossip about his glamorous wedding, endless tales of his romantic links with Hollywood starlets and dredging up the sordid saga of the drug, alcohol, sex, violence and reckless-living escapades of other Kennedy family members.

These were the same things that the media pounded away on when he was alive.

Kennedy probably wouldn't have been too surprised by the downplaying or flat-out omissions by the TV networks, major news weeklies and newspapers of his significant social and political contributions.

From the start he was ripe for the tabloid pickings. Tabloids decided that the public had an insatiable appetite for every tidbit of rumor and gossip about his and his family's private lives, and that's what the public got.

And why not. The National Enquirer, Star, the Examiner and the other tabloids have successfully parlayed gossip, innuendo, rumor, half-truths and outright lies into hugely profitable empires. They have millions of devoted readers. Their market continues to expand. More people read the tabloids than read the Los Angeles Times, New York Times or Washington Post.

More Americans get their "news" from "Extra" and "Rescue 911" than from the three



A young John F. Kennedy Jr. salutes the casket bearing his father.

major network evening news programs.

But the tabloids exploited the life and now death of JFK Jr. for cash and public titillation. They don't pretend that they are informing or educating the public. The mainstream press does. It kids itself that it is a public-spirited benefactor satisfying the public's seeming bottomless need to know about JFK Jr.

The mass media have honed and refined the technique of icon creation and celebrity image making and enhancement with the O.J. Simpson case, the Monica Lewinsky-Clinton sex frolic and the Princess Di tragedy.

News gathering is, of course, a business and sensational news does sell. TV and magazine advertisers depend on those increased sales to more effectively market their products. Publishers run the stories and the TV networks air the news and features that they think will boost sales and attract greater ad revenue.

The JFK Jr. tragedy is certainly a moving and compelling human interest story. In the coming weeks he will be featured in magazine and newspaper cover story after cover story and TV news clips and specials after news clips and specials.

The political and social contributions JFK Jr. made battling apartheid, homelessness, educational neglect and environmental devastation will be a scant footnote deeply buried beneath "the Kennedy family curse," "heir to Camelot," and "the crown prince" spins.

In 1992 Kennedy told an interviewer that he wanted to create something on his own terms. The ultimate tragedy is that despite his best efforts the media preferred to create him on their own terms.

And it won't stop with his death.

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THE CHRONICLE

The Choice for African American News
USPS 067910
617 N. Liberty Street
Winston-Salem, NC 27101

The Chronicle was established by Ernest Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974, and is published every Thursday by The Chronicle Publishing Co., Inc.

The Chronicle is a proud member of National Newspapers Publishers Association • North Carolina Press Association • North Carolina Black Publishers Association • Inland Press Association

National Advertising Representative:
Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., 45 West 45th Street,
New York, NY 10036 212/869-5220

Postmaster: send address changes to:
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P.O. BOX 1636
Winston-Salem, NC 27102

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