

Collection of Interviews with

**Dr. Mortimer R. Feinberg,
Executive Coach**

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Interviews and Articles

Collection of articles about Dr. Feinberg

Wise Man to America's Top Executives

Wise Man to America's Top Executives

Industrial psychologist Mortimer R. Feinberg applies life's lessons, quotes from the famous and not so famous in counseling managers.

Joyce M. Rosenberg
Associated Press

June 23, 1995

NEW YORK â When Mortimer R. Feinberg sits down to help a client figure out what's wrong with a business, he relies not just on the standardized tests that any industrial psychologist employs. He draws answers from a life of experience and perspective and the advice of people ranging from Socrates to Freud to his own parents.

The words "industrial psychology" might turn off someone who knows little about the topic. Listening to Feinberg talk, the subject comes alive.

Feinberg, 72, acts as a consultant, counselor, wise man and by, his own description, vizier to top managers of some of the country's biggest companies. Clients bring a variety of problems to his office: disagreements with superiors or subordinates, marital difficulties, even problems with mistresses.

"They want to have somebody to just ventilate to," he said. "They really can't talk to their people about their anxieties. . . . You don't want to be showing tremendous weakness or indecision in front of your people.

"You want to be able to talk to somebody who is non-judgmental, who will listen you out, who has experience--because if you just talk to yourself, you're going to get the same answers."

Sometimes a client has been fired. His advice: "You've not lost a spouse, you've not lost a child, you've not lost a mother, you have lost a job. Recognize that you've got to put it in perspective. Recognize what are your strengths and weaknesses."

Feinberg is the author or co-author of six books and a former professor at New York's Bernard M. Baruch College. He has traveled the world in his work and earned the respect of executives.

"He is a totally enjoyable person," said Richard Voell, chief executive of the Rockefeller Group, the New York real estate management firm. "He is a healer . . . he is a confidant, he is totally trustworthy."

"As a result of using him, we have had enormous success in attracting, retaining and keeping some of the best management we could possibly have," Voell said.

Dennis Botorff, chairman of First American Corp., the Nashville-based bank holding company, said, "He has studied leadership styles from a wide range of people, CEOs and political figures, and has just got a tremendous amount of wisdom. . . . He's a great resource."

A conversation with Feinberg is exactly what you'd expect from someone who has spent half a century studying behavior. He is introspective, examining his own motives, and knows that his early life helped shape him.

"I was raised in the Depression," Feinberg begins. His father worked as a salesman, and Feinberg remembers sitting on the stoop of his Bronx home, waiting for his father to come home and tell him whether he had made enough money so Feinberg and his brother could have 22 cents to go to the movies.

"I was a terribly anxious student," he said. "I knew that without an education I would have to be a salesman like my father and I would have to worry whether I got paid on a commission basis."

He gravitated toward psychology, a field in which he could make a living--"for me, being a professional was security, it was status."

Feinberg didn't want to become a psychotherapist. Business fascinated him, so he chose industrial psychology. He graduated from New York's City College in 1944, got his master's from Indiana University the next year and his doctorate from New York University in 1950.

Feinberg has learned from many people over the years, from his parents to great scholars and historical figures. He peppers his conversations with quotes borrowed from people like Franklin Roosevelt ("You have nothing to fear but fear itself") and his mother ("What you have in your head is what matters, not what you have in your pocket").

In his office, alongside the pictures of his wife, Gloria, two sons and grandchildren, there are bronze busts of public figures he admires, among them Lincoln, Churchill and Albert Schweitzer.

Great speakers also had an effect on Feinberg. His mother, a Romanian immigrant, loved to hear people who could make English fun to listen to. She took her son to hear speakers like Adam Clayton Powell, who preached at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.

When Feinberg joined Baruch in 1950, he had the chance to impress students with his own verbal style. Feinberg worked the lecture hall the way a stand-up comic works a crowd. He moved around the floor, microphone in hand, sprinkling lectures on cognitive dissonance or abnormal psychology with anecdotes and jokes. When a student answered a question correctly, the professor tossed him or her sugarless candy as a reward.

"I loved teaching," he said. Even when personal problems depressed him, "I went into that Psych 1 class, and I felt great. I felt I was doing something meaningful."

When Feinberg started out, industrial psychology meant studying statistical data and IQ tests. Over the years, the field has changed along with the entire business world, giving his job more depth and meaning.

"I loved to advise, I loved to present options, I loved to think of things the CEO didn't think of. I loved to be his vizier, like Joseph was to the Pharaoh," he said.

Feinberg's company, BFS Psychological Associates Inc., evaluates clients with tests, seeking to determine their strong points. He helps job-seekers with resumes and networking and gives them a sense of direction.

He helps those who have been fired see "what they did to contribute to their downfall."

Feinberg retired from Baruch in 1980, but has not slowed down. The walls and shelves of his office are filled with photos from Egypt, India, Ireland and other places where Feinberg has given speeches and attended conferences. Besides his books, he's written many articles, including contributions to The Wall Street Journal column Manager's Journal.

His most recent book is "Why Smart People Do Dumb Things," written with John J. Tarrant. It looks at prominent people--including Richard Nixon, Leona Helmsley and onetime presidential candidate Gary Hart--who did themselves in because of blindness or hubris. The book offers advice to people hoping to avoid those kinds of traps.

Wake Up Britain - Bexley Business News

One of the world's leading authorities on business psychology, Dr. Mortimer Feinberg is professor Emeritus of the City University of New York, and a lecturer at Rutgers University, the American Management Association, and the Young Presidents' Association. As a top business expert, he has contributed more than 100 articles to such publications as the The Wall Street Journal, has interviewed the last four American presidents, and is a frequent guest on US radio and television.

"If you don't wake up, Britain will become a museum." That was the parting shot from world famous speaker, Dr. Mortimer Feinberg, who addressed a packed house of local business people at the Building Winning Businesses seminar run SOLOTEC, the South London Training and Enterprise Council, on 26 January.

In a highly entertaining presentation, laced with anecdotes, business psychologist, consultant, and author, Dr Feinberg kept his audience enthralled as he punched home a series of thought-provoking messages for British business. "You Brits," he said, "never stand up and demand anything - you are always too courteous. If you can demand more, get flexibility and desire, the link it to you undoubted strengths, as intelligent, creative people, you will be able to achieve anything."

Moving on from ways of thinking, New York-based Dr. Feinberg considered the characteristics of the managers of the future. "in order to have winning teams," he said, "you need to have a vision - a strategic statement that creates clarity, consensus, and commitment. You need to be customer driven too, for without the customer, you have nothing.

Quality, technology, distribution, and other factors were also discussed, but the most important factor in business, stressed Dr. Feinberg, is your people. "And," he pointed out. "the UK's investors in People Standard is the ideal vehicle for training, developing, and empowering them.

Speaking immediately after the event, John Howell said "initial feedback is most encouraging. Everyone is talking about Dr. Feinberg's views on what makes a difference for a successful business, the characteristics of winners and losers, and the importance of training and developing one's people. As a result, I am sure that we will see even more local organizations taking the route to success through investors in people."

US Analyst Draws Up 20-Year Blueprint for British Industry [1995]

A top American business analyst visiting the Midlands yesterday said British industry will be great again -- around year 2015.

Dr Mort Feinberg, an expert on business psychology, was in the Midlands at the invitation of Sandwell Training & they were to Enterprise Council to deliver a "clarion call" for the Investors in People week.

He believed that Britain's long-term prospects were excellent - and would improve when the present generation "died off."

The US academic said Britain would eventually regain its high position in the world economy, but this would take a couple of decades.

"I think that Britain has started to wake up. If you look at what makes countries great, Britain has the elements in place. The cost of capital is becoming low and is being spread around like fertilizer -- when it accumulates in one spot it begins to smell.

The idea that German and Japan are images of the future is false. German is suffering because of the weight of keeping its welfare system going; the Japanese can't run anything abroad outside of manufacturing; and the Italians change their governments so often that any policies are stillborn.

Dr. Feinberg said, however, the British still had to develop a different culture if they were to succeed. The British were too polite and willing to accept poor service without complaint.

A Club Pro's Survival Kit

Critics have said for a long time that golf is a crazy game and golfers crazy people but it took the Metropolitan PGA, if only by inference, to make it semi-official.

What the Met PGA did was Invite a psychologist as one of the speakers at its annual Education Forum-Luncheon at the Westchester CC yesterday. (Hmmmmm, what do they mean by that?). And what Mortimer R.

Feinberg, Ph.D., professor in industrial psychology at Baruch College (CUNY), consultant and high-handicap golfer, told the pros in effect was that they aren't aloneâ the whole world is crazy.

Relating this to golf, to the pro himself, the practice tee, the pro shop and Intra-club relations isn't difficult for a professor. In fact, it's great fun.

"Golf has been caught up, like everything else, in the tremendous value shift In American life," Dr. Feinberg said, beaming.

"This has thrown the pro into a terrible value struggle, basically because he is trying to fill three incompatible rolesâ merchandiser, teacher and golfer.

The professor offered a seven-point formula for maintaining sanity when the skies seem to be falling down, a sort of survival kit for club pros.

"First," he said, "a pro has to be sensitive to individual differences, not only in his club members but in the people who work for him.

"Two, motivation. He has to be able to Inspire his pupils and subordinates. That's like being the captain of the Titanic and convincing the passengers you merely stopped to pick up ice.

"Three, planning time. Time is the most critical thing he's got, the difference between the pro and the amateur. If you don't control time, it eats you up."

Then, Dr. Feinberg pointed out, there's the issue of learning. "The pro should be leading more," he said, before going on to point No. 5, the organization of human resources.

"Pay your young people more money now and less fringe benefits," he advised. "When they get to be 40, then they'll go for the fringe benefits."

No. 6 deals with what the professor calls emotional defenses.

"It deals with what Irritates people, what gives them anxieties," he said. "All of us build up defenses against certain realities.

"Most members are successes in business or the professions who come to the club to get away from it all and to be surrounded by warmth.

"Now maybe you, the pro, don't like some of them and right away you've got a role conflict."

The final point Is the evaluation of self and others.

"In criticizing others," Dr. Feinberg warned, "never use the sandwich technique. That is, two pieces of

praise wrapped around a dig.

"And never criticize your staff at night. Don't send them home unhappy so they can tell the wife what you said and she can say you were right."

More important, the professor went on is self-criticism.

"How do you think your membership sees you?" he asked. "There's quite a gap between self-image and the image others have of you."

The purpose of all the above is to assist the poor, bedeviled club pro in coping. "When you don't cope," he said, "then your head comes apart. You get increased disorganization, then regressions (like bursting into baby tears) and a break down of orderly thought processes.

"Finally, of course," the professor said, twinkling, "there's suicide."

The audience leaped up and gave him a standing ovation. The good doctor had found the ultimate solution

Success? You'd Better Sleep on It - Presentation at ELTEC [1994]

Snippets from articles that reported on Dr. Feinberg's visit to England in 1994.

A good nights sleep and lot of laughter are among the keys to success for East Lancashire managers, according to business guru.

Professor Mortimer Feinberg spoke to more than 200 bosses during his trip to the area.

He began his visit with a workshop for 12 women managers follow by a dinner a the Dunkenhaigh Hotel, Clayton-la-Moors.

"in order to be successful these days you need desire for achievement, pure animal energy, readiness to make decisions, resistance to stress, emotional stamina, pride and the capacity to resolve differences," said the American consultant and author.

"Managers have to be able to communicate in all situations and control their anger."

"The also have to get a good night's sleep and plenty of laughter."

Professor Feinberg flew to East Lancashire for events held to coincide with Investors in People week. At th XTEND program he gave a dinner talk about how to use psychology to help change the way organizations work.

And Prof. Feinberg said that with the unprecedented expansion of the Internet, information had never been more important.

He stressed the key is to a successful enterprise was th capacity to re-use, unscramble, store, and transmit information. To do that education was vital, not just for the staff but for the managers also.

At another meeting he stated:

"You need more elbows and less 'after you old chap'," says New York-based Dr. Feinberg, one of the leading specialists on business psychology.

And he told business leaders at the Stockport and High Peak Tec Enterprise Awards that restlessness is the key to success.

"What is wrong with England, and perhaps more so in the north west, is that there is an air of civility, and less desire for restlessness," Dr. Feinberg claims.

"Everybody just accepts what occurs. Restlessness is necessary in a world fo competition."

Dr. Feinberg says we need to be more aware of our failings: "you English accept no choices. In the US everyone wants to choose from 300 different brands of sneakers when they buy a pair."

But he also argues that what is wrong with England could also be its savior: "The civility and trustworthiness of the British is critical at the moment, when everyone is falling ... [clipped]."

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Early-Life shaping

A conversation with Feinberg is exactly what you'd expect from someone who has spent half a century studying behavior. He is introspective, examining his own motives, and knows that his early life helped shape him.

"I was raised in the Depression," Feinberg said.

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His most recent book is "Why Smart People Do Dumb Things," written with John J. Tarrant. It looks at prominent people - including Richard Nixon, Leona Helmsley, and one-time presidential candidate Gary Hart & who did themselves in because of blindness or hubris. The book offers advice for people hoping to avoid those kinds of traps.

Although the business world has changed radically in recent years, Feinberg doesn't see these times, even with continuing corporate restructurings, as being more traumatic than in the past.

"I've been through enough cycles to know the world and the world economy is a circular stair, you go down, you go up."

Still, he acknowledges, "We are in a difficult time now."

"The world of downsizing is terrible," he said. "We're going to run out of talent, because you don't have bench to train people in."

"There's nobody to follow up, to have learned."

Guru Calls in our Camelot

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Business Focus Section - News & Star

Meet the Man Who Tells the Bosses What to Do!

by John Stimpson

A grey-haired wise man from New York came to Cumbria this week to teach our top executives how "not to do dumb things."

The dumb things to avoid include attacks of hubris syndrome that lead some executives to push their luck.

It was only Dr. Mortimer Feinberg's second visit to Cumbria which he likens to Camelot.

His CV includes having worked with four US Presidents.

An organizational psychologist, Dr. Feinberg's view of the old divide between British and American boardrooms is naturally an American one.

He said: "There used to be a divide, but I think it is narrowing now. The United States executives were much more insecure and much more willing to change."

"I think that the British chief executive lives in the past have been somewhat insular and they've somewhat had silos in which they think 'We know all the answer, we've been around longer than you provincials and therefore we are better.' And I think we bought that argument in America.

"I think the United States has always had a feeling of insecurity and inferiority according to you Brits and the Brits have encouraged them in that."

So why are some British firms in areas like Cumbria now seeking to be more like American ones?

Dr. Feinberg said: "I think in reality you were falling way behind, you were falling way behind economically and I think that reality is what finally woke the Brits up."

"The Brits are much bolder and more effective and competitive than they were when I started this series of lectures seven years ago."

"There's been a big exchange in my recent visits for being the one who said: England's got to wake up."

He said there should be a ceiling and there should be a floor, but the ceiling should be further away from the floor."

One of the themes of his lectures to a dozen managers at Colony Candles and then around 50 senior managers at Forum 20 this week was "Why Smart People Do Dumb Things, the name of his latest book. So why do they?

Dr. Feinberg said: "The stretch the envelope because they can't possibly accept the idea that life is just boring for them."

His advice to entrepreneurs in attendance includes: "They need to understand this after they've started the company and they need a partner with other kinds of talent."

And he says, every executive can benefit from the exchange with an advisor with whom the executive can

seek counsel with and weigh options with from time to time.

Famous folk are among those who have considered his management skills.

"I was very impressed with Nixon even though I didn't admire him. The problem with Nixon was he was paranoid."

"I most admired Reagan but for different reasons. I admired Reagan's ability to take complex issues and simplify them."

"Kennedy had a great sense of humor."

Dr. Feinberg's visit was subsidized by CCW Ltd, the new American-owned candle firm which opened in Barrow and by Colony Gift Corporation.

Peter Taylor, manager of the American owned Kimberly-Clark paper mill who attended Dr. Feinberg's Forum 20 presentation said: "I enjoyed it for lots of reasons. I think he is good and has certainly gained a lot of experience and has a really good way of sharing it. There were some Americanisms obviously, but he had done a lot research on the UK."

"People from different businesses had a chance to meet and share different experiences, something which isn't done much in this area."

"We are all very grateful in CCW who financed it."

Mr. Taylor said he believed the firms which enjoyed the master class should now consider arranging a couple of such events a year.

Colony boss Alan Williams said: "The fact that everyone was so keen to hear Mort talk is an indication of how much have changed.

Despite Dr. Feinberg's talk, there are cultural divides even he can't jump.

For instance, of South Cumbria he said: "It's just a mystical place, it's a kinda magical place with places like Windemere and Crowsmere. You wake up each morning and expect a leprechaun to greet you."