



Case Study: Not Your Average Working Joe

At the height of his career, with a wife, two children, and material symbols of success, Joseph could hardly believe his life—and neither could his siblings. While working abroad, separated from his family for 22 years, Joseph’s accomplishments catapulted him into a position of political and economic leadership. Years of dirty work, gang violence, and the fragmentation of his family after his mother died were all a distant memory. Joseph was no longer just the big-mouthed little brother. He was a highly capable, respected, and internationally renowned leader with real power. His countercyclical economic policies steered a nation through economic surplus, crisis, and recovery. So much had changed since he and his brothers were young—or had it?

When the family reunited, past hurts and deceptions seemed to disappear. In reality, the siblings just never mentioned old offenses for the sake of peace and harmony. But family secrets, schisms, and drama are often amplified in the midst of crisis. This is exactly what happened when their elderly father fell ill. As Joseph’s father uttered his last words, he stoked smoldering sibling rivalries that had lain dormant for years. After the funeral, Joseph’s siblings started conspiring.

In the prime of his career, it seemed that Joseph had it all—except authentic relationships with his family of origin. His extraordinary power and wealth widened the gap even further between them. How could people from the same family have such different lives? When Joseph’s siblings looked at him with awe and incredulity, they saw an impossible childhood dream being fulfilled. When his nieces and nephews looked at him, they saw a hero. When his children looked at him, they saw a dad, whose success they took for granted. But when Joseph looked at his siblings, their children, and his own, he, like his father, saw people with great potential that had not yet been realized. “If only they knew what it took to get here,” he thought. “How can I help them understand that fulfilling my calling and becoming the transformational leader that they esteem (or envy) is no great mystery?” Nor was it easy.

Joseph feared that without their father, the family would devolve into factions and feuds rather than moving forward. But Joseph had come too far to go backward, and he certainly did not want family drama to cascade into his new life. So, he reached out to them. He desperately wanted a better relationship with them and to share the lessons he had learned. He wanted all of them to flourish. Joseph pondered how to use this moment as an opportunity to launch conversations that would simultaneously heal past rifts and inspire his family to live their own callings.

Case History

Joseph's compelling story transcends time and place. He could be from Detroit, Durban, or Delhi. His seemingly contemporary story about how to live your calling is nearly 4,000 years old; it is common to the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all of which have adherents worldwide. Thus, Joseph's story is directly relevant for people in established and emerging economies—and indirectly relevant for people of other faiths and philosophies.

Although the Torah (Genesis 37–50), Qur'an (Surah 12), and Bible (Genesis 37–50) focus on different details of the story, all agree that Joseph (or Yusuf) was not an “average working Joe.” As such, the details from all three religious texts are integrated here to provide an interfaith perspective of Joseph's calling. Additional archaeological information provides historical context and details about his work. The confluence of information from all sources conveys practical lessons about Joseph's calling, leadership, and talent development in organizations.

Joseph, a Hebrew shepherd from Canaan, left home and lived up to his Hebrew name, which means “to increase or may God add.” He was ultimately appointed Pharaoh's vizier and second in command over Egypt during the 12th dynastic era under the Pharaoh Amenemhat III.¹ At that time, Joseph was given an Egyptian name, Zaphenath-pa'aneah, which means “who is called to life.”² As Egypt's top administrator, Joseph developed and implemented revolutionary economic policies that led the nation through a famine to fecundity.³ How did he do it? Between each line of Joseph's résumé are clues about how he lived and fulfilled his calling (Figure 11.1).

Joseph's story elegantly illustrates the dynamic relationship between destiny, duty, and disposition, guided by a collective cosmology that resulted in extraordinarily “good work” across life roles and throughout the life span. His story provides insights into discovering, developing, and fulfilling one's calling as well as attendant risks and challenges. It also illuminates the role that leaders, organizational policies, and colleagues play in developing talent and