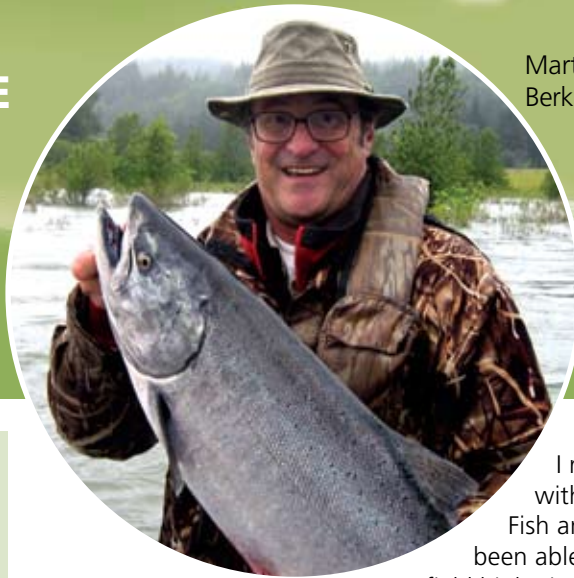


COLUMN: GUEST DIRECTOR'S LINE

Leadership: A Tale of Six Mentors



Jim Martin

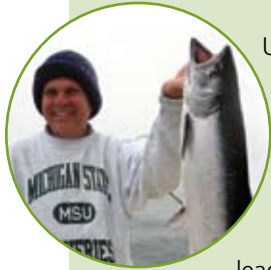
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This paper is the result of extensive discussions with **Bill Taylor, Katie Kahl, Nancy Leonard, and Jordan Burroughs** at Michigan State University regarding the lessons learned by Jim Martin throughout his extensive and colorful career with fishery related state and industry sectors. Jim is an inspirational leader, friend, and mentor to all who have the opportunity to interact with him.

There is no way to adequately replicate in a manuscript the enthusiasm, sincerity, and urgency that Jim personally brings to a conversation about the state of our world's natural resources, the need for fisheries conservation, and the essence of leadership that he says are needed to "move the needle!"

His sentiments on leadership are recorded here in his voice, as a motivating message to everyone from young and aspiring students to mid-career professionals to retired administrators.

You can watch Jim's presentation in video format at www.fw.msu.edu. This is the inaugural speech of an ongoing set of presentations provided under the auspices of the Sustainable Global Fisheries Systems program at Michigan State University.



Nine years ago,

I retired after a 30 year career with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Since then I've been able to reflect on those years as a field biologist, fish researcher, harvest manager, chief of fisheries, and governor's advisor. My reflections have centered on asking, "How much of all that work really mattered?" What portion of my efforts and passion were spent on what someone else saw as the urgent, while the important and meaningful got away from me? (as Stephen Covey would say in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*).

WORK MAGIC

As I think about the best times in my career, they were all spent experiencing an excitement and happiness in my work...times I term "work magic." The rest of the times were just work. There is a dramatic distinction between work magic and just work. The paradox is that in work magic times, I was working harder and longer than any other time in my life, and yet I loved it.

What if we could understand the factors that combine to create work magic and could purposely "dial it in?" Think of the energy and productivity that would result from working in the state of work magic more often than not! There were six periods of my career when I was in the state of work magic. I have pondered what was unique about those times and how can I pass this knowledge to others. The following is my assessment of the key variables needed for work magic.

There are three indispensable components of work magic. First, we must have **meaningful work**. We all get into resource conservation to make a difference in those parts of nature that capture our imagination and our passion. Somewhere along the line though, we find ourselves buried in the bureaucracy of government, non-profit, or private organizations. Think of the work you have done over the last six months...over the last five years...over your career. Can you say that you are making a difference for the environment and the conservationists who love and interact with nature?

In order to be in the state of work magic, we need to be able to see a direct link between our day-to-day efforts and the resource. Are we "moving the needle" towards sustainable resource use? Are we making a difference in peoples' lives and in the environment? If not, why not? Isn't this why we got into this field to begin with?!

The second component of work magic is **fun**. Not fun that accidentally breaks out and is quickly suppressed like a wildfire, but fun that is on purpose. This is fun that is planned as a daily part of the work we do. When was the last time you belly laughed and had fun at work...on purpose? For some, probably most, of us it has been quite a while.

The third component of work magic is **great leadership**. Find a team of maniacs, working like crazy on a resource issue, and at the center you will find an inspirational leader. This leader believes in the cause with all of his/her

heart and soul and connects with and ties together each member of the team. Leaders wear passion for their work like a name badge.

LEADERSHIP IS THE KEY

What are the characteristics of great leaders? Are they made or born or some combination of both? Consider for a moment the person who comes to mind as the great leader, the great mentor, of your life and what characteristics they exhibit. We will come back to that person later in this essay.

In my life, I have had six great mentors who showed me all I know about leadership. These are people that created defining periods of work magic in my career. Each has a different personality and each taught me a different lesson of great leadership.

In 1969, I graduated with my bachelor's degree in wild-life management from Oregon State University and went to work on the lower Rogue River for one of the great leaders of my life, **Fred Everest**. He was leading the research crew in southern Oregon, studying the famous summer steelhead of the Rogue River. The work was setting a seine, capturing fish, sampling and tagging them, and releasing them to continue their migration up the Rogue. The work was hot, long, and exhausting. We would set the seine time after time hoping to capture the migrating fish and attach the tags that would decipher the code of their life history, migration timing, and habitat requirements so we could ensure their sustainable management in the years to come.

From this work with Fred, I learned the first lesson of great leadership:

There is no substitute for enthusiasm!

We worked until we were so tired that we could hardly stand and then Fred would want to set the net once again. We would work past quitting time, because he saw fish breaking the riffle and entering our sampling area, his enthusiasm so great for learning about these fish...and it never occurred to him that we would not set the net again. We always followed him because he was first on the boat, first grabbing the net line and first to start sampling the fish—who were we to let him down? Enthusiasm fuels the team when the equipment breaks, the weather turns sour, and the days are long.

In 1972, I went to work for **Jim Lichatowich**, the second great mentor in my career. Jim was leading a team to evaluate the impacts of a series of hydropower dams on the Rogue River fishery. Jim had a more reserved personality than Fred Everest but he demonstrated a questioning and keenly insightful mind. He taught us, by his example, the second key principle of great leadership:

Think about the problem, before rushing to a solution.

So often, because we are scientists, we treat every resource problem as a scientific problem. We rush to solution and can't understand why the political system and society in general doesn't respond immediately to our recommendations. Sometimes the problem is economic or political rather than just biological. The reality is that economics always

trumps science and politics always trumps both. Some are discouraged by this message until they realize that their science can emphasize economics and change the politics by influencing public opinion. This communication is at the heart of making a difference.

By his example, and in his book *Salmon Without Rivers*, Jim taught me the importance of taking time to understand the historical trajectory of a problem and its context in the landscape (Lichatowich 2001). Only then can you really contribute to a solution in a meaningful manner and timeframe. Every problem has a "here and now" component and is also affected by things that happened a long time ago and a long way away from here. Taking the time to consider the nature of the problem is a trait that Jim Lichatowich exemplified.

In 1975, I returned to Oregon State University to seek a master's degree in fisheries, and went to work for the third of my great mentors, **Carl Shreck**. Carl led the Oregon Cooperative Fishery Research Unit at OSU and every one of his students held him in high regard.

At that time, the rage on campus was "critical thinking" and many used that mantra as an excuse to show how smart they were by criticizing to the extreme everything and everyone. "We are smart and they are dumb and we know that because of our critical thinking"...sound familiar? Have we heard a lot of that in our place of work, in our personal life? Did it build energy or drain it? Did it contribute to solutions or add to the problems?

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Carl Schreck rejected that attitude and instead pointed out that all that unnecessary “bad mouthing” will come back to haunt people who work in a small world, where “what goes around comes around.” He knew that hurt feelings create long-term, deep-seated animosities that get in the way of teamwork needed for enhancing resource management. Negative attitudes rarely lead to progress in conservation. Carl led by example through rarely expressing negative feelings towards other professionals. He set a positive attitude and demonstrated that:

Positive demeanor is the key to positive energy in the workplace.

A focus on ideas over personalities is a critical component of great leadership.

In 1982, I went to work for **Harry Wagner**, chief of fisheries for Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). We were in the middle of the political tornado known as the “Salmon Wars.” In 1977, the North Pacific Ocean had changed regimes and ocean survival for many salmon stocks had plummeted to all time lows. Ocean survival for Oregon coho salmon dropped from 16% to 1.6%! In essence the resource had collapsed, necessitating the department to either close or severely reduce ocean fisheries in an effort to maintain spawning numbers. We, as fisheries biologists, didn’t know what had happened. An unexplained change in population numbers had occurred and demanded conservation action...right now! We did not think of anything but the fish populations whose demise seemed near.

The political controversy over our biologically-based decisions was vicious. The department was accused of everything from incompetence to graft. Stupid was the nicest thing said and it went downhill from there...and it got nasty and personal.

In the middle of the controversy, Harry Wagner would tell us,

The test of a professional is not what your supporters think of you... it is what your opponents think of you.

Harry Wagner was the consummate gentleman, professional, and scientist. He never spoke down to anyone. He was patient, empathetic, and courteous. When he had bad news to deliver, he went out of his way to go to the opponent’s place of work and deliver the news with respect and courtesy, no matter how he was treated. He never lost his sense of professionalism and his calm demeanor. Years later, when I was chief of fisheries with plenty of controversy swirling about the decision we made, I remembered Harry Wagner’s quiet and kind example of how to work with people under pressure.

When Harry retired, people from all walks of life came to speak well of him. Many disagreed with Harry but no one ever was treated disrespectfully and everyone remembered it all their lives. Harry Wagner was the consummate chief of fisheries and a great mentor to many.

During this same time, Harry and I worked for one of the greatest directors of ODFW, **Jack Donaldson**. He was the director during the Salmon Wars. We all loved and

respected Jack for the scientist, resource manager, and kind person that he was. During this very difficult time in the agency’s history, Jack was viciously attacked by fishermen, politicians, and the media. He was accused of selling out the fishermen and the resource, while all the time trying to protect both for the future.

One time, Jack was the subject of a major public demonstration where fishermen burned him and our governor in effigy on a burning commercial fishing boat. The media covered this demonstration widely and the accusations were extraordinarily nasty, brutal, and unfair, both professionally and personally. The department staff was furious and wanted to launch a media counterattack. Jack called us together and waited for us to quiet down. He then began to describe how it must feel if all you knew was fishing on the ocean...risking your life to provide food and income...your only security was your boat...which was now worthless because the season was shut down. What if we had no salary or retirement benefits, he asked. How would we explain to our families that the boat was worthless, the season was shut down, and no one could explain exactly why or for how long? The quiet in the room was deafening! Then he explained something I have never forgotten,

They are mad as hell because they are scared to death!

Years later, when I was chief of fisheries and facing a mad crowd, anger seething from their bodies, I saw scared people and tried to empathize with them. I attempted to treat them with the same respect as Jack Donaldson and Harry Wagner would have.

In 1996, after six exhausting years as chief of fisheries at ODFW, I was offered the opportunity to work with **John Kitzhaber**, the then newly elected governor of Oregon. In spite of my built-in disdain at that time for any politician, I went to work for a person who turned out to be one of the great leaders and mentors of my life. As a biologist, I would have never predicted it!

Oregon stocks of coho salmon had been proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act and Governor Kitzhaber wanted to avoid the social, political, and biological gridlock that had accompanied the listing of the northern spotted owl in the Pacific Northwest a decade earlier. We thus launched the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, a state-based recovery strategy for fish and water quality in Oregon (OCSRI 1997). The plan continues to this day.

I learned a huge lesson about leadership one day at Governor Kitzhaber’s staff meeting. While the governor was enthusiastically describing his vision for the state’s education plan to his team, he was interrupted by his chief of staff, announcing that U.S. President Bill Clinton was on the telephone wishing to speak to him. We were so impressed that the president of the United States would call our governor. The governor got a pained expression...thought a moment...and told the chief of staff to tell President Clinton that *he would call him back!* We were flabbergasted and speechless. In that moment, I thought, “He just told us we were more important to him

than the president of the United States...now, which of us is ever going to disappoint this person?!"

The leadership lesson of that moment was that:

People are not really motivated by money, power, or fear of a bad performance appraisal—they are motivated to never disappoint someone they respect and love.

When we treat people with that respect, they will never forget the moment and will damn near die to avoid disappointing that kind of leader and mentor. To this day, former Oregon staff members speak of that day and their love and respect for former Governor John Kitzhaber.

YOUR GREAT MENTOR... HAVE YOU SAID THANKS?

Consider the person that I asked you to picture as the great leader or mentor of your life. It might be a parent, a boss, a teacher, or a major professor. Have you thanked them? Don't wait until it's too late. Tell them now, not at their funeral. Don't wait for everyone to be gathered around, telling stories of the dead leader with you kicking yourself for missing the opportunity to say thank you. Find them now. Track them down. Tell them what they have meant to you and you will not believe the look in their eyes and the feeling in your heart.

There is one other way to say thank you—consider how you are leading and mentoring as you pass it on. We are all leaders in our workplace, in our family, in our community. What kind of leader are you? Do you think about your leadership qualities daily? Would your mentor be proud? There is still time to make a difference, to make your mentor proud, and make the world a better place in which to live.

YOUR WORK, YOUR PASSION AND YOUR CAREER... IS IT MAGIC?

We are all responsible for our careers and how we use our energy, our time, and our passion. Think back over

the last six months. Are you in work magic? Are you doing meaningful work that will matter when you look back on your career at your retirement? Are you belly laughing enough and are you having fun? Are you working for an inspirational mentor? If not, why not?

The difference between a manager and a leader is that the manager does things right (correctly) and a leader does the right things. Most of us are competent enough that we will do a fair-to-good job of what we choose to do. The key is whether we choose to work on the meaningful things that will matter and make the difference in the long run for the resource and for people. The most important decisions we make in our careers are what we will work on, what we will pass on, and the team we will work with. All the rest are relatively small details in the scheme of life.

When I retired nine years ago, I made two promises to myself. First, that I would do the best conservation work of my life in the next 20 years...I consider my first 30 years at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as my "undergraduate" work. Secondly, if the opportunities presented aren't both meaningful and fun, I will not do it. I will not give my remaining energy and passion to tiresome and trivial issues—don't have to, and damn well won't!

You *deserve* work magic. If you have already had it, you want and need more; it's addictive. If you haven't had it yet, keep looking. You won't forget it all your life and you will make the difference for the resource and it will provide you with the growth opportunities and fulfillment you deserve.

Take responsibility...work magic...go get it! ⚡

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—Referring to internal anchor tags, Henderson-Arzapalo et al., 1998, *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*, Vol.19, No.2, pp 482-493.

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