

Reminders to Be Better

Rabbi A. Brian Stoller

Rosh Hashanah Morning 5787 / September 12, 2026

In the first episode of the new season of *Ted Lasso*, we see that Ted's uptight assistant coach, Alice Chilton, has sticky notes with wisdom sayings posted all around her office.

I laughed because I do the same thing.

There are certain ideals I need to be reminded of every day precisely because I consistently fail to live up to them.

So, I'd like to tell you about the three post-it notes I keep prominently displayed on my desk.

The first one says:

"Anger is a manifestation of arrogance and self-righteousness."

It sits front-and-center because I have a problem controlling my anger.

I've been that way my whole life, but I think it's gotten worse with age.

I know intellectually that if I keep fighting it will get me into trouble, but in the heat of the moment, I feel powerless to stop myself.

It's a personality flaw, I know. But the solution is not to try to change my personality. That's not realistic.

Instead, I have tried to understand *why* I have so much trouble with anger so I can work on it.

I realized that what tends to trigger me is when I feel my integrity is being questioned.

Integrity is the value that is most important to me, and it's central to how I see myself. My grandfather always taught us, "don't bring shame upon your name."

So, when I think someone is impugning my integrity, I experience it as an attack on the core of who I am.

I react angrily because, if it is *true* that I have acted without integrity, my internal world would collapse.

So, I fight back to keep my self-perception intact.

Ironically, but not surprisingly, this impulse often causes me terrible harm. Our psyches are funny that way.

This insight doesn't excuse my angry reactions, but at least I know where to focus my efforts to do better.

One of our greatest sages, Rabbi Moses Nachmanides, taught that the antidote to anger is not self-control.

It's *humility*.¹

My goal this year is to make humility my first response.

Hence the reminder to myself: "Anger is a manifestation of arrogance and self-righteousness."

The second post-it note on my desk says:

"Raise kids, not grass."

This is a quote by the leadership expert Steven M.R. Covey.

When he was 7 years old, his father gave him a job: to keep their front yard "green and clean."

His dad said to him: *I'm not going to tell you how to do it. That's up to you. And if you need me to do something to help, tell me and I'll do it. You're the boss.*

Covey says, "I was too young to care about status or appearance. But I did care about my dad, so being trusted by him was very inspiring to me."²

I always learned that parents are supposed to tell kids what to do and bosses are supposed to tell employees what to do. And what matters is that you *do* what they say, not how you *feel* about it.

But Covey taught me this is an old way of leading people called "Command and Control"—and it doesn't work anymore, if it ever really did.

He proposes a different way. He calls it "Trust and Inspire."

"Trust and Inspire is about seeing, communicating, developing, and unleashing the potential for greatness within people," he says. "[I]t's already *there*. Our job is to bring it out, to ignite the fire within..."³

To focus "on enabling, empowering, and growing *people*."⁴

Command-and-control is concerned with what people *get done*. Trust-and-inspire cares about who they *become*.

Hence the reminder to myself that our purpose is to "raise kids, not grass."

My third post-it note is a quote by my friend Susie Wexler:

"If your goal is to win, you will lose everything."

For me to *win*, someone else has to *lose*.

The whole idea of “winning” presumes that life is a zero-sum game. There’s only so much to go around, and I have to get mine at your expense.

Now, I *do* like to win.

I’ll keep arguing and arguing to prove to you that I’m right.

And because I’m arrogant enough to think I’m usually right, I know I can be bossy. (Right, family?)

Again, not good traits.

Not just because it’s rude, but also because when you’re determined to win, you can alienate people, strain your relationships, and harm your reputation.

A much better strategy, I’ve learned, is what the author Thomas Gordon calls the “no lose” approach.

Here’s the basic idea:

“You and I have a conflict of needs. I respect your needs, but I must respect my own, too.

“I will not use my power over you so I win and you lose, but I cannot give in and let you win at the expense of my losing.

“So let’s agree to search together for a solution that would satisfy your needs and also satisfy mine, so no one loses.”⁵

It sounds hard—and it is. Much easier just to tell people what to do.

But the more you practice it, the easier it gets. And it leads to better outcomes in the long run.

Most importantly, I have found that making the effort to find no-lose solutions *strengthens* my relationships, lowers my stress, and helps me feel more successful.

“Winning” might get you more of what you want faster. But it often comes at a high cost.

Hence the reminder: “If your goal is to win, you will lose everything.”

Self-awareness is the key to *t’shuvah*.

So, my challenge to you, between now and Yom Kippur, is to come up with three quotes you need to be reminded of regularly—and post them somewhere *you’ll* see them every day.

T’shuvah takes work and time. We can’t become better people overnight.

But we can remind ourselves every day to try.

¹ See the opening paragraphs of *Iggeret Ha-Ramban*.

² Steven M.R. Covey, *Trust & Inspire: How Truly Great Leaders Unleash Greatness in Others*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵ Dr. Thomas Gordon, *Leader Effectiveness Training*, 190.