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## Pearls from Sand: How Small Encounters Lead to Powerful Lessons

By Karl Wiegiers  
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Review by Robert L. Glass

I really wanted to review this book. But at the same time, I was apprehensive about reviewing it. Why? The author is a friend and colleague of mine (and a long-time Software Practitioner subscriber), and I was afraid I would have a problem if I didn't like it. I have a strong belief that a reviewer's first responsibility is to be true to himself and his opinion of the book, and only after that be true to other factors like friendship.

Fortunately, I liked the book. It's not a software book, but it is a fascinating collection of life lessons written by a software person. The lessons are presented as 37 "pearls of wisdom," one per chapter, each supported with one or more anecdotes from the background of the author. The pearls are grouped into interpersonal, personal, motivational, practical, cautionary, and professional, a nice organizational scheme.

I want to do two things in this review. For the first, I will give one of my own life lessons, written in the style of the book. This will give you an idea of what the book is about without stealing any of the author's material! For the second, I want to give you some brief but pithy quotes from the book.

Here's my personal life lesson. Early in my software career, I worked in a small and tight-knit group of people. As our work expanded, we needed to expand the group. One of our new hires was a fellow named Harold Graebner.

Now Harold seemed to be a nice guy, but at the same time he seemed to go out of his way to bug me. After several weeks of this behavior,

I decided I had to do something about it. So I confronted him, and explained how I felt about what he was doing.

What happened next astounded me, and became a life lesson I love to share with others. After I had my say, Harold looked at me and said "Why don't you and your wife come over for dinner Friday night?" I had expected some sort of defensive reaction, but instead what I received was a solid overture of friendship! Harold and I became good friends after that, a friendship that eventually withered only because we moved on to different geographic places in our lives.

What was the lesson, the one I have shared so frequently with others over the years? If you have a problem with someone, confront it (thoughtfully and respectfully). It may turn out to be the greatest decision you ever made! (Oh, just in case you are wondering why Harold had made such a point of bugging me. I chalked it up to the "little-boy syndrome," where a little boy bugs a little girl because he likes her, not because he enjoys bugging her!)

Interestingly, I failed to apply that particular life lesson a few years later in my life. At the time I was a national speaker for the technical society ACM, and as a national speaker I was paid to travel to and lecture at various student and professional ACM chapters around the world (mostly around the US). I was in Kansas City, I remember vividly, where a group of my hosts, accompanied by their spouses, took me out to dinner before the talk (that was the normal practice). One wife seemed to delight in bugging me, and in fact kept doing it all evening, not only through the dinner but before and after my talk.

I thought about applying my life lesson and confronting her, but then – the more I thought about it – this was a one-time event and I would

never see her again, so I decided not to bother. I will never know, of course, whether that was the right decision – without the confrontation, I couldn't find out why she was doing what she was doing – but in the end the confrontation simply didn't seem worth the risk.

I guess all of that just shows that life lessons need to be applied selectively!

Now, for those pithy quotes:

- on exercise – Find a health club a mile or so away. Schedule a one-hour session three times a week. Walk/run there and back home. There is no need to enter the club or pay a fee!
- on perfection – "At some point, you just have to declare victory and move on with your life."
- on teaching – "Dealing with three-year-olds is pretty much like dealing with PhD scientists, except you can reason with three-year-olds."
- on opinion – "Everyone is entitled to his opinion, but not his own facts." (this one is borrowed from the late Senator Daniel Moynihan).
- on mistakes – "If it is true that we learn from our mistakes, I must be a genius by now!"
- on self-knowledge – "There are some things I'm good at, and many I'm not."
- on a one-person company – "I always win the Employee of the Month award."

So, what's the bottom line here? I liked the book. It is entertainingly written, contains some worthwhile life lessons, and was an enjoyable reading experience. I found myself wondering, though, if I would have the personal – what's the word, "chutzpah"? – to write such a book, but then the fact that this review consists mostly of my own anecdotes proves that I would!