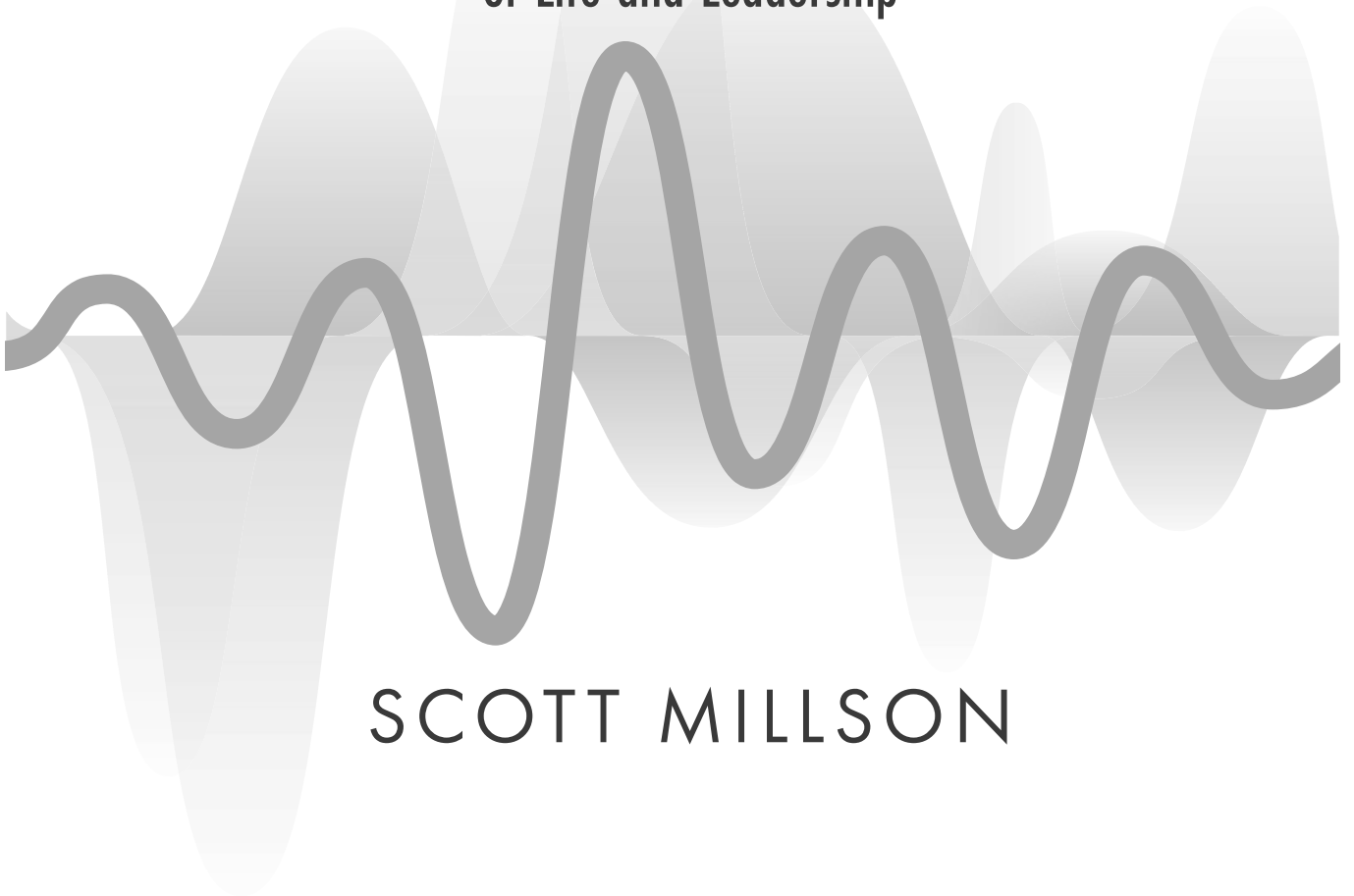


FREQUENCY OF EXCELLENCE

Tuning In to the Everyday Lessons
of Life and Leadership



SCOTT MILLSON

CHAPTER 9

Poise under Pressure

We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorns have roses.

—ALPHONSE KARR

A KEY TO REFLECTIVE leadership is the ability to keep your eyes and ears open and be constantly looking for learnings in everyday activities—tuning your frequency every moment of every day. Opportunities for growth come in all shapes and sizes and oftentimes they are right under your nose.

I have experienced several opportunities to witness poise under pressure throughout my career; however, the best and clearest example of this has lived and is currently living under our own roof—my twenty-four-year old daughter, Rose. As I write this chapter, Rose is lying in a hospital bed across from me in the neurology ICU awaiting a second brain surgery to combat a seven-year diagnosis of epilepsy. Since being diagnosed at age seventeen, Rose has demonstrated so much poise and grace while facing unfathomable adversity that it is difficult to not be in awe and even envious of her strength and grace.

As a parent, you never want to see your children suffer any ailment, particularly one that could potentially alter the trajectory of their lives. When Rose was first diagnosed, while we were trying our best to be strong for her and her siblings, I'm not going to lie and tell you it was easy. We were in a fog, trying to learn more about the condition, the limitations on driving, her ability to live alone, and the

medications she would be taking to potentially reduce or eliminate the seizures. We called upon our faith and worked diligently to be strong for her and her siblings, but it was a struggle unlike anything we had ever faced.

That struggle was positively turned on its head for me on January 14, 2018. Rose had just experienced her second-ever seizure a few days prior and was in the midst of another round of MRIs, with a fair amount of poking and prodding. In the days that followed, our immense fog had returned, and we were struggling once again. Due to the enormity of the situation, Rose chose to stay home from school this January day and was sitting at our kitchen counter working on her computer as I entered the room. Upon walking past her, I caught a glimpse of her laptop's monitor, which read,

Sometimes when things appear to be *falling apart*,
They may be *falling into place*.

I was floored to read this. Blown away. Here I was in the middle of an avalanche of pity (for her and for us), feeling overwhelmed and struggling to piece everything together. I was confused, disappointed, anxious, and, at times, angry. Instead of joining me in a wallow of pity, she was sitting at our kitchen counter creating inspirational messages to hang on her wall. It was an unreal moment for me, and I had the wherewithal to grab my phone and discreetly take a picture over her shoulder to help never forget the day she provided me with such an incredible life lesson—a true gift.

Her poise under immense pressure was beyond my comprehension. Sometimes the lessons in our life are incredibly subtle, and we must finely tune our frequency to see or hear them. Other times, the lessons hit you squarely between the eyes and upside the head. This situation was clearly the latter and Rose's grace, composure, and poise were astonishingly inspirational and taught me a very valuable lesson in management and leadership—to find the positive even in the most challenging situation.

This memory came ricocheting back to me in 2023 as I entered my final year of professional employment. I was working for HUB International, and Kristin and I had agreed that I would retire at the end of the year to dive into some new passions and nonprofit work that had begun to stir within me. However, as I began to make plans to formally announce my retirement, I experienced several professional challenges that caused me to question whether it was the right time to retire. In addition to the professional challenges, I also experienced my own set of health challenges that served to only increase the speed of this 2023 mini-tailspin. It would be overly trite and a bit ironic to figuratively assume my heart was no longer in the business with retirement looming, but it literally was my heart that was beginning to fail. For factors that will never be fully known or understood, I was diagnosed with six different heart conditions mid-2023, which ultimately led to an expedited pacemaker implant surgery in September. All is well now, but with my heart issues layered on top of the newfound professional challenges, 2023 was quickly turning into one of the more challenging years of my life and career. I found myself wandering through an unfortunate but familiar fog. I was confused, disappointed, anxious, and, at times, angry—the exact feelings I had in 2018 with Rose’s epilepsy diagnosis.

As I walked into this *déjà vu* moment, I was questioning the timing and the why behind what was occurring at work and with my health. Why were these situations happening? Could I have done anything to avoid them? What good would come through these trials? To say I was struggling and questioning a host of things would be a wild understatement.

Throughout my life, when my stress reaches an unhealthy level or I am faced with a difficult decision, I step outside. I have always found the outdoors to be healing and restorative, and fresh air helps me clear my mind, lower my blood pressure, improve my mood, and sharpen my focus. As I entered the fall of 2023 and as my personal and professional pressures mounted, I was in desperate need of some outdoor time. On one particular fall day, as I walked our dog

around a beautiful and tranquil lake, I was struck with a memory that delivered the peace I was so desperately craving.

Sometimes when things appear to be *falling apart*,
They may be *falling into place*.

Just as Rose did in 2018, she helped me once again in 2023. I recalled the grace she displayed when faced with immense pressures, and it immediately changed my perspective, lowered my stress level, and I began to view things as falling into place versus falling apart.

We cannot control life's unpredictable challenges, whether they are health or career oriented. What we can control are our thoughts, attitudes, and responses to those situations. Perspective is a wonderful gift and can help you through the most difficult of times, but you must have the strength and resilience to call upon it.

In your life, when you find an inspiring example of someone displaying poise under pressure, I encourage you to make note of the situation, maybe even take a discreet photo, and file it away for your own rainy day. Those everyday examples are out there, you just need to have the desire and ability to tune your frequency to see and hear them. Oftentimes, they are right under your nose.