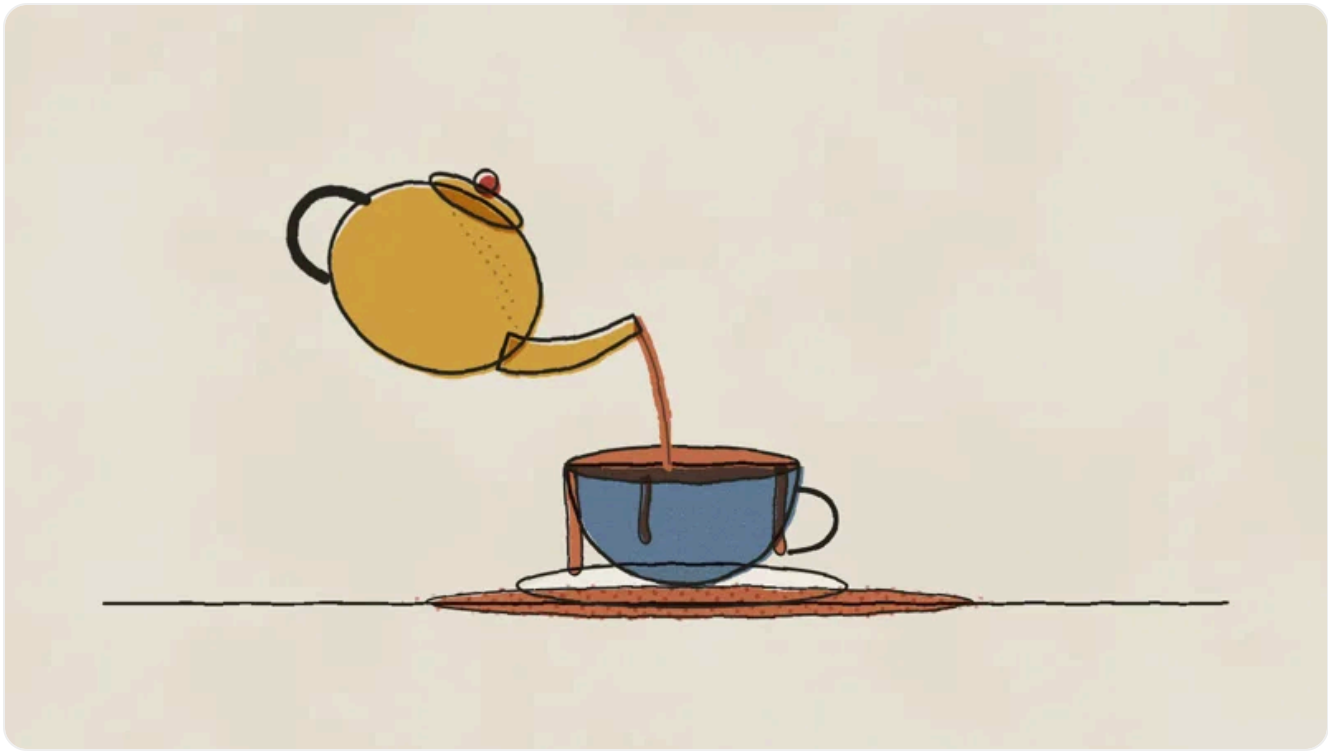
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The Advice Trap, Part 1: Why I Stopped Leading With Answers.



By Tommy Lee



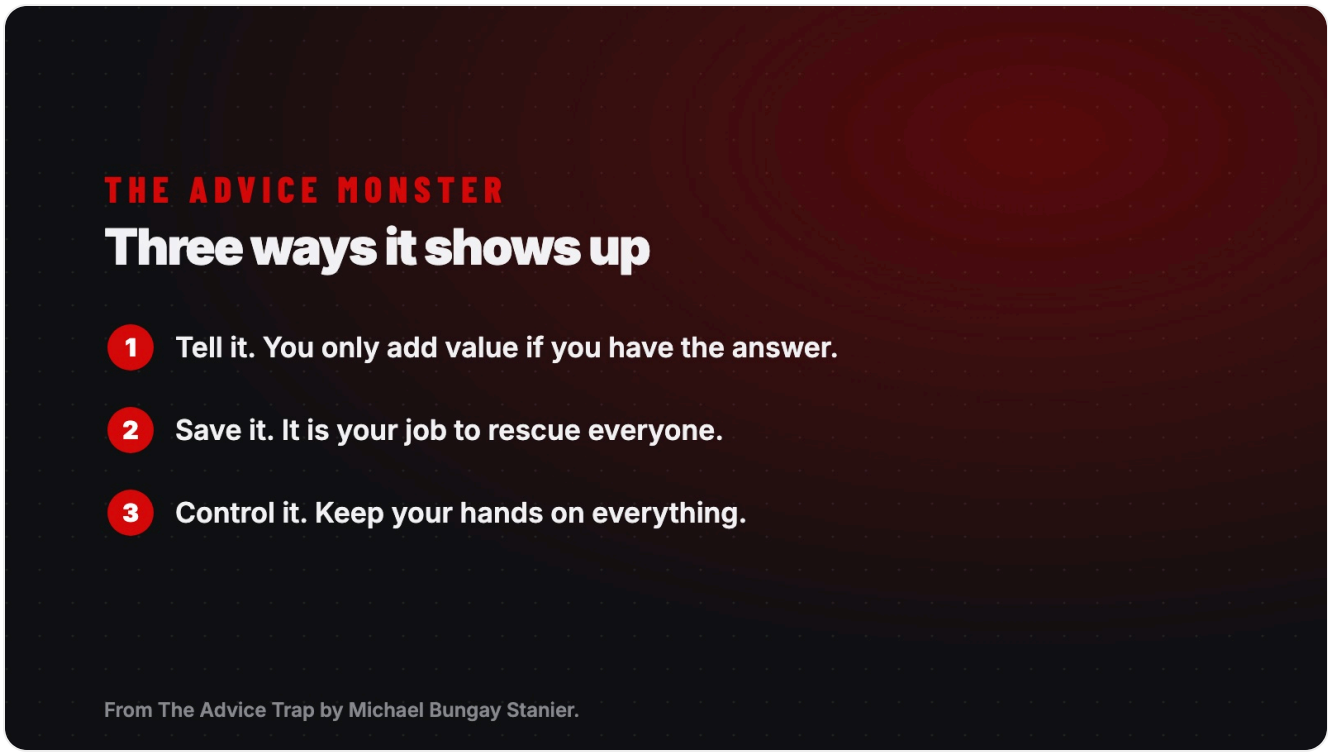
What a leadership book, and our work around the world, taught me about talking less.

You've met this type of person. This person always has all the answers, or at least they make it seem like they have all the answers. You share your problem and before you can even finish the sentence, they start talking and giving you all the answers and thoughts on the subject. They just won't give you the opportunity to talk and they don't listen well at all.

I recently heard and read a book called The Advice Trap by Michael Bungay Stanier. The whole idea is simple. We rush to give advice, and we would be better leaders if we stayed curious a little longer and rushed to advice a little more slowly.

He has a name for the "part of us that cannot wait to jump in." He calls it the advice monster. And he says it shows up in three ways:

- **Tell it.** This one believes you only add value if you have the answer. If you are not the smartest one in the room, you get frustrated.
- **Save it.** This one believes it is your job to rescue everyone. If you do not step in, the whole thing will fall apart.
- **Control it.** This one believes you have to keep your hands on everything, or you will lose control.



Their rush to give advice is usually not about the other person. It is them needing to be the expert, the one with the answer. What is driving them to do this? Is it because they believe they really have the best answer? Or is it the insecurity in their heart that is driving their leadership?

At Resource Global we walk with Christian leaders in cities all over the world: Jakarta, Nairobi, São Paulo, Kuala Lumpur, Cluj, Johannesburg, Cairo, and more. The fastest way to do damage in any of those places is to fly in as the American with all of the answers. Missions has a long and

painful history of exactly that, with people who gave the answer before they ever learned the question and understood the context. They ended up making assumptions about how things should be done and what they think is best. The leader in Nairobi already knows what their city needs. I do not. My job is not to bring the solution. It is to find out what God is already doing there and get behind the people he is already using. As Ray Bakke used to remind me, “I have to learn to exegete the culture and honor the people in that city.” I have to draw out the information from them and together process the answer with them in partnership. That means I need to listen well, ask good questions, and learn to facilitate and give up power. A lot of people in the West do not do this well because they want to lead strong. But that means they talk before they truly understand.

Here’s the thing. Jesus asked questions. He asked them constantly. And he really cared to know the answers. The one person who actually had every answer led with questions. He asked a blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?” He could see the man was blind. He asked anyway, because he wanted the man to have a voice. He asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” He could have told them. He asked. Even in the garden, God’s first words to Adam after everything fell apart were a question: “Where are you?” God was not looking for information. He was drawing a person out.

So if Jesus did not need to be the smartest one in the room, why do you need to? Is there something that is driving you?

In Part 2 I will get practical about how to climb out of it: how to tame the advice monster, how to actually listen, and the few questions that have changed how I lead and how we work in every city we are in.

Tommy

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