

Blues to Blessings Excerpt – from Chapter 26 titled “I Come from Scratch”

Setting: This is my third session with my therapist, Ann and I am discussing working with my husband, Webb in our small business.

It’s 11:02 a.m. and I’m on the elevator riding up to her office. Technically, I’m late because my appointment is for 11 a.m. In my head, the scolding begins as I promised myself that I would never arrive late to these sessions.

As soon as she hears me in the lobby area, she signals me to come back to her office. There isn’t even time to grab a bottle of water beforehand.

I switch my phone to vibrate and our session begins:

“How are you doing today?”

“If you would have asked me that question three days ago, I would have said things are progressing along. Webb and I have started to make amends, which feels good.”

“That’s great news Suzette. The last time we spoke, it sounded as if you guys may have been contemplating divorce.”

“Yes, but that turned out to be an option that neither of us really wanted to pursue.”

“So, what has happened in the last three days?”

“What has happened this week is all my stuff. This time, I can clearly pinpoint what’s going on, but I consistently fail at changing my actions.”

“Tell me exactly what you’re talking about.”

“Each year around this time I prepare a presentation deck for the team on how the company performed against last year’s goals. I take the initial lead at offering insights into why we may have missed certain goals and what we need to do differently moving forward. I circulate the deck to the team for their feedback and additional comments. This is the moment my problem starts. Actually...I said that incorrectly. My problem starts with all that I take myself through before I send the email.”

“What sort of things do you take yourself through?”

“In a nutshell, I take myself on a whirlwind anxiety trip before I allow myself to release this document.”

Once I finish the deck, I comb through it continually, searching for any place to make the slightest improvement. I promise myself only one more final review. This turns into countless more reviews. I sleep on it. I wake up on it, only to discard the revisions that I made just the

night before. I continue to edit even though I know at this stage my revisions have diminishing returns. I do this until I can finally muster up the courage to press the send button.

My real problem is that perfection, to me, is not a ten on a scale from one to ten; it's a twenty-six. Therefore, I invest a considerable amount of time (more than I am willing to confess) trying to produce sheer perfection. I must identify all issues at their core, especially the less obvious ones. I don't want someone to come behind me and catch an oversight. I want the basis for my recommendations to be well-reasoned. The list goes on and on. When it's time to be assessed, 'good' doesn't do it for me. I need to feel that whatever I did was great, and I need to hear the words come out of my assessor's mouth.

“Is this the norm for you?”

“This annual document is in a class all its own. That said, I will study and review any business-related email that requires a modicum of follow up or document with my name on it many more times than the average person. At this stage, I am fully aware that I am a classic perfectionist. I realized this when I was in school. If I earned a 95% on a test, I would immediately want to know what question I missed rather than acknowledge myself for earning an A. I am also aware that perfection is an illusion and ultimately, a trap.”

Even in this moment, I pause because I am looking for her to nod her head, as if she is impressed with how self-aware I am. She does not.

“Go on Suzette, I am listening to every word.”

“This is where my frustration comes in. I know better but I don’t do better. I promised myself this year would be different. Yet, here I am again, being held hostage by a single company email despite the fact that I am the founder and CEO of the company.”

In business, I think you should always surround yourself with people who are smarter and more experienced than you. This part, I have done well. Consequently, I have had less success at feeling secure around them. For example, this document will be sent to Tanya. Tanya holds her bachelor’s in engineering and dual-master degrees in engineering and business from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.). That’s three M.I.T. degrees! This document will also go to Mike and Webb. Mike’s last gig was overseeing a \$600MM division for a Corporate 100 firm, and Webb has so much experience from his early years on Wall Street to his most recent ones in private equity that I am convinced he’s been cutting deals since he was eight.

“What happens after you send the document?”

“Good question. You would think that once finally I release the document that I would be *released*. Unfortunately, this is not the case. I am still on the hook, because I have solicited their feedback. So, this is only Round 2 for me. I loathe all of my perfectionism on the front end and waiting with baited breath for someone’s validation of me on the back end.”

“Did you just hear yourself?”

“What?”

“You said – ‘validation of me’...not ‘validation of my work.’”

“Did I? Well, I didn’t mean to say that. I do know the difference between the two.”

“Do you?”

“Yes. When I correct the boys, I am always careful to admonish their behavior and not them.”

“You seem to be practicing what’s right as a parent, but you’re not treating yourself with the same care.”

“I won’t push back to that.”

I am going along with her for now, but I feel that I need to hear something more than self-care. This doesn’t get to the heart of my issue. This is a practical step that I should implement after I get it right. When I am feeling overwhelmed by my perfectionism, practicing self-care in that moment doesn’t seem realistic. Teach me how to stop torturing myself in this way and I’ll be more inclined to celebrate myself and practice self-care.

“So going back to your document, what types of responses have you received so far?”

“The day I emailed the document, I received zero responses. The next day, Webb chimed in with his recommendations, and it seemed like the team was off to the races with their responses back to him.”

“Suzette, you sound bothered by the traction that Webb’s email received compared to yours.”

“I am, somewhat.”

I think Webb felt slighted that I didn’t collaborate with him on the document this year. Last year I worked with him on it, and that didn’t go well for us. I felt like he didn’t value my ideas, so this year I decided to go it alone. I’m sure he feels validated that his email was well-received by the team. I can read that “I-told-you-so” look on his face even though he hasn’t uttered a word. I’m also frustrated with the team, because it feels like they chose him over me. I can’t show this, however, because I still need them to freely contribute their best ideas without fear of reprisal.

“Are you competing with Webb?”

“No, I don’t think so. Webb and I will often agree that a problem exists, however, we can totally disagree on how to resolve it. This happens to us a lot in business. Webb has a

more straight-no-chaser demeanor, while I have a softer side. I didn't say pushover, just softer. Webb doesn't value a soft side in business."

"And when you don't feel valued by Webb, you do what?"

"I take on the 'I'll-show-you' attitude. In my head I say, 'I can show you better than I can tell you!' This is where you might sense that I am competing with him. It is less about winning and more about proving that my approach has value. If I sense a person doesn't value me, or doesn't believe in my abilities (like I feel with Webb and the team right now), I become adamant to prove them wrong."

"I could feel the pressure rising within you when you said those last words."

The tears begin to form in the crevices of my eyelids.

"Ann, sometimes I hate working with Webb. He has a way of making me feel small."

"Do you remember our last talk when I told you that you don't have the power to change Webb?"

"Yes."

“Well, the same applies here. No one else has the power to make you feel a certain way about yourself that you don’t already feel. The only way you can even buy into the lie of you being small is if you believe some of that lie yourself.”

There’s a steady stream of tears flowing down my cheeks now. Although she hands me her box of tissue, I don’t rush to wipe the tears this time. It feels good to let nearly a week’s worth of pain and frustration just flow out of me.

To read more of my story, visit [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and purchase your copy today!

Blues to Blessings: from Fearful to Faithful