

## OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW

In 1850 the young Otto von Bismarck, then a thirty-five-year-old deputy in the Prussian parliament, was at a turning point in his career. The issues of the day were the unification of the many states (including Prussia) into which Germany was then divided, and a war against Austria, the powerful neighbor to the south that hoped to keep the Germans weak and at odds, even threatening to intervene if they tried to unite. Prince William, next in line to be Prussia's king, was in favor of going to war, and the parliament rallied to the cause, prepared to back any mobilization of troops. The only ones to oppose war were the present king, Frederick William IV, and his ministers, who preferred to appease the powerful Austrians.

Throughout his career, Bismarck had been a loyal, even passionate supporter of Prussian might and power. He dreamed of German unification, of going to war against Austria and humiliating the country that for so long had kept Germany divided. A former soldier, he saw warfare as a glorious business.

This, after all, was the man who years later would say, "The great questions of the time will be decided, not by speeches and resolutions, but by iron and blood."

Passionate patriot and lover of military glory, Bismarck nevertheless gave a speech in parliament at the height of the war fever that astonished all who heard it. "Woe unto the statesman," he said, "who makes war without a reason that will still be valid when the war is over! After the war, you will all look differently at these questions. Will you then have the courage to turn to the peasant contemplating the ashes of his farm, to the man who has been crippled, to the father who has lost his children?" Not only did Bismarck go on to talk of the madness of this war, but, strangest of all, he praised Austria and defended her actions. This went against everything he had stood for. The consequences were immediate. Bismarck was against the war—what could this possibly mean? Other deputies were confused, and several of them changed their votes. Eventually the king and his ministers won out, and war was averted.

A few weeks after Bismarck's infamous speech, the king, grateful that he had spoken for peace, made him a cabinet minister. A few years later he became the Prussian premier. In this role he eventually led his country and a peace-loving king into a war against Austria, crushing the former empire and establishing a mighty German state, with Prussia at its head.

## **Interpretation**

At the time of his speech in 1850, Bismarck made several calculations. First, he sensed that the Prussian military, which had not kept pace with other European armies, was unready for war—that Austria, in fact, might very well win, a disastrous result for the future. Second, if the war were lost and Bismarck had supported it, his career would be gravely jeopardized. The king and his conservative ministers wanted peace; Bismarck wanted power. The answer was to throw people off the scent by supporting a cause he detested, saying things he would laugh at if said by another. A whole country was fooled. It was because of Bismarck's speech that the king made him a minister, a position from which he quickly rose to be prime minister, attaining the power to strengthen the Prussian military and accomplish what he had wanted all along: the humiliation of Austria and the unification of Germany under Prussia's leadership.

Bismarck was certainly one of the cleverest statesman who ever lived, a master of strategy and deception. No one suspected what he was up to in this case. Had he announced his real intentions, arguing that it was better to wait now and fight later, he would not have won the argument, since most Prussians wanted war at that moment and mistakenly believed that their army was superior to the Austrians. Had he played up to the king, asking to be made a minister in exchange for supporting peace, he would not have succeeded either: The king would have distrusted his ambition and doubted his sincerity.

By being completely insincere and sending misleading signals, however, he deceived everyone, concealed his purpose, and attained everything he wanted. Such is the power of hiding your intentions.

## KEYS TO POWER

Most people are open books. They say what they feel, blurt out their opinions at every opportunity, and constantly reveal their plans and intentions. They do this for several reasons. First, it is easy and natural to always want to talk about one's feelings and plans for the future. It takes effort to control your tongue and monitor what you reveal. Second, many believe that by being honest and open they are winning people's hearts and showing their good nature. They are greatly deluded. Honesty is actually a blunt instrument, which bloodies more than it cuts. Your honesty is likely to offend people; it is much more prudent to tailor your words, telling people what they want to hear rather than the coarse and ugly truth of what you feel or think. More important, by being unabashedly open you make yourself so predictable and familiar that it is almost impossible to respect or fear you, and power will not accrue to a person who cannot inspire such emotions.

If you yearn for power, quickly lay honesty aside, and train yourself in the art of concealing your intentions. Master the art and you will always have the upper hand. Basic to an ability to conceal one's intentions is a simple truth about human nature: Our first instinct is to always trust appearances. We cannot go around doubting the reality of what we see and hear—constantly imagining that appearances concealed something else would exhaust and terrify us. This fact makes it relatively easy to conceal one's intentions. Simply dangle an object you seem to desire, a goal you seem to aim for, in front of people's eyes and they will take the appearance for reality. Once their eyes focus on the decoy, they will fail to notice what you are really up to. In seduction, set up conflicting signals, such as desire and indifference, and you not only throw them off the scent, you inflame their desire to possess you.

A tactic that is often effective in setting up a red herring is to appear to support an idea or cause that is actually contrary to your own sentiments. (Bismarck used this to great effect in his speech in 1850.) Most people will believe you have experienced a change of heart, since it is so unusual to play so lightly with something as emotional as one's opinions and values.

The same applies for any decoyed object of desire: Seem to want something in which you are actually not at all interested and your enemies will be thrown off the scent, making all kinds of errors in their calculations.

During the War of the Spanish Succession in 1711, the Duke of Marlborough, head of the English army, wanted to destroy a key French fort, because it protected a vital thoroughfare into France. Yet he knew that if he destroyed it, the French would realize what he wanted—to advance down that road. Instead, then, he merely captured the fort, and garrisoned it with some of his troops, making it appear as if he wanted it for some purpose of his own. The French attacked the fort and the duke let them recapture it. Once they had it back, though, they destroyed it, figuring that the duke had wanted it for some important reason. Now that the fort was gone, the road was unprotected, and Marlborough could easily march into France.

Use this tactic in the following manner: Hide your intentions not by closing up (with the risk of appearing secretive, and making people suspicious) but by talking endlessly about your desires and goals—just not your real ones. You will kill three birds with one stone: You appear friendly, open, and trusting; you conceal your intentions; and you send your rivals on time-consuming wild-goose chases.

Another powerful tool in throwing people off the scent is false sincerity. People easily mistake sincerity for honesty. Remember—their first instinct is to trust appearances, and since they value honesty and want to believe in the honesty of those around them, they will rarely doubt you or see through your act. Seeming to believe what you say gives your words great weight. This is how Iago deceived and destroyed Othello: Given the depth of his emotions, the apparent sincerity of his concerns about Desdemona's supposed infidelity, how could Othello distrust him? This is also how the great con artist Yellow Kid Weil pulled the wool over suckers' eyes: Seeming to believe so deeply in the decoyed object he was dangling in front of them (a phony stock, a touted racehorse), he made its reality hard to doubt. It is important, of course, not to go too far in this area. Sincerity is a tricky tool: Appear overpassionate and you raise suspicions. Be measured and believable or your ruse will seem the put-on that it is.

To make your false sincerity an effective weapon in concealing your intentions, espouse a belief in honesty and forthrightness as important social values. Do this as publicly as possible. Emphasize your position on this

subject by occasionally divulging some heartfelt thought—though only one that is actually meaningless or irrelevant, of course. Napoleon's minister Talleyrand was a master at taking people into his confidence by revealing some apparent secret. This feigned confidence—a decoy—would then elicit a real confidence on the other person's part.

Remember: The best deceivers do everything they can to cloak their roguish qualities. They cultivate an air of honesty in one area to disguise their dishonesty in others. Honesty is merely another decoy in their arsenal of weapons.

## **PART II: USE SMOKE SCREENS TO DISGUISE YOUR ACTIONS**

*Deception is always the best strategy, but the best deceptions require a screen of smoke to distract people attention from your real purpose. The bland exterior—like the unreadable poker face—is often the perfect smoke screen, hiding your intentions behind the comfortable and familiar. If you lead the sucker down a familiar path, he won't catch on when you lead him into a trap.*

## OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW I

In 1910, a Mr. Sam Geezil of Chicago sold his warehouse business for close to \$1 million. He settled down to semiretirement and the managing of his many properties, but deep inside he itched for the old days of deal-making. One day a young man named Joseph Weil visited his office, wanting to buy an apartment he had up for sale. Geezil explained the terms: The price was \$8,000, but he only required a down payment of \$2,000. Weil said he would sleep on it, but he came back the following day and offered to pay the full \$8,000 in cash, if Geezil could wait a couple of days, until a deal Weil was working on came through. Even in semiretirement, a clever businessman like Geezil was curious as to how Weil would be able to come up with so much cash (roughly \$150,000 today) so quickly. Weil seemed reluctant to say, and quickly changed the subject, but Geezil was persistent. Finally, after assurances of confidentiality, Weil told Geezil the following story.

### JEHU, KING OF ISRAEL FEIGNS WORSHIP OF THE IDOL BA'AL

*Then Jehu assembled all the people, and said to them, "Ahab served Ba'al a little; but Jehu will serve him much more. Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Ba'al, all his worshippers and all his priests; let none be missing, for I have a great sacrifice to offer to Ba'al; whoever is missing shall not live." But Jehu did it with cunning in order to destroy the worshippers of Ba'al. And Jehu ordered, "Sanctify a solemn assembly for Ba'al. "So they proclaimed it. And Jehu sent throughout all Israel; and all the worshippers of Ba'al came, so that there was not a man left who did not come. And they entered the house of Ba'al, and the house of Ba'al was filled from one end to the other.... Then Jehu went into the house of Ba'al ... and he said to the worshippers of Ba'al, "Search, and see that there is no servant of the LORD here among you, but only the worshippers of Ba'al." Then he went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had stationed eighty men outside, and said, "The man who allows any of those whom I give into your hands to escape shall forfeit his life." So as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, Jehu said to the*



*guard and to the officers, “Go in and slay them; let not a man escape.” So when they put them to the sword, the guard and the officers cast them out and went into the inner room of the house of Ba’al and they brought out the pillar that was in the house of Ba’al and burned it. And they demolished the pillar of Ba’al and demolished the house of Ba’al, and made it a latrine to this day. Thus Jehu wiped out Ba’al from Israel.*

OLD TESTAMENT, 2 KINGS 10:18-28

Weil’s uncle was the secretary to a coterie of multimillionaire financiers. These wealthy gentlemen had purchased a hunting lodge in Michigan ten years ago, at a cheap price. They had not used the lodge for a few years, so they had decided to sell it and had asked Weil’s uncle to get whatever he could for it. For reasons—good reasons—of his own, the uncle had been nursing a grudge against the millionaires for years; this was his chance to get back at them. He would sell the property for \$35,000 to a set up man (whom it was Weil’s job to find). The financiers were too wealthy to worry about this low price. The set-up man would then turn around and sell the property again for its real price, around \$155,000. The uncle, Weil, and the third man would split the profits from this second sale. It was all legal and for a good cause—the uncle’s just retribution.

Geezil had heard enough: He wanted to be the set-up buyer. Weil was reluctant to involve him, but Geezil would not back down: The idea of a large profit, plus a little adventure, had him champing at the bit. Weil explained that Geezil would have to put up the \$35,000 in cash to bring the deal off. Geezil, a millionaire, said he could get the money with a snap of his fingers. Weil finally relented and agreed to arrange a meeting between the uncle, Geezil, and the financiers, in the town of Galesburg, Illinois.

On the train ride to Galesburg, Geezil met the uncle—an impressive man, with whom he avidly discussed business. Weil also brought along a companion, a somewhat paunchy man named George Gross. Weil explained to Geezil that he himself was a boxing trainer, that Gross was one of the promising prizefighters he trained, and that he had asked Gross to come along to make sure the fighter stayed in shape. For a promising fighter, Gross was unimpressive looking—he had gray hair and a beer belly—but Geezil was so excited about the deal that he didn’t really think about the man’s flabby appearance.

Once in Galesburg, Weil and his uncle went to fetch the financiers while Geezil waited in a hotel room with Gross, who promptly put on his boxing

trunks. As Geezil half watched, Gross began to shadowbox. Distracted as he was, Geezil ignored how badly the boxer wheezed after a few minutes of exercise, although his style seemed real enough. An hour later, Weil and his uncle reappeared with the financiers, an impressive, intimidating group of men, all wearing fancy suits. The meeting went well and the financiers agreed to sell the lodge to Geezil, who had already had the \$35,000 wired to a local bank.

This minor business now settled, the financiers sat back in their chairs and began to banter about high finance, throwing out the name “J. P. Morgan” as if they knew the man. Finally one of them noticed the boxer in the corner of the room. Weil explained what he was doing there. The financier countered that he too had a boxer in his entourage, whom he named. Weil laughed brazenly and exclaimed that his man could easily knock out their man. Conversation escalated into argument. In the heat of passion, Weil challenged the men to a bet. The financiers eagerly agreed and left to get their man ready for a fight the next day.

As soon as they had left, the uncle yelled at Weil, right in front of Geezil; They did not have enough money to bet with, and once the financiers discovered this, the uncle would be fired. Weil apologized for getting him in this mess, but he had a plan: He knew the other boxer well, and with a little bribe, they could fix the fight. But where would the money come from for the bet? the uncle replied. Without it they were as good as dead. Finally Geezil had heard enough. Unwilling to jeopardize his deal with any ill will, he offered his own \$35,000 cash for part of the bet. Even if he lost that, he would wire for more money and still make a profit on the sale of the lodge. The uncle and nephew thanked him. With their own \$15,000 and Geezil’s \$35,000 they would manage to have enough for the bet. That evening, as Geezil watched the two boxers rehearse the fix in the hotel room, his mind reeled at the killing he was going to make from both the boxing match and the sale of the lodge.

The fight took place in a gym the next day. Weil handled the cash, which was placed for security in a locked box. Everything was proceeding as planned in the hotel room. The financiers were looking glum at how badly their fighter was doing, and Geezil was dreaming about the easy money he was about to make. Then, suddenly, a wild swing by the financier’s fighter hit Gross hard in the face, knocking him down. When he hit the canvas, blood spurted from his mouth. He coughed, then lay still. One of the

financiers, a former doctor, checked his pulse; he was dead. The millionaires panicked: Everyone had to get out before the police arrived—they could all be charged with murder.

Terrified, Geezil hightailed it out of the gym and back to Chicago, leaving behind his \$35,000 which he was only too glad to forget, for it seemed a small price to pay to avoid being implicated in a crime. He never wanted to see Weil or any of the others again.

After Geezil scurried out, Gross stood up, under his own steam. The blood that had spurted from his mouth came from a ball filled with chicken blood and hot water that he had hidden in his cheek. The whole affair had been masterminded by Weil, better known as “the Yellow Kid,” one of the most creative con artists in history. Weil split the \$35,000 with the financiers and the boxers (all fellow con artists)—a nice little profit for a few days’ work.

## SNEAK ACROSS THE OCEAN IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

*This means to create a front that eventually becomes imbued with an atmosphere or impression of familiarity, within which the strategist may maneuver unseen while all eyes are trained to see obvious familiarities.*

“THE THIRTY-SIX STRATEGIES.” QUOTED IN THE JAPANESE ART OF WAR.

THOMAS CLEARY, 1991