A peacock in the Land of Penguins

A Fable about Creativity & Courage

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Foreword by Ken Blanchard

International Bestseller
An Excerpt From

A Peacock in the Land of Penguins:
A Fable about Creativity & Courage,
Third Edition

by BJ Gallagher Hateley and Warren H. Schmidt
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A Note from the Authors
About This Expanded Edition

When we first began writing this parable about a peacock in the Land of Penguins several years ago, little did we know where the book would ultimately take us! We knew we had an important message about creativity and innovation in the context of today’s organizations — and we wanted to express it in a way that would entertain as well as enlighten. We wanted to write a story that would speak to both the hearts and minds of people.

However, we had no idea how popular the book would become, and that it would evolve into a veritable cottage industry. We now have translations into many languages worldwide, a best-selling video that is used in conferences and seminars, assessment instruments for consultants and trainers, and a whole world of merchandising — T-shirts, coffee mugs, feather pens, penguin stress toys, and more!

Since its first publication in January 1995, many of our readers have asked us for more information; they want ideas and suggestions about what to do with the insights from our book. “How can I deal with my own situation?” they ask. Managers and executives also ask: “Can you help me transform my organization?”

This expanded version is our answer to their questions. We have revised and expanded Part II: “Tips and Tools for Feathered Friends” — advice to peacocks struggling to find happiness and success at work. And we have added a new section, Part III: “Ideas and Examples for Teaching Penguins to Fly” — advice to penguins who want to transform their organizations by embracing new ideas (sometimes from unlikely sources). We’ve also expanded our Part IV: “Resources” section, including training materials, videos, and merchandise to help reinforce the message of the Peacock story. We hope you will find these new additions helpful!

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Los Angeles, California
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Foreword

Every once in a while a small book comes along that deals with a profound subject in a simple, elegant way. A Peacock in the Land of Penguins is such a book. I loved this book when the first edition came out in 1995, and I love this new edition even more. It provides important insights into the issue of creativity and innovation in the workplace — and it does so in a most engaging manner. Through the medium of a fable, this book helps us to see what can happen when we try to express ourselves fully and courageously in an environment created by executives and managers who view the world very differently.

Stories are a great way to convey important messages — they inspire and teach at the same time. People forget facts, figures, and theories, but they remember stories. People who know me can tell you how often I use stories in my own conversations, in my speeches, and in my daily life. I love to write great stories, and I love to read great stories.

This is the story of Perry the Peacock — a bright, talented, colorful bird — who comes to live in the Land of Penguins. He soon runs into problems because the penguins have established a chilly organizational climate that is formal, bureaucratic, and governed by a vast array of written and unwritten rules. Although his talent is recognized, his different and unusual style makes the penguins feel uneasy. The very thing he was recruited for — his distinctive flair and creativity — is now viewed as a problem by the penguins, once Perry is inside the organization!

His experience reflects that of “birds of different feathers” in many of today’s organizations. Executives and managers say that they want new ideas and new thinking from their employees, but their actions indicate otherwise. New ideas are disruptive, they’re messy, they challenge the status quo, they require taking chances and increased risk, and they push everyone out of their comfort zones. So people who are different, people with new views on how to make the organization successful, are often discouraged from
expressing them — much to the detriment of both the individual and the organization.

This delightful corporate fable follows the adventures of Perry the Peacock and other exotic birds as they try to make their way in the Land of Penguins. Their story is both entertaining and enlightening. This is a tale of the perils and possibilities of being unique and creative in a world that values comfort, safety, and the predictability of conformity.

If you’re interested in new ideas for making yourself and your organization successful, read this little book. Creating a workplace where creativity and innovation can flourish is a top priority for managers and employees alike. There are important insights for all of us!

Ken Blanchard  
coauthor of The One Minute Manager
Most organizations looked the same:

Top executives
and managers
wore their distinctive penguin suits,
while worker birds
of many kinds
wore colors and outfits
that reflected their work
and their lifestyles.

Birds who aspired to move up
in their organizations
were encouraged to become
as penguin-like as possible —
to shorten their steps
and learn the penguin stride,
to wear penguin suits,
and follow
the example of their leaders.
Employee Development Departments offered extensive training programs on appropriate penguin-like behavior.

The rules and norms were clear from Day One.
Penguins advised in subtle (and not so subtle) ways:

“This is the way we do things here.”

“If you want to be successful, be like us.”
Some of the birds who wanted to move up in the pecking order became very good at taking on the penguin look and penguin behaviors.

But even they found that they never quite made it into key positions.
It was assumed by all that penguins were natural leaders — orderly, loyal, and good team players. Penguins could be trusted to put the organization’s interests ahead of personal and family concerns.
Other birds
were thought to be
more flighty
and less dependable.
Of course,
this was never stated
out loud
or in writing.

Because,
like every organization,
penguins wanted to be seen
as fair-minded and
ready to promote
on the basis of
talent,
hard work,
and contribution.
But everyone really knew —

The penguins
had always been in charge,
and
the penguins
would always be in charge.
The elder penguins would take younger penguins under their wings and coach them on how to be successful.

They would invite them to play golf and go jogging.

They would sit together in the executive dining room and talk about sports.
It was clear to everyone
who the important penguins were.

It was also clear
that the penguins
felt most comfortable
around each other.
Life was harmonious in the Land of Penguins, as long as everyone played by the penguins’ rules.

The other birds in the organization knew how to act to make the penguins feel comfortable and secure.
But there came a time
when things began to change
in the Land of Penguins . . .
Senior penguins would visit other lands, where they encountered interesting birds who impressed them with their management talent, experience, and accomplishments.
“These birds are not penguins,”
the elders thought,
“but perhaps
they could become penguins
if we brought them to our land
and trained them
in our penguin ways.”

“Surely
these impressive and unusual birds
could adapt to life
in the Land of Penguins,
and the talent
they bring
would make us
even more successful.”
“Our climate is different —
chilly and cold.
And our terrain is unique —
icy and barren.

“But we have thrived there
and so perhaps
will these new birds.

“If they are as smart
as we think they are,
they can adjust
to our weather and our ways.”
And this was how
Perry the Peacock
came to live
in the Land of Penguins . . .