

## From the Doer to the Shaper, from Factual Constraint to Serving the Purpose

**Hans:** Yesterday, while playing the piano, I discovered that as long as “it” played, everything was fine. It was only when I started to think about how the piece continued that I immediately lost track of where I was. That reminded me of Toscanini, who once said that he could always visualize the score and each individual part so clearly that he could have written them down from memory. I, however, cannot write down the pieces I play.

**Martina:** But you are not Toscanini.

**Hans:** No, and sometimes I am simply careless. I had to empty and clean out the kitchen drawer twice before learning that I should first shut the drawer instead of balancing a full coffee spoon over it.

**Martina:** Perhaps you cannot be an entrepreneur, a father, and a course leader, memorize music the way Toscanini could, and then try to compete with practical “house-husbands” on top of everything else.

**Hans:** What or who is it that is chasing me through life?

I call him the “doer.” He wants to have everything under control, does not tolerate making mistakes because that would make him feel like a failure, and suppresses his own needs because he does not want to reveal his weaknesses. He does not allow himself to be happy, but he wants to make others happy. He is the inventor of factual constraint, for he strongly believes that things have a will of their own, and he wages war on this constraint day in and day out. For him, there are only winners or losers.

Because he feels small, he is compelled to be the biggest and the best. Everything he does is characterized by helplessness, self-righteousness, and guilt. He attempts to live up to other people’s expectations and thrives on their praise. However, it must be said in his defense that in most cases he is not even aware of what he is doing.

It is a well-known fact that there is a world of difference between theory and practice. If I speak on the topic of a just world economic order, I may be asked what I personally have done in practical terms to further this cause. What if I have not done anything concrete and can “only” reply that I have learned something for myself? Do I like admitting that I have not initiated some manifesto or set the ball rolling on a particular issue, that I cannot produce a declaration that has been signed by umpteen economic leaders? Is it easy for me to confess that, instead of running seminars with several hundred participants, I have had to cancel a course due to lack of interest? Does it make me feel good that I have achieved a great deal spiritually but am not able to present any impressive statistics, which everyone seems to find so important? I am repeatedly challenged to rid myself of this burden of having to prove things that has been dogging me for years. Almost all my life I have been concerned with assessing the value of work by its tangible results, and consequently I still find myself reverting to these conventional yardsticks.

After all, as an entrepreneur I was accustomed from a young age to having to validate my actions with sales figures and revenue. And I was proud of what I achieved. Together with my cousin, I was already managing the family company at the age of eighteen. My father, as our mentor, encouraged us to shape and transform the business. We were the exclusive distributors in Switzerland of Columbia, a record label belonging to the EMI Group, and my first task was to restructure and reorganize our sales staff. The ensuing upswing in sales resulted in our firm also being entrusted with other EMI labels, including Parlophone.

Quite unexpectedly, sales of the Parlophone products rocketed as soon as we began stocking them in our warehouses, as the initial releases included the first of the Beatles' many hit records. Of course, adroit marketing and efficient structuring on our part also contributed to this financial success, but in effect all we had really done was to unwrap a gift that had fallen into our laps.

In retrospect, our greatest successes were never the result of cleverly conceived corporate strategies. Instead, they appeared to be guided by a natural flow of energy, which I, as a young entrepreneur, followed more or less unconsciously. This was particularly demonstrated by the following sequence of events.

As the exclusive distributor for Columbia, one of our obligations was to offer a Swiss repertoire. One of our employees brought to my attention three musicians he had heard performing Spanish and South American songs in a nightclub. I invited the three men to come and sing for me. Their music sent shivers down my spine, a sensation I feel whenever I experience something very special. My colleague, too, was convinced that we were listening to something exceptional, so I spontaneously decided to produce a collection of twelve songs with the trio. One of them, "Ave Maria no morro," proved to be a resounding success. We sold well over five hundred thousand records, which at the end of the 1950s was a significant accomplishment.

*The doer is aroused: he gauges the potential success...  
and brings about financial disaster.*

At this point, the doer in me was aroused. I reasoned that if we could be so successful with relatively simple production facilities—up to then we had produced our recordings in a country inn, using simple technical equipment—then surely we would be at least twice as successful if we went about things more professionally. And so, shortly afterward, we were producing, at considerable expense, our next series of recordings by the Trio San José in a studio in Munich, complete with choir and orchestra as well as a professional arranger who had worked with such German stars as Conny Froboess, Rex Gildo, and Peter Kraus and whom we assumed knew how to produce hit records. However, things did not quite work out as I had hoped, as sales of these records were extremely poor. But worse than that, my potentially lucrative journey into the world of "anybody who is somebody" at the Munich music studio transpired to be a financial disaster that devoured almost all of the profit generated by the seemingly simple "Ave Maria no morro."

Having been brought down to earth again with a bump, I decided to listen more closely to my gut feeling when it came to making our own productions in the future. One such project was a series of records for children, which instantly became a bestseller, as did a performance of the nativity story by schoolchildren together with the popular Swiss songwriter Paul Burkhard, who had previously made a name for himself with his hit “Oh mein Papa.” In fact, this recording of Burkhard’s “Zäller Wiehnacht” is still a popular CD. As it turned out, after that my gut feeling continued to act as a reliable sensor when we had to make decisions relating to our own productions and their economic viability.

Thus I experienced at a local level what happened to the EMI Group at an international level after a high-flying top executive took over its management. The new boss decided that EMI was producing too many flops and not enough hits. In order to cut down on what he considered unnecessary expenditure, he gave instructions to produce less music, and even then to produce only songs with hit potential. Thus his recipe for success was to play it safe, gambling on the notion that a hit was a calculable risk. This business policy ended up permanently destabilizing the group and led to the realization that musical success cannot be predicted in advance.

However, I was a long way off from applying these notions that I accepted in the sphere of music production to my other areas of responsibility within the company.

Almost all of the record labels owned by the EMI Group were represented by our firm—except one. That was His Master’s Voice, which was distributed in Switzerland by one of our competitors. When I told EMI’s German sales manager that I wanted to represent this label, with a twinkle in his eye he answered with the adage “Complacency makes one reckless.” But I refused to give up and traveled to England to talk to the head of the group’s export division. I tried to explain that it would be much more efficient for all of the EMI labels, including His Master’s Voice, to be represented by one company, namely ours. I explained that we were the right company to do this because we had generated better sales for Columbia than our rival had with His Master’s Voice. He listened carefully to everything I had to say. When I had finished he announced that while he agreed with me in principle, he had an even better idea: “We’ll do it ourselves. We’ll set up EMI Switzerland.”

In the long run, there is no doubt that EMI would have set up its own operation in Switzerland, for, besides the Netherlands, Switzerland was the only remaining country in Western Europe without its own EMI branch. But now, thanks to my initiative, this process had been accelerated. When it actually happened, I was still not able to let go and wanted at least to enter into a partnership with EMI. Thus we ended up owning one third of the company and transferred our entire sales department to the new firm, EMI Switzerland. However, I soon discovered that the new joint venture, which under our ownership had flourished and generated profits, now slipped into the red. Already after the first few months we recorded a loss, a downward trend that was continued to the end of the first year. And so I traveled once again to England, this time to terminate our partnership. By selling our one-third participation back to EMI, we managed to get off easily. However, our company had forfeited approximately half of its sales volume by relinquishing our EMI distributorship agreements, and, having sunk to such a low level, we were forced to restructure the company and rethink our strategy.

My cousin and I were determined to make good the loss of revenue and prestige. What could we do? At that time, shopping centers were just catching on and were sprouting up all over the place on the outskirts of towns and cities. In Zurich, two were in the process of being built. And before anyone knew what was happening, the rather demoralized doer bounced back again. He immediately set about developing a strategic concept that would enable our present stores to control the music business in the city center, supported by new stores in the two “gateways” to Zurich, which would ensure that even customers from the surrounding areas would not elude us. Unfortunately, the millions of Swiss francs that we invested in the sales outlet in one of these centers got into the hands of a general contractor who subsequently went bankrupt. Furthermore, it transpired that our payments had not been used to settle the various building firms’ invoices, with the result that we had to pay some of the bills twice.

Experiences such as these brought my notion of “if I don’t do it, nothing will get done” more into perspective. And I found that the more I followed my intuition, the more the doer retreated into the background, from where he observed the strokes of good fortune that arose as soon as he relinquished control.

After losing the EMI distributorship, we had built up a wholesale business selling quality hi-fi equipment, but we still lacked an appropriate cassette brand. During a visit to the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, I asked a then-

unknown Japanese firm called Maxell if the distributorship of their cassettes in Switzerland was still available. As the company had not yet established itself in the European market, I heard nothing from them for some time. In the meantime, industry colleagues were raving about their success with Memorex, a cassette that was being marketed as a top-quality product. But it was almost as if we were jinxed; whenever the opportunity arose to make contact with Memorex, I kept missing the firm's head of exports. Then, almost two years after I had first approached Maxell in Chicago, one of its employees contacted us. And I have to say, I did just about everything possible to throw away my chances of securing the distributorship of their cassettes! Unwilling to undergo any risks, I initially envisaged purchasing two thousand units a month. When he heard this, the Maxell representative laughed and proposed that, on his own responsibility, he would deliver ten times that amount. Before long, we were selling one hundred times more than my original suggestion, and sales later rocketed to one million cassettes a month. We became Maxell's best customer in Europe, and occasionally our share of the Swiss market increased to the highest in the world. In the meantime, Memorex rapidly vanished from the market.

And I had done just about everything possible to hinder this development! I had set my sights on Memorex, which turned out to be a product without a future. I couldn't even recall the name Maxell when the firm's employee first contacted us. On top of that, I had acted rather stupidly when proposing the volume of our initial order. After all, they could easily have thought that with my ridiculously low forecast I had no idea about the product or its market potential. Yet none of this did anything to hamper the financial success that we subsequently enjoyed with this product.

*The doer is irritated by the unpredictability of coincidence.*

How was this possible? At that time, I probably would have answered this question with a simple shrug of my shoulders. My life seemed so unpredictable. This unpredictability irritated the doer in me so much that he did everything he could to keep it under control. Yet simply passing off the entire episode as coincidence would also have meant regarding the existence of every single being as pure coincidence, and thus regarding all of evolution as an arbitrary history invented by a capricious God who gives to one what he takes away from the other.