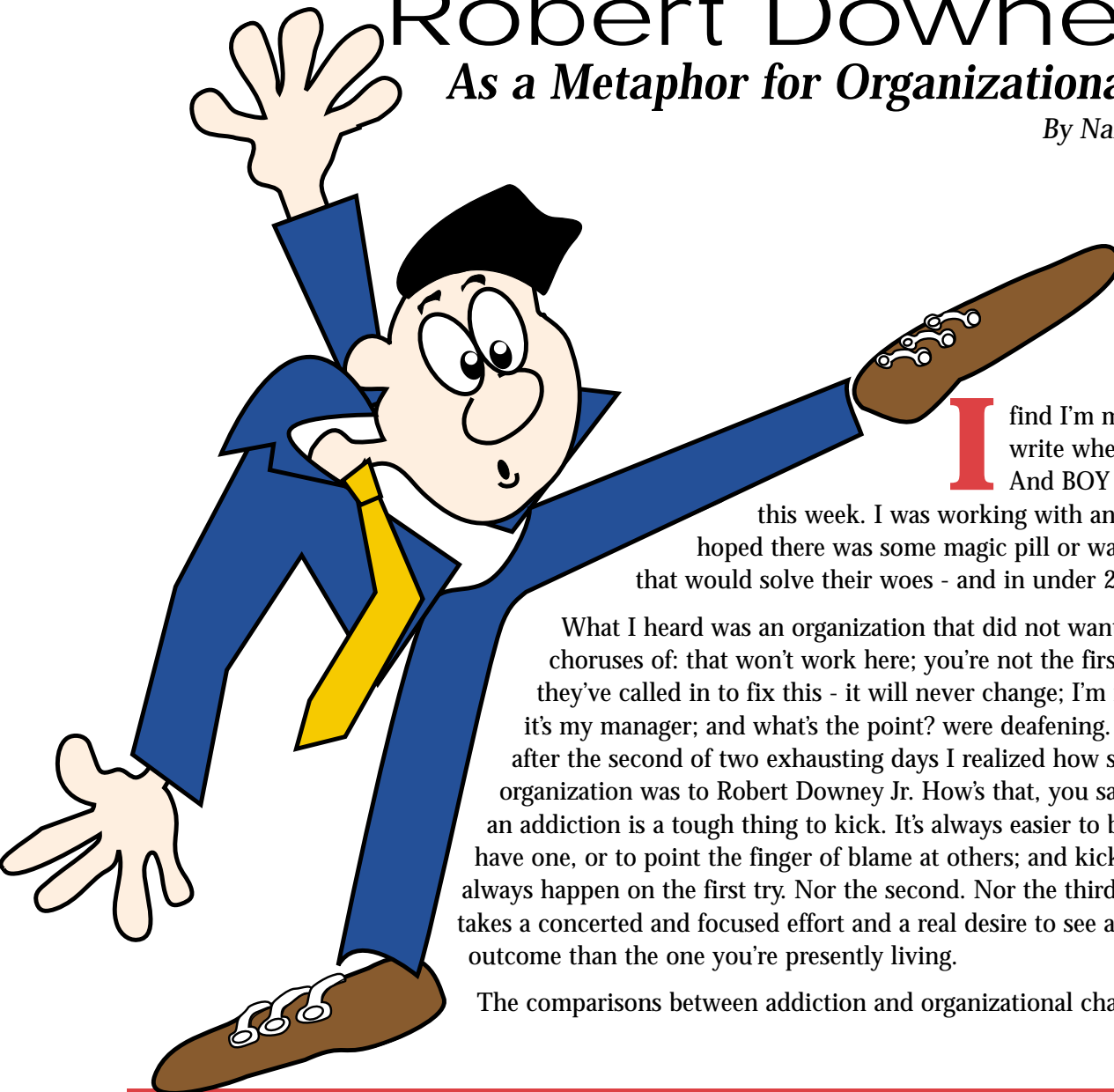


Robert Downey Jr. As a Metaphor for Organizational Change

By Nanette Miner, EdD



I find I'm most inspired to write when I'm irritated. And BOY was I irritated

this week. I was working with an organization that hoped there was some magic pill or wand I could wave that would solve their woes - and in under 2 hours, please.

What I heard was an organization that did not want to change. The choruses of: that won't work here; you're not the first consultant they've called in to fix this - it will never change; I'm not the problem - it's my manager; and what's the point? were deafening. As I drove home after the second of two exhausting days I realized how similar this organization was to Robert Downey Jr. How's that, you say? Consider this: an addiction is a tough thing to kick. It's always easier to believe you don't have one, or to point the finger of blame at others; and kicking it doesn't always happen on the first try. Nor the second. Nor the third. To truly change takes a concerted and focused effort and a real desire to see a different outcome than the one you're presently living.

The comparisons between addiction and organizational change are eerie:

THE ORGANIZATION

- We don't have time to fix it.
- I'm not to blame. It's my manager, the union, the alignment of the planets.
- We've tried it before, it didn't work.
- It will never work here, we're unique.
- It's faster if we go back to the old way.

THE ADDICT

- It's too hard.
- You've got the problem. I don't have a problem.
- I tried it before, it didn't work.
- You don't understand my special needs.
- I'll just slip-up this one time.

(Continued)

Let's take a look at each of these, individually.

We don't have time to fix it.

You may not get another chance.

I'm not to blame.

Sometimes no one is to "blame." Sometimes these things just evolve. But this is where you're at now. So it's time to take charge and make progress. It's wasted time to try to affix blame.

We've tried it before, it didn't work.

Did you know that the average American tries something 2.1 times before giving up? There has developed an odd mystique in America that things must go correctly right out of the gate. No room for tweaking, no margin for error. Remember the motto, "If at first you don't succeed..."

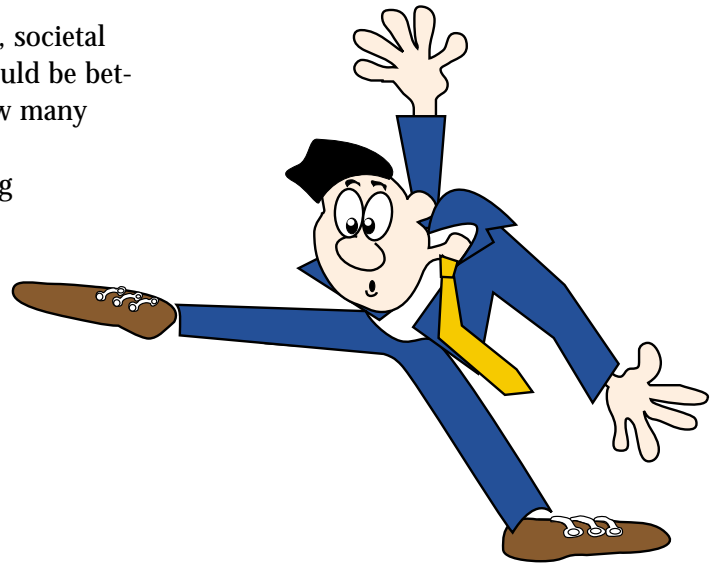
It will never work here, we're unique.

I've been an organizational consultant for over a decade and nearly every client begins their first conversation with me by stating, "We are a unique organization." No, you're not. What are organizations but large assemblies of people? And people behave rather predictably to: stress, change, success, and failure.

It's faster if we go back to the old way.

This is probably the most deadly belief, in my opinion. As with addicts, there is no "just this once." If the organization has decided to make a change, then it must stay the course. Waffling or allowing special dispensation only fosters a lack of respect from the workforce. It causes non-management people to say, "They don't really know what they're doing, do they?" It undermines any future changes you announce or attempt to initiate. People will wait to see if you are serious *this time*.

Change is painful. Personal change, organizational change, societal change - no one said it would be easy. They just said it would be better. And it will be, given concerted and focused effort. How many times has Robert Downey Jr. been to rehab? Three? Four? Some might say he has failed. I say "Bravo!" he's still trying to get it right.



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