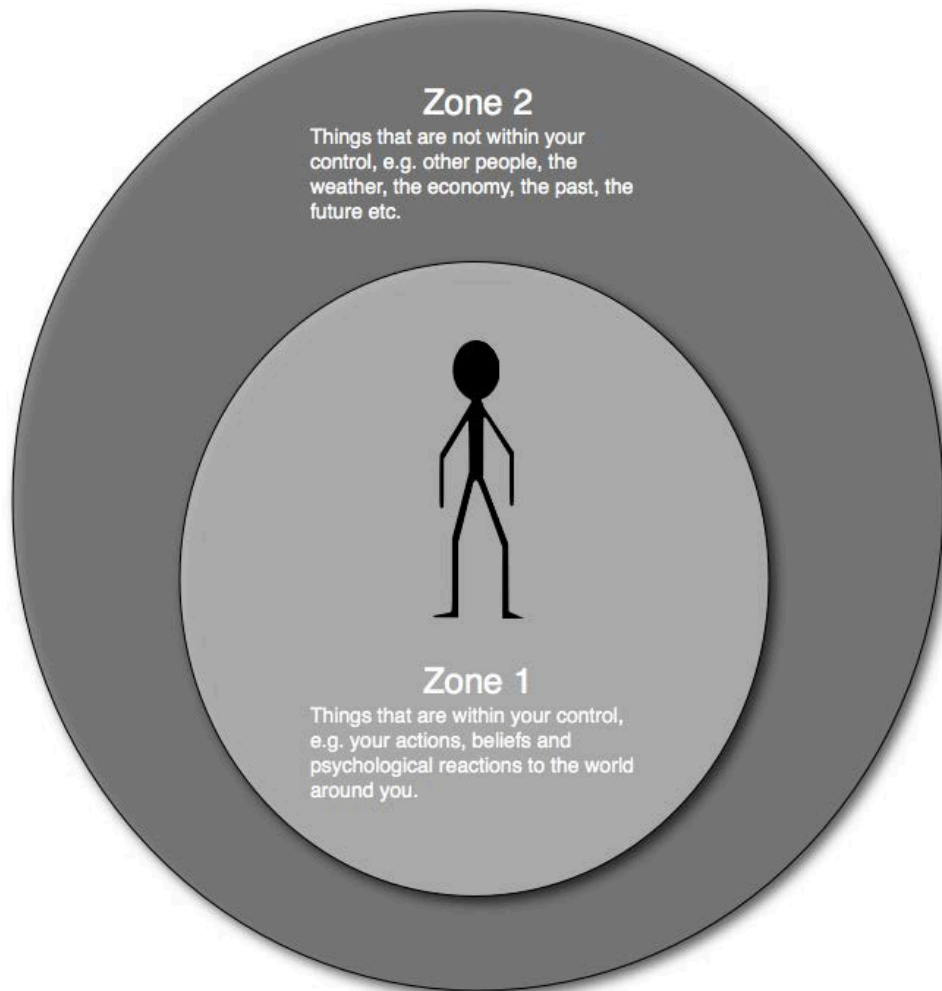


The Stoic Way of Leadership

Dialogues with an Ancient Philosopher and a Roman Emperor

David Langiulli



Introduction

This work is a tribute to my father, **Nino Langiulli** (1932AD – 2017AD). He liked to describe himself as Stoic by philosophy and Catholic by religion. His life was infused by teachings from both traditions. In the Stoic philosophical tradition, he was well acquainted with the work of the Greek philosopher **Epictetus** (including the *Enchiridion*) and the life of the Roman Emperor **Marcus Aurelius** as it was expressed in his *Meditations*.

My father's funeral mass card quoted from his commentary on modern times, *Brooklyn Existentialism*. It read:

“The purpose of education in a free society is the formation of persons capable of responsible self-determination, ones who know what to resist as well as what to pursue. There is so little time in our finite lives that we ought not to waste it on bad ideas.”

This pithy excerpt from Pop's book is nearly a perfect expression of his brand of stoic philosophy which was put forward earlier by Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. It was certainly one expression of the way he lived his life as influenced by these men:

Epictetus (55AD - 135 AD) was a Greek Stoic philosopher. He was born a slave at Hierapolis, Phrygia (present day Pamukkale, Turkey) and lived in Rome until his banishment, when he went to Nicopolis in northwestern Greece for the remainder of his life. His teachings were written down and published by his pupil Arrian in his *Discourses* and *Enchiridion*. Epictetus taught that philosophy is a way of life and not just a theoretical discipline.

Marcus Aurelius (121AD - 180 AD) was the Emperor of Rome during the 2nd Century AD. The philosophy of Epictetus was certainly an influence on the Roman Emperor whose reign was marked by wars with the resurgent Parthia in western Asia and against the Germanic tribes in Europe. Aurelius quotes from Epictetus repeatedly in his work, *Meditations*, written during his campaigns in central Europe.

In the dialogues that follow I engage Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius in a series of questions about leading and living life in the modern era. I was curious to explore how they (an Ancient Philosopher and a Roman Emperor) would respond from their stoic perspective. The questions are mine, and their responses are from the *Enchiridion* and the *Meditations*.

My name is [David Langiulli](#). I was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1963AD. Like my father before me, I'm a Catholic by religion. However, unlike him, I tend to be more influenced by Buddhist philosophy, which is similar in many ways to the Stoic tradition.

I am also an experienced leader, fundraiser, trainer and certified professional coach who specializes in non-profit leadership development. As an [executive coach](#), I help nonprofit leaders clarify what is essential and important so they can effectively lead their teams, and achieve results for their organizations. In addition to my coaching work, I facilitate a

number of [online courses](#), onsite workshops, and retreats for leaders interested in professional as well as personal advancement, growth, and development.

My professional background spans both the nonprofit and corporate sectors for over three decades. In the nonprofit world, I successfully served in positions of progressive responsibility in fundraising and technology transfer/licensing. In the corporate sector, I led market research, product development, sales, and marketing initiatives. Prior to launching my training and coaching practice, I led a fundraising team of ten professionals at Princeton University that was responsible for \$35million in annual support for the University's mission. Before this, I served as the Director of Development for Stony Brook University's College of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

In the corporate sector, my experience culminated in reorganizing, invigorating, and transforming the licensing division of an early-stage product development company in San Francisco. In that role, I built and led a team of three dozen individuals that included researchers, artists, engineers, and product managers.

I co-publish the [Fundraising Leadership Blog](#) and [Podcast](#) for nonprofit professionals interested in fundraising, leadership, and management. I'm also the author of [The Essential Leadership Guide for Nonprofit Professionals](#). Some of my own philosophy and approach to working with leaders is expressed in my blog posts and eBook.

I hold a master's degree in management and business administration from Stony Brook University, a master's degree in materials science from Columbia University, and a bachelor's degree in physics-engineering and mathematics from Washington and Lee University.

I am retired from my mountaineering avocation, after having scaled peaks across North America and Europe. I am now practicing to become proficient in the martial art of Jiu-Jitsu. Like the founding fathers of the United States of America, I value life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As a volunteer, I coach youth classes at my Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Academy and serve on the Board of Directors for the Collier-Lee Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Through my father I was influenced by the philosophy of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. I dedicate this eBook to all leaders who want to educate themselves in order to be "persons capable of self-determination in a free society."

If after reading this eBook you want to share any insights or inspiration, feel free to write to me at David@FundraisingLeadership.org. I promise to respond.

Also, you can follow me on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/in/langiulli), where I regularly post on topics related to leadership, management, and from time-to-time philosophy.

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I. People and Circumstances

David Langiulli: “I find myself frequently frustrated by what other people do, and when things don’t go my way. Do you have any advice?”

Epictetus: “There are things which are within our power, and there are things which are beyond our power. Within our power are opinion, aim, desire, aversion, and, in one-word, whatever affairs are our own. Beyond our power are body, property, reputation, office, and, in one word, whatever are not properly our own affairs.

Now the things within our power are by nature free, unrestricted, unhindered; but those beyond our power are weak, dependent, restricted, alien. Remember, then, that if you attribute freedom to things by nature dependent and take what belongs to others for your own, you will be hindered, you will lament, you will be disturbed, you will find fault both with gods and men. But if you take for your own only that which is your own and view what belongs to others just as it really is, then no one will ever compel you, no one will restrict you; you will find fault with no one, you will accuse no one, you will do nothing against your will; no one will hurt you, you will not have an enemy, nor will you suffer any harm.

Seek at once, therefore, to be able to say to every unpleasing semblance, ‘You are but a semblance and by no means the real thing.’ And then examine it by those rules which you have; and first and chiefly by this: whether it concerns the things which are within our own power or those which are not; and if it concerns anything beyond our power, be prepared to say that it is nothing to you.

Demand not that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will go on well.

Upon every circumstance, remember to turn toward yourself and inquire what faculty you have for its use. If you encounter a handsome person, you will find continence the faculty needed; if pain, then fortitude; if reviling, then patience. And when thus habituated, the phenomena of existence will not overwhelm you.

Remember that you are an actor in a drama of such sort as the Author chooses—if short, then in a short one; if long, then in a long one. If it be his pleasure that you should enact a poor man, or a cripple, or a ruler, or a private citizen, see that you act it well. For this is your business—to act well the given part, but to choose it belongs to another.

Remember that desire demands the attainment of that of which you are desirous; and aversion demands the avoidance of that to which you are averse; that he who fails of the object of his desires is disappointed; and he who incurs the object of his aversion is wretched. If, then, you shun only those undesirable things which you can control, you will never incur anything which you shun; but if you shun sickness,

or death, or poverty, you will run the risk of wretchedness. Remove [the habit of] aversion, then, from all things that are not within our power, and apply it to things undesirable which are within our power. But for the present, altogether restrain desire; for if you desire any of the things not within our own power, you must necessarily be disappointed; and you are not yet secure of those which are within our power, and so are legitimate objects of desire. Where it is practically necessary for you to pursue or avoid anything, do even this with discretion and gentleness and moderation.”

Marcus Aurelius: “Say this to yourself in the morning: Today I shall have to do with meddlers, with the ungrateful, with the insolent, with the crafty, with the envious and the selfish. All these vices have beset them because they know not what is good and what is evil. But I have considered the nature of the good, and found it beautiful: I have beheld the nature of the bad and found it ugly. I also understand the nature of the evil-doer and know that he is my brother, not because he shares with me the same blood or the same seed, but because he is a partaker of the same mind and of the same portion of immortality. I, therefore, cannot be hurt by any of these, since none of them can involve me in any baseness. I cannot be angry with my brother, or sever myself from him, for we are made by nature for mutual assistance, like the feet, the hands, the eyelids, the upper and lower rows of teeth. It is against nature for men to oppose each other; and what else is anger and aversion?”

“All that happens, happens right: you will find it so if you observe narrowly. I mean not only according to a natural order, but according to our idea of justice, and, as it were, by the action of one who distributes according to merit. Go on then observing this as you have begun, and whatever you do, let your aim be goodness, goodness as it is rightly understood. Hold to this in every action.”

“Wretched am I, says one, that this has befallen me. Nay, say you, happy am I who, though this has befallen me, can still remain without sorrow, neither broken by the present nor dreading the future. The like might have befallen any one; but everyone would not have endured it unpaired.”

“Remember, therefore, for the future, upon all occasions of sorrow, to use the maxim: this thing is not misfortune, but to bear it bravely is good fortune.”

“How ridiculous, and how like a foreigner, is he who is surprised at anything which happens in life!”

“When you fret at anything, you have forgotten that all happens in accordance with the nature of the Universe and that the wrong done was another's. This, too, that whatever happens has happened, and will happen, and is now happening everywhere. You have also forgotten how great is the bond between any man and all the human race, a bond not of blood and seed, but of common intelligence. You have forgotten that the intelligence of every man is divine, and an efflux from God;

also that no man is proprietor of anything: his children, his body, his very life are given of God. You have forgotten, too, that everything is a matter of opinion; and that it is the present moment only that one can live or lose.”

David Langiulli: “How would you recommend I engage with other people?”

Epictetus: “Begin by prescribing to yourself some character and demeanor, such as you may preserve both alone and in company.”

“Be mostly silent, or speak merely what is needful, and in few words. We may, however, enter sparingly into discourse sometimes, when occasion calls for it; but let it not run on any of the common subjects, as gladiators, or horse races, or athletic champions, or food, or drink—the vulgar topics of conversation—and especially not on men, so as either to blame, or praise, or make comparisons. If you are able, then, by your own conversation, bring over that of your company to proper subjects; but if you happen to find yourself among strangers, be silent.”

“Let not your laughter be loud, frequent, or abundant.”

“Avoid taking oaths, if possible, altogether; at any rate, so far as you are able.”

“Before marriage guard yourself with all your ability from unlawful intercourse with women; yet be not uncharitable or severe to those who are led into this, nor boast frequently that you yourself do otherwise.”

“It is not necessary for you to appear often at public spectacles; but if ever there is a proper occasion for you to be there, do not appear more solicitous for any other than for yourself—that is, wish things to be only just as they are, and only the best man to win; for thus nothing will go against you. But abstain entirely from acclamations and derision and violent emotions. And when you come away, do not discourse a great deal on what has passed and what contributes nothing to your own amendment. For it would appear by such discourse that you were dazzled by the show.”

“Be not prompt or ready to attend private recitations; but if you do attend, preserve your gravity and dignity, and yet avoid making yourself disagreeable.”

“When you are going to confer with anyone, and especially with one who seems your superior, represent to yourself how Socrates or Zeno would behave in such a case, and you will not be at a loss to meet properly whatever may occur.”

“When you are going before anyone in power, fancy to yourself that you may not find him at home, that you may be shut out, that the doors may not be opened to you, that he may not notice you. If, with all this, it be your duty to go, bear what happens and never say to yourself, ‘It was not worth so much’; for this is vulgar, and like a man bewildered by externals.”

“In company, avoid a frequent and excessive mention of your own actions and dangers. For however agreeable it may be to yourself to allude to the risks you have run, it is not equally agreeable to others to hear your adventures. Avoid likewise an endeavor to excite laughter, for this may readily slide you into vulgarity, and, besides, may be apt to lower you in the esteem of your acquaintance. Approaches to indecent discourse are likewise dangerous. Therefore, when anything of this sort happens, use the first fit opportunity to rebuke him who makes advances that way, or, at least, by silence and blushing and a serious look show yourself to be displeased by such talk.”

Marcus Aurelius: “Are you angry with one whose armpits smell or whose breath is foul? What is the use? His mouth or his arm-pits are so, and the consequence must follow. But, you say, man is a reasonable being, and could by attention discern in what he offends. Very well, you too have reason. Use your reason to move him; instruct, admonish him. If he listens, you will cure him, and there will be no reason for anger. You are neither actor nor harlot.”

“In the gymnasium, if someone scratches us with his nails, or in a sudden onset bruises our head, we express no resentment; we are not offended; nor do we suspect him for the future as one who is plotting against us. We are on our guard against him, it is true, but not as against an enemy or a suspected person. In all good humor we simply keep out of his way. Let us thus behave in other affairs of life, and overlook the many injuries which are done to us, as it were, by our antagonists in the gymnasium of the world. As I said, we may keep out of their way, but without suspicion or hatred.”

David Langiulli: “What if other people slander me, or speak disparagingly of me to others?”

Marcus Aurelius: “Whenever someone offends you, consider straightway how he has erred in his conceptions of good or evil. When you see where his error lies you will pity him, and be neither surprised nor angry. Indeed, you yourself perhaps still wrongly count good the same things as he does, or things just like them. Your duty then is to forgive. And, if you cease from these false ideas of good and bad, you will find it the easier to grant indulgence to him who is still mistaken.”

“Think not as your insulter judges or wishes you to judge: but see things as they truly are.”

Epictetus: “When any person does ill by you, or speaks ill of you, remember that he acts or speaks from an impression that it is right for him to do so. Now it is not possible that he should follow what appears right to you, but only what appears so to himself. Therefore, if he judges from false appearances, he is the person hurt, since he, too, is the person deceived. For if anyone takes a true proposition to be false, the proposition is not hurt, but only the man is deceived. Setting out, then,

from these principles, you will meekly bear with a person who reviles you, for you will say upon every occasion, ‘It seemed so to him.’

“Remember that it is not he who gives abuse or blows, who affronts, but the view we take of these things as insulting. When, therefore, anyone provokes you, be assured that it is your own opinion which provokes you. Try, therefore, in the first place, not to be bewildered by appearances. For if you once gain time and respite, you will more easily command yourself.”

“If anyone tells you that a certain person speaks ill of you, do not make excuses about what is said of you, but answer: ‘He was ignorant of my other faults, else he would not have mentioned these alone.’”

David Langiulli: “I was passed over for a promotion that I deserved. How should I respond or react?”

Epictetus: “Is anyone preferred before you at an entertainment, or in courtesies, or in confidential intercourse? If these things are good, you ought to rejoice that he has them; and if they are evil, do not be grieved that you have them not. And remember that you cannot be permitted to rival others in externals without using the same means to obtain them. For how can he who will not haunt the door of any man, will not attend him, will not praise him, have an equal share with him who does these things? You are unjust, then, and unreasonable if you are unwilling to pay the price for which these things are sold, and would have them for nothing. For how much are lettuces sold? An obulus, for instance. If another, then, paying an obulus, takes the lettuces, and you, not paying it, go without them, do not imagine that he has gained any advantage over you. For as he has the lettuces, so you have the obulus which you did not give. So, in the present case, you have not been invited to such a person’s entertainment because you have not paid him the price for which a supper is sold. It is sold for praise; it is sold for attendance. Give him, then, the value if it be for your advantage. But if you would at the same time not pay the one, and yet receive the other, you are unreasonable and foolish. Have you nothing, then, in place of the supper? Yes, indeed, you have—not to praise him whom you do not like to praise; not to bear the insolence of his lackeys.”

David Langiulli: “I did a favor for a colleague and he did not reciprocate.”

Marcus Aurelius: Some men, when they have done you a favor, are very ready to reckon up the obligation they have conferred. Others, again, are not so forward in their claims, but yet in their minds consider you their debtor, and well know the value of what they have done. A third sort seem to be unconscious of their service. They are like the vine, which produces its clusters and is satisfied when it has yielded its proper fruit. The horse when he has run his course, the hound when he has followed the track, the bee when it has made its honey, and the man when he has done good to others, make no noisy boast of it, but set out to do the same once more, as the vine in its season produces its new clusters again. Should we, then, be

among those who in a manner know not what they do? Assuredly. But this very thing implies intelligence; for it is a property of the unselfish man to perceive that he is acting unselfishly, and, surely, to wish his fellow also to perceive it. True, but if you misapprehend my saying, you will enter the ranks of those of whom I spoke before. They, too, are led astray by specious reasonings. But if you have the will to understand what my principle truly means, fear not that in following it you will neglect the duty of unselfishness.”

II. Purpose, Motivation, and Urgency

David Langiulli: “How does one discover or know his or her purpose in life?”

Marcus Aurelius: “This, I think: in all things to act, or to restrain yourself from action, as best suits the particular structure of your nature. This is the end of all arts and studies, for every art aims at making what it produces well adapted to the work for which it was designed. The gardener, the vine-dresser, the horse-breaker, the dog-trainer all try for this; and what else is the aim of all education and teaching? Here, then, is what you may truly value: this well won, you will seek for nothing more. Will you, then, cease valuing the multitude of other things? If you do not, you will never attain to freedom, self-sufficiency, or tranquility. You cannot escape envying, suspecting, and striving against those who have the power to deprive you of your cherished objects, nor plotting against men who are in possession of that on which you set your heart. The man who lacks any of these things must, of necessity, be distracted, and be forever complaining against the gods. But reverence and respect for your own intelligence will bring you to agreement with yourself, into concord with mankind, and into harmony with the gods, whom you will praise for all their good gifts and guidance.”

“Adapt yourself to the things which your destiny has given you: love those with whom it is your lot to live, and love them with sincere affection.”

“Is my understanding sufficient for this business or not? If it be sufficient, I use it for the work in hand as an instrument given to me by nature. If it be not sufficient, I either give place to one better fitted for the achievement, or, if for some reason this be not a proper course, I do it as best I can, taking the aid of those who, by directing my mind, can accomplish something fit and serviceable for the common good. For all that I do, whether by myself or with the help of others, should be directed solely towards what is fit and useful for the public service.”

“He whose aim in life is not always one and the same cannot himself be one and the same through his whole life. But singleness of aim is not sufficient, unless you consider also what that aim ought to be. For, as there is not agreement of opinion regarding all those things which are reckoned good by the majority, but only as regards some of them such as are of public utility; so your aim should be social and political. For he alone who directs all his personal aims to such an end can reach a uniform course of conduct, and thus be ever the same man.”

Epictetus: “Consider who you are. In the first place, you are a man; and this is one who has nothing superior to the faculty of the will, but all other things subjected to it; and the faculty itself he possesses unenslaved and free from subjection. Consider then from what things you have been separated by reason. You have been separated from wild beasts: you have been separated from domestic animals. Further, you are a citizen of the world, and a part of it, not one of the subservient, but one of the principal parts, for you are capable of comprehending the divine administration and

of considering the connection of things. What then does the character of a citizen promise? To hold nothing as profitable to himself; to deliberate about nothing as if he were detached from the community, but to act as the hand or foot would do, if they had reason and understood the constitution of nature, for they would never put themselves in motion nor desire anything, otherwise than with reference to the whole. Therefore the philosophers say well, that if the good man had foreknowledge of what would happen, he would cooperate toward his own sickness and death and mutilation, since he knows that these things are assigned to him according to the universal arrangement, and that the whole is superior to the part and the state to the citizen. But now, because we do not know the future, it is our duty to stick to the things which are in their nature more suitable for our choice, for we were made among other things for this.”

“After this, remember that you are a son. What does this character promise? To consider that everything which is the son's belongs to the father, to obey him in all things, never to blame him to another, nor to say or do anything which does him injury, to yield to him in all things and give way, cooperating with him as far as you can. After this know that you are a brother also, and that to this character it is due to make concessions; to be easily persuaded, to speak good of your brother, never to claim in opposition to him any of the things which are independent of the will, but readily to give them up, that you may have the larger share in what is dependent on the will. For see what a thing it is, in place of a lettuce, if it should so happen, or a seat, to gain for yourself goodness of disposition. How great is the advantage?”

“Next to this, if you are senator of any state, remember that you are a senator: if a youth, that you are a youth: if an old man, that you are an old man; for each of such names, if it comes to be examined, marks out the proper duties.”

David Langiulli: “How can I motivate myself to work when I feel stuck?”

Marus Aurelius: “In the morning, when you find yourself unwilling to rise, have this thought at hand: I arise to the proper business of man, and shall I repine at setting about that work for which I was born and brought into the world? Am I equipped for nothing but to lie among the bed-clothes and keep warm? But, you say, it is more pleasant so. Is pleasure, then, the object of your being, and not action, and the exercise of your powers? Do you not see the smallest plants, the little sparrows, the ants, the spiders, the bees, all doing their part, and working for order in the Universe, as far as in them lies? And will you refuse the part in this design which is laid on man? Will you not pursue the course which accords with your own nature? You say, I must have rest. Assuredly; but nature appoints a measure for rest, just as for eating and drinking. In rest you go beyond these limits, and beyond what is enough; but in action you do not fill the measure, and remain well within your powers. You do not love yourself; if you did, you would love your nature and its purpose. Others, who love the art that they have made their own, exhaust themselves with laboring at it unwashed and unfed. But you honor your own nature

less than the carver honours his carving, less than the dancer honours his dancing, the miser his gold, or the vain man his empty fame. These men, when desire takes them, count food and sleep well lost if they can better realize the object of their longings; and shall the pursuit of the common good seem less precious in your eyes and worthy of a lesser zeal?”

“Act the part which is worthy of you, regarding not whether you be stiff with cold or comfortably warm; whether you be drowsy or refreshed with sleep; whether you be in good report or bad; whether you be dying or upon some other business.”

David Langiulli: “I’ve been a bit restless in my professional life.”

Marcus Aurelius: “Cease your wandering, for you are not like to read again your own memoirs, or the deeds of the ancient Greeks and Romans, or those collections from the writings of others that you laid up for your old age. Hasten then to your proper end. Fling away vain hopes, and, if you have any care for yourself, fly to your own succor while yet you may.”

“Love the art which you have learned, humble though it be, and in it find your recreation.”

David Langiulli: “Why do today that which can be put off ‘til tomorrow?”

Marcus Aurelius: “Order not your life as though you had ten thousand years to live. Fate hangs over you.”

“Man must consider, not only that each day part of his life is spent, and that less and less remains to him, but also that, even if he live longer, it is very uncertain whether his intelligence will suffice as heretofore for the understanding of his affairs, and for grasping that knowledge which aims at comprehending things human and divine. When dotage begins, breath, nourishment, fancy, impulse, and so forth will not fail him. But self-command, accurate appreciation of duty, power to scrutinize what strikes his senses, or even to decide whether he should take his departure, all powers, indeed, which demand a well-trained understanding, must be extinguished in him. Let him be up and doing then, not only because death comes nearer every day, but because understanding and intelligence often leave us before we die.”

“If some God were to inform you that you must die tomorrow, or the next day at farthest, you would take little concern whether it was to be tomorrow or the next day; that is if you were not the most miserable of cowards. For how small is the difference? Wherefore, account it of no great moment whether you die after many years or tomorrow.”

“Constantly consider how many physicians are dead and gone, who frequently knitted their brows over their patients; how many astrologers, who foretold the

deaths of others with great ostentation of their art; how many philosophers, who wrote endlessly on death and immortality; how many warriors, who slew their thousands; and how many tyrants, who used their power of life and death with cruel wantonness, as though they had been immortal. How many whole cities, if I may so speak, are dead: Helice and Pompeii and Herculaneum, and others past counting. Tell over next all those you have known, one after the other: think how one buried his fellow, then lay dead himself, to be buried by a third. And all this within a little time. In sum, look upon human things, and behold how short-lived and how vile they are; mucus yesterday, tomorrow ashes or pickled carrion. Spend, then, the fleeting remnant of your time in a spirit that accords with Nature, and depart contentedly. So the olive falls when it is grown ripe, blessing the ground from whence it sprung, and thankful to the tree that bore it.”

“Run ever the short way. The short way is the way according to Nature. Therefore, speak and act according to the soundest rule; for this resolution will free you from much toil and warring, and from all artful management and ostentation.”

III. Planning and Action

David Langiulli: “How can I know what action to take in a given circumstance?”

Marcus Aurelius: “Wherever we can act conformably to the reason which is common to gods and men, there we have nothing to dread. Where we can profit by prosperous activity which proceeds in agreement with the constitution of our nature, we need suspect no harm.”

“Upon every action ask yourself, what is the effect of this for me? Shall I never repent of it? I shall presently be dead, and all these things gone. What more should I desire if my present action is becoming to an intelligent and a social being, subject to the same law with gods?”

“In action be neither grudging, nor selfish, nor ill-advised, nor constrained. Let not your thought be adorned with overmuch nicety. Be not a babbler or a busybody. Let the God within direct you as a manly being, as an elder, a statesman, a Roman, and a ruler, standing prepared like one who awaits the recall from life, in marching order; requiring neither an oath nor the testimony of any man. And withal, be cheerful, and independent of the assistance and the peace that comes from others; for, it is a man's duty to stand upright, self-supporting, not supported.”

“Let no action be done at random, nor otherwise than in complete accordance with the principles involved.”

“Do every deed, speak every word, think every thought in the knowledge that you may end your days any moment.”

“Men are often unjust by omissions as well as by actions.”

“If you see your way, proceed in it calmly, inflexibly. If you do not see it, pause and consult the best advisers. If any other obstacle arise, proceed with prudent caution, according to the means you have; keeping always close to what appears just. That is the best to which you can attain: and failure in that is the only proper miscarriage. He who in everything follows reason is always at leisure, yet ever ready for action, always cheerful, yet composed.”

“In the first place, let nothing be done at random or without an object. In the second let your object never be other than the common good.”

Epictetus: “When you set about any action, remind yourself of what nature the action is. If you are going to bathe, represent to yourself the incidents usual in the bath—some persons pouring out, others pushing in, others scolding, others pilfering. And thus, you will more safely go about this action if you say to yourself, “I will now go to bathe and keep my own will in harmony with nature.” And so, with regard to every other action. For thus, if any impediment arises in bathing, you will be able to say, “It was not only to bathe that I desired, but to keep my will in harmony with nature; and I shall not keep it thus if I am out of humor at things that happen.”

In every affair consider what precedes and what follows, and then undertake it. Otherwise you will begin with spirit, indeed, careless of the consequences, and when these are developed, you will shamefully desist. “I would conquer at the Olympic Games.’ But consider what precedes and what follows, and then, if it be for your advantage, engage in the affair. You must conform to rules, submit to a diet, refrain from dainties; exercise your body, whether you choose it or not, at a stated hour, in heat and cold; you must drink no cold water, and sometimes no wine—in a word, you must give yourself up to your trainer as to a physician. Then, in the combat, you may be thrown into a ditch, dislocate your arm, turn your ankle, swallow an abundance of dust, receive stripes [for negligence], and, after all, lose the victory. When you have reckoned up all this, if your inclination still holds, set about the combat. Otherwise, take notice, you will behave like children who sometimes play wrestlers, sometimes gladiators, sometimes blow a trumpet, and sometimes act a tragedy, when they happen to have seen and admired these shows. Thus you too will be at one time a wrestler, and another a gladiator; now a philosopher, now an orator; but nothing in earnest. Like an ape you mimic all you see, and one thing after another is sure to please you, but is out of favor as soon as it becomes familiar. For you have never entered upon anything considerately; nor after having surveyed and tested the whole matter, but carelessly, and with a half-way zeal. Consider first, man, what the matter is, and what your own nature is able to bear. If you would be a wrestler, consider your shoulders, your back, your thighs; for different persons are made for different things. Do you think that you can act as you do and be a philosopher, that you can eat, drink, be angry, be discontented, as you are now? You must watch, you must labor, you must get the better of certain appetites, must quit your acquaintances, be despised by your servant, be laughed at by those you meet; come off worse than others in everything—in offices, in honors, before tribunals. When you have fully considered all these things, approach, if you please—that is, if, by parting with them, you have a mind to purchase serenity, freedom, and tranquility. If not, do not come hither; do not, like children, be now a philosopher, then a publican, then an orator, and then one of Caesar’s officers. These things are not consistent. You must be one man, either good or bad. You must cultivate either your own reason or else externals; apply yourself either to things within or without you—that is, be either a philosopher or one of the mob.”

IV. Change and Habits

David Langiulli: “It seems like the pace of change will never slow down nor cease. I just want to catch my breath.”

Marcus Aurelius: “Observe continually that all things exist in change; and keep this thought ever with you, that Nature loves nothing more than changing what things now are, and making others like them. For what now is, is in a manner the seed of what shall be. Therefore, conceive not that that alone is seed which is cast into the earth or the womb, for that is the thought of ignorance.”

“Time is a river, a violent torrent of things coming into being. Each one, as soon as it has appeared, is swept away: it is succeeded by another which is swept away in its turn.”

“Consider frequently how swiftly things that exist or are coming into existence are swept by and carried away. Their substance is as a river perpetually flowing; their actions are in continual change, and their causes subject to ten thousand alterations. Scarcely anything is stable, and the vast eternities of past and future in which all things are swallowed up are close upon us on both hands. Is he not then a fool who is puffed up with success in the things of this world, or is distracted, or worried, as if he were in a time of trouble likely to endure for long?”

“Some things hasten into being. Some hasten to be no more. Even as a thing is born some part of it is already dead. Flux and change are constantly renewing the world, just as the unbroken flow of time ever presents to us some new portion of eternity. In this vast river, on whose bosom there is no tarrying, what is there among the things that sweep by us that is worth the prizing? It is as if a man grew fond of one among a passing flight of sparrows, when already it had vanished from his sight. Our life itself is much like a vapor of the blood or a drawing in of air. Our momentary actions of inhalation and exhalation are one in kind with that whole power of breathing which, yesterday or the day before, we received at birth, and which we must restore again to the source from whence we drew it.”

“Do you dread change? What can come without it? What can be pleasanter or more proper to universal nature? Can you heat your bath unless wood undergoes a change? Can you be fed unless a change is wrought upon your food? Can any useful thing be done without changes? Do you not see, then, that this change also which is working in you is even such as these, and alike necessary to the nature of the Universe?”

“All things are in change. You yourself are under continual transmutation, and, in some sort, corruption. So is the whole universe.”

David Langiulli: “How does one know when to stick with something, and when to make a change?”

Epictetus: “When some persons have heard these words, that a man ought to be constant, and that the will is naturally free and not subject to compulsion, but that all other things are subject to hindrance, to slavery, and are in the power of others, they suppose that they ought without deviation to abide by everything which they have determined. But in the first place that which has been determined ought to be sound. I require tone in the body, but such as exists in a healthy body, in an athletic body; but if it is plain to me that you have the tone of a frenzied man and you boast of it, I shall say to you, “Man, seek the physician”: this is not tone, but atony. In a different way something of the same kind is felt by those who listen to these discourses in a wrong manner; which was the case with one of my companions who for no reason resolved to starve himself to death. I heard of it when it was the third day of his abstinence from food and I went to inquire what had happened. “I have resolved,” he said. But still tell me what it was which induced you to resolve; for if you have resolved rightly, we shall sit with you and assist you to depart; but if you have made an unreasonable resolution, change your mind. “We ought to keep to our determinations.” What are you doing, man? We ought to keep not to all our determinations, but to those which are right; for if you are now persuaded that it is right, do not change your mind, if you think fit, but persist and say, “We ought to abide by our determinations.” Will you not make the beginning and lay the foundation in an inquiry whether the determination is sound or not sound, and so then build on it firmness and security? But if you lay a rotten and ruinous foundation, will not your miserable little building fall down the sooner, the more and the stronger are the materials which you shall lay on it? Without any reason would you withdraw from us out of life a man who is a friend, and a companion, a citizen of the same city, both the great and the small city? Then, while you are committing murder and destroying a man who has done no wrong, do you say that you ought to abide by your determinations? And if it ever in any way came into your head to kill me, ought you to abide by your determinations?”

David Langiulli: “Once I’ve made a change, how can I stick with it?”

Epictetus: “Every habit and faculty is maintained and increased by the corresponding actions: the habit of walking by walking, the habit of running by running. If you would be a good reader, read; if a writer, write. But when you shall not have read thirty days in succession, but have done something else, you will know the consequence. In the same way, if you shall have lain down ten days, get up and attempt to make a long walk, and you will see how your legs are weakened. Generally, then, if you would make anything a habit, do it; if you would not make it a habit, do not do it, but accustom yourself to do something else in place of it.”

V. Dealing with Obstacles

David Langiulli: “How do I deal with obstacles that seem to impede my progress?”

Marcus Aurelius: “If a thing seems to you very difficult to accomplish, conclude not that it is beyond human power. But, if you see that anything is within man's power, and part of his proper work, conclude that you also may attain to it.”

“Try to persuade men to agree with you; but whether they agree or not, pursue the course you have marked out when the principles of justice point that way. Should one oppose you by force, act with resignation, and show not that you are hurt, use the obstruction for the exercise of some other virtue, and remember that your purpose involved the reservation that you were not to aim at impossibilities. What, after all, was your aim? To make some good effort such as this. Well, then, you have succeeded, even though your first purpose be not accomplished.”

“No man can prevent you from living according to the plan of your nature; and nothing can befall you which is contrary to the plan of the nature of the Universe.”

“Order your life in its single acts, so that if each, as far as may be, attains its end, it will suffice. In this no one can hinder you. But, you say, may not something external withstand me?—Nothing can keep you from justice, temperance, and wisdom.—Yet, perhaps some other activity of mine may be obstructed.—True, but by yielding to this impediment, and by turning with calmness to that which is in your power, you may happen on another course of action equally suited to the ordered life of which we are speaking.”

“Is the gourd bitter? Put it from you. Are there thorns in the way? Walk aside. That is enough. Do not add, ‘Why were such things brought into the world?’”

“Whatever happens, Nature has either formed you able to bear it or unable. If able, then bear it as Nature has made you able, and fret not. If unable, yet do not fret, for when the trial has consumed you it too will pass away. Remember, however, that Nature has made you able to bear whatever it is in the power of your own opinion to make enduring or tolerable, if only you conceive it profitable or fit to be borne.”

“In one respect man is nearest and dearest to me; in so far, that is, as I must do good to him and bear with him. But in so far as some men obstruct me in my natural activities, man enters the class of things indifferent to me, no less than the sun, the wind, or the wild beast. By these indeed some special action may be impeded, but no interference with my purpose or with my inward disposition can come from them, thanks to my exceptive and modifying powers. For the mind can convert and change everything that impedes its activity into matter for its action; hindrance in its work becomes its real help, and every obstruction makes for its progress.”

Epictetus: “It is circumstances which show what men are. Therefore, when a difficulty falls upon you, remember that God, like a trainer of wrestlers, has matched you with a rough young man. ‘For what purpose?’ you may say, Why, that you may become an Olympic conqueror; but it is not accomplished without sweat. In my opinion no man has had a more profitable difficulty than you have had, if you choose to make use of it as an athlete would deal with a young antagonist.”

VI. Procrastination and Overwhelm

David Langiulli: “I procrastinate with things I don’t want to do, or actions I don’t want to take.”

Marcus Aurelius: “Think of your long procrastination, and of the many opportunities given you by the gods, but left unused. Surely it is high time to understand the Universe of which you are a part, and the Ruler of that Universe, of whom you are an emanation; that a limit is set to your days, which, if you use them not for your enlightenment, will depart, as you yourself will, and return no more.”

“Hourly and earnestly strive, as a Roman and a man, to do what falls to your hand with perfect unaffected dignity, with kindness, freedom and justice, and free your soul from every other imagination. This you will accomplish if you perform each action as if it were your last, without willfulness, or any passionate aversion to what reason approves; without hypocrisy or selfishness, or discontent with the decrees of Providence. You see how few things it is necessary to master in order that a man may live a smooth-flowing, God-fearing life. For of him that holds to these principles the gods require no more.”

David Langiulli: “There are times when I get overwhelmed and/or feel like giving up.”

Marcus Aurelius: “Men seek retirement in the country, on the sea-coast, in the mountains; and you too have frequent longings for such distractions. Yet surely this is great folly, since you may retire into yourself at any hour you please. Nowhere can a man find any retreat quieter and fuller of leisure than in his own soul; especially when there is that within it on which, if he but look, he is straightway quite at rest. And rest I hold to be naught else but perfect order in the soul. Constantly, therefore, allow yourself this retirement, and so renew yourself.”

“Do few things, says the philosopher, if you would have quiet. This is perhaps a better saying, ‘Do what is necessary, do what the reason of the being that is social in its nature directs, and do it in the spirit of that direction.’ By this you will attain the calm that comes from virtuous action, and that calm also which comes from having few things to do. Most things you say and do are not necessary. Have done with them, and you will be more at leisure and less perturbed. On every occasion, then, ask yourself the question, Is this thing not unnecessary? And put away not only unnecessary deeds but unnecessary thoughts, for by so doing you will avoid all superfluous actions.”

“Be not ashamed of taking assistance. It is laid upon you to do your part, as on a soldier when the wall is stormed. What, then, if you are lame, and cannot scale the battlements alone, but can with another's help?”

VII. Speaking in Public

David Langiulli: “I sometimes get nervous when speaking in front of large crowds. How can I better handle my anxiety?”

Epictetus: “When I see a man anxious, I say, What does this man want? If he did not want something which is not in his power, how could he be anxious? For this reason, a lute player when he is singing by himself has no anxiety, but when he enters the theatre, he is anxious, even if he has a good voice and plays well on the lute; for he not only wishes to sing well, but also to obtain applause: but this is not in his power. Accordingly, where he has skill, there he has confidence. Bring any single person who knows nothing of music, and the musician does not care for him. But in the matter where a man knows nothing and has not been practiced, there he is anxious. What matter is this? He knows not what a crowd is or what the praise of a crowd is. However, he has learned to strike the lowest chord and the highest; but what the praise of the many is, and what power it has in life, he neither knows nor has he thought about it. Hence, he must of necessity tremble and grow pale. Is any man then afraid about things which are not evil? No. Is he afraid about things which are evil, but still so far within his power that they may not happen? Certainly, he is not. If then the things which are independent of the will are neither good nor bad, and all things which do depend on the will are within our power, and no man can either take them from us or give them to us, if we do not choose, where is room left for anxiety?”

“Your question is reasonable. Have you then not practiced speaking? and what else did you learn in the school? Syllogisms and sophistical propositions? For what purpose? was it not for the purpose of discoursing skillfully? and is not discoursing skillfully the same as discoursing seasonably and cautiously and with intelligence, and also without making mistakes and without hindrance, and besides all this with confidence? Yes. When then you are mounted on a horse and go into a plain, are you anxious at being matched against a man who is on foot, and anxious in a matter in which you are practised, and he is not? Yes, but that person (to whom I am going to speak) has power to kill me. Speak the truth, then, unhappy man, and do not brag, nor claim to be a philosopher, nor refuse to acknowledge your masters, but so long as you present this handle in your body, follow every man who is stronger than yourself. Socrates used to practice speaking, he who talked as he did to the tyrants, to the judges, he who talked in his prison. Diogenes had practiced speaking, he who spoke as he did to Alexander, to the pirates, to the person who bought him. These men were confident in the things which they practiced. But do you walk off to your own affairs and never leave them: go and sit in a corner, and weave syllogisms, and propose them to another. There is not in you the man who can rule a state.”

Marcus Aurelius: “The familiar phrases of old days are now strange and obsolete; and, likewise, the names of such as were once much celebrated now sound strangely in our ears. Camillus, Caeso, Volesus, Leonnatus; after them Scipio and Cato; lastly, Augustus, Hadrian, and Antonine - all are forgotten. All things hasten to an end, shall speedily seem old fables, and then be buried in oblivion. This I say of those who have shone with the brightness of their fame. The rest of men, as soon as they expire, are unknown and forgotten. What, then, is it to be remembered for ever? A wholly empty thing. For what should we be zealous? For this alone, that our souls be just, our actions unselfish, our speech ever sincere, and our disposition such as may cheerfully embrace whatever happens, seeing it to be inevitable, familiar, and sprung from the same source and origin as we ourselves.”

“Speak, whether in the Senate or elsewhere, with dignity rather than elegance; and let your words ever be sound and virtuous.”

VIII. Criticism

David Langiulli: “How should I react when other people criticize me?”

Marcus Aurelius: “Judge no speech or action unworthy of you which is consistent with nature. Be not dissuaded by any consequent criticism or censure from others; but, if the speech or action be honorable, judge yourself worthy to say or do it. Those who criticize you have their own conscience and their own motives. These you are not to regard, but follow a straight course, guided by your own nature and the nature of the Universe, both of which point the same way.”

“The best revenge is not to copy him that wronged you.”

“If anyone can convince or show me that I am wrong in thought or deed, I will gladly change. It is truth that I seek; and truth never yet hurt any man. What does hurt is persistence in error or in ignorance.”

“Men slay you, cut you to pieces, pursue you with curses. What has this to do with your soul remaining pure, prudent, temperate, and just? What if some one, standing by a clear sweet fountain, should reproach it? It would not cease to send forth its refreshing waters. Should he throw into it mud or dung, it will speedily scatter them and wash them away, and be in nowise stained thereby.”

“When another reproaches or hates you, or utters anything to that purpose; go to his soul; enter in there; and look what manner of man he is. You will see that you need not trouble yourself to make him think well or ill of you. Yet you should be kindly towards such men, for they are by nature your friends.”

“Does any man condemn me? Let him look to that. And let me look to it that I be found doing or saying nothing worthy of his contempt. Does anyone hate me? That is his affair. I shall be kind and good-natured to everyone, and ready to show his mistake to him that hates me; not in order to upbraid him, or to make a show of my patience, but from genuine goodness, if he indeed was sincere. Your inward character should be such that the gods may see you neither angry nor repining at anything. “

“Does another wrong me? Let him look to that. His character and his actions are his own. So much is in my present possession as is dispensed to me by the nature of things, and I act as my own nature now bids me.”

IX. Equanimity and Tranquility

David Langiulli: "I get angry with all of the corruption and duplicity of our public officials."

Epictetus: "'Ought not then this robber and this adulterer to be destroyed?' By no means say so, but speak rather in this way: 'This man who has been mistaken and deceived about the most important things, and blinded, not in the faculty of vision which distinguishes white and black, but in the faculty which distinguishes good and bad, should we not destroy him?' If you speak thus, you will see how inhuman this is which you say, and that it is just as if you would say, 'Ought we not to destroy this blind and deaf man?'"

"Man, you ought not to be affected contrary to nature by the bad things of another. Pity him rather: drop this readiness to be offended and to hate, and these words which the many utter: 'These accursed and odious fellows.' How have you been made so wise at once? and how are you so peevish? Why then are we angry? Is it because we value so much the things of which these men rob us? Do not admire your clothes, and then you will not be angry with the thief. Do not admire the beauty of your wife, and you will not be angry with the adulterer. Learn that a thief and an adulterer have no place in the things which are yours, but in those which belong to others and which are not in your power. If you dismiss these things and consider them as nothing, with whom are you still angry? But so long as you value these things, be angry with yourself rather than with the thief and the adulterer."

"Consider the matter thus: you have fine clothes; your neighbor has not: you have a window; you wish to air the clothes. The thief does not know wherein man's good consists, but he thinks that it consists in having fine clothes, the very thing which you also think. Must he not then come and take them away?"

"What is it then that disturbs and terrifies the multitude? is it the tyrant and his guards? I hope that it is not so. It is not possible that what is by nature free can be disturbed by anything else, or hindered by any other thing than by itself. But it is a man's own opinions which disturb him: for when the tyrant says to a man, 'I will chain your leg,' he who values his leg says, 'Do not; have pity': but he who values his own will says, 'If it appears more advantageous to you, chain it.'"

"Socrates said to one who was reminding him to prepare for his trial, 'Do you not think then that I have been preparing for it all my life?' By what kind of preparation? 'I have maintained that which was in my own power.' How then? 'I have never done anything unjust either in my private or in my public life.'"

"How strange, then, that Socrates should have been so treated by the Athenians." Slave, why do you say Socrates? Speak of the thing as it is: how strange that the poor body of Socrates should have been carried off and dragged to prison by stronger men, and that any one should have given hemlock to the poor body of

Socrates, and that it should breathe out the life. Do these things seem strange? Do they seem unjust, do you on account of these things blame God? Had Socrates then no equivalent for these things, Where, then, for him was the nature of good? Whom shall we listen to, you or him? And what does Socrates say? ‘Anytus and Meletus can kill me, but they cannot hurt me’: and further, he says, ‘If it so pleases God, so let it be.’”

“Was Socrates so foolish as not to see that this way leads not to the preservation of life and fortune, but to another end? What is the reason then that he takes no account of his adversaries, and even irritates them? Just in the same way my friend Heraclitus, who had a little suit in Rhodes about a bit of land, and had proved to the judges that his case was just, said, when he had come to the peroration of his speech, ‘I will neither entreat you nor do I care what judgment you will give, and it is you rather than I who are on your trial.’”

“He is free who lives as he wishes to live; who is neither subject to compulsion nor to hindrance, nor to force; whose movements to action are not impeded, whose desires attain their purpose, and who does not fall into that which he would avoid.”

Marcus Aurelius: “Whenever your situation forces trouble upon you, return quickly to yourself, and interrupt the rhythm of life no longer than you are compelled. Your grasp of the harmony will grow surer by continual recurrence to it.”

X. About the Author

My name is [David Langiulli](#). I am an experienced leader, fundraiser, trainer and certified professional coach who specializes in non-profit leadership development. As an [executive coach](#), I help nonprofit leaders clarify what is essential and important so they can effectively lead their teams, and achieve results for their organizations. In addition to my coaching work, I facilitate a number of [online courses](#), onsite workshops, and retreats for leaders interested in professional as well as personal advancement, growth, and development.

My professional background spans both the nonprofit and corporate sectors for over three decades. In the nonprofit world, I successfully served in positions of progressive responsibility in fundraising and technology transfer/licensing. In the corporate sector, I led market research, product development, sales, and marketing initiatives. Prior to launching my training and coaching practice, I led a fundraising team of ten professionals at Princeton University that was responsible for \$35million in annual support for the University's mission. Before this, I served as the Director of Development for Stony Brook University's College of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

In the corporate sector, my experience culminated in reorganizing, invigorating, and transforming the licensing division of an early-stage product development company in San Francisco. In that role, I built and led a team of three dozen individuals that included researchers, artists, engineers, and product managers.

I co-publish the [Fundraising Leadership Blog](#) and [Podcast](#) for nonprofit professionals interested in fundraising, leadership, and management. I'm also the author of [The Essential Leadership Guide for Nonprofit Professionals](#). Some of my own philosophy and approach to working with leaders is expressed in my blog posts and eBook.

I hold a master's degree in management and business administration from Stony Brook University, a master's degree in materials science from Columbia University, and a bachelor's degree in physics-engineering and mathematics from Washington and Lee University.

I am retired from my mountaineering avocation, after having scaled peaks across North America and Europe. I am now practicing to become proficient in the martial art of Jiu-Jitsu. Like the founding fathers of the United States of America, I value life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As a volunteer, I coach youth classes at my Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Academy and serve on the Board of Directors for the Collier-Lee Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

If after reading this eBook you want to share any insights or inspiration, feel free to write to me at David@FundraisingLeadership.org. I promise to respond.

Also, you can follow me on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/in/langiulli), where I regularly post on topics related to leadership, management, and from time-to-time philosophy.