

## **The Minimalists**

5           The characters in this story are Joe Minor and Steven Heid. They have the unprincipled reputation of doing as little as possible and maintaining a low profile. These are fictitious characters that many can identify with real people that they have encountered in their daily work routines. They have comfortable positions and try not to draw attention to themselves. They practice the ALAP work ethic (As Little As Possible).

### **Behavioral Characteristics**

10           They were not born this way, but became conditioned after joining the work force. The conditioning came from a management style that motivated workers by fear of termination. The minimalists soon realized that the safe strategy is to do as little as possible while continuing to draw the same pay. In fact, safety rules provided a convenient platform to stall, delay, and avoid exposure to “harm”. They became risk averse. The behavior pattern is not unlike that of a mouse that wants to remain in the shadows. However, they are always seeking security of pay.

15           The minimalists tend to gravitate toward secure government jobs. There, they can be camouflaged in the pool of numbers. No worries, just arrive every day, do your time, collect the same pay as high performers, and seek not any more responsibility. They are only paid workers who are trading their time for money. But, and here is the irony of the situation, they will do whatever they think that they can get away with. Have I painted a picture of an extreme case of a “do nothing” person? Yes that is an extreme portrayal, but there are varying degrees of these individuals that can be pointed out in many groups. There is a little bit of minimalist in each of us. And it is a group phenomena that is perpetuated by the group response. Remove these minimalists from the group environment and they will transform into something else.

### **Hazards**

20           There are hazards to falling into this mind set. The minimalist soon learns that extra effort is not rewarded with extra money. Extra effort is rewarded with accolades, certificates, medals in the Department of Defense, notoriety, but no extra money. Money is a wonderful

motivator, and an equally effective de-motivator. So the minimalist finds ways to minimize effort, while retaining the money. Take away some money and he/she sinks deeper.

Speaking out is dangerous. It could become politically incorrect. It could ruffle some feathers of executives in high places. So be quiet and keep the seat warm. This quells creativity. The minimalist gradually lacks self-confidence. The only place to practice this behavior is in large organizations where the numbers whitewash the dereliction. The minimalist is extremely safe on the job, as required, but engages in risky behavior outside of the work environment.

## **Nature**

Joe Minor and Steven Heid are products of a weak and corrupted society. They could not survive in the natural world with their philosophy of minimal effort. Most creatures crawl around, or swim or fly, looking for resources. The resources are usually food energy for survival. In the case of humans in a corporate environment, the resource of choice is money -- an artificially generated reward system maintained in a capitalist society. The minimalist has been transformed into an un-natural behavior that is self destructive. The ruinous result is not achieving their full potential and falling short of what could have been.

The minimalist would not survive long in the animal world. In nature, animals need to hustle to eat, and to be not eaten.

The minimalist attitude is not so bad in our society. It is minimal risk, a safe place to be, comfortable, easy on mental anxiety, and satisfying. It is survival in a corporate world.

## **The cure**

The cure is to speak your mind. Tell management the truth from your perspective. Sometimes, management needs to hear what they do not want to hear. This could catapult the minimalist out of the large organization, which could be a good thing. That would provide a good “boot” towards a new career in self-actualization.

Start a business. A capitalist will not be a minimalist.

## **Can do**

Young men detached from their mothers' protection enter the armed forces basic training camps with handicaps. Some have a fear of heights, others have a fear of water, and still others

have a fear of darkness. Fear can be a wonderful motivator to empower "superhuman" performance when being chased by a water buffalo. Fear can also immediately kill the prospect of even starting a task. The Army conducts lectures on managing fear prior to an exercise that requires soldiers to step outside of their comfort zone. The word "can't" has the power to limit activity. We are limited precisely by what we think that we cannot do. The human mind places an upper boundary on the body's physical ability before the physical limit is even discovered. But, we still cannot do the impossible. So the knowledge of that possible/impossible boundary is a valuable tool for exceeding in life.

Uniformed service personnel are frequently required to step outside of their comfort zones when performing their professional duties. These are law enforcement, firemen, medical practitioners, emergency responders, customs officers, forest service personnel, federal marshals, DOD, etc. This is usually not by choice, except as a career decision. If they knew the consequences beforehand, then they may not have chosen that career path. Ignorance of the future is a benefit to humans excelling in whatever they chose to do. I may be willingly to step through that door into the unknown if that unknown remains unknown. Our physical barriers are frequently based on our frail psychology of fear of the unknown..

Fear is healthy. It keeps us awake, alert, and motivated to do the right thing. A fear of darkness is akin to the fear of not knowing a path forward. Just as light illuminates darkness, knowledge removes fears. The safe path forward may not be immediately visible, but an end point must first be visualized. This establishes a goal. Then a plan is developed on how to get there. The plan involves our known capabilities. Anything that can be imagined is possible.

Young men entering the Army's Advanced Infantry Training School at Fort Polk, Louisiana in 1968 would pass through an entrance gate, Figure 1.

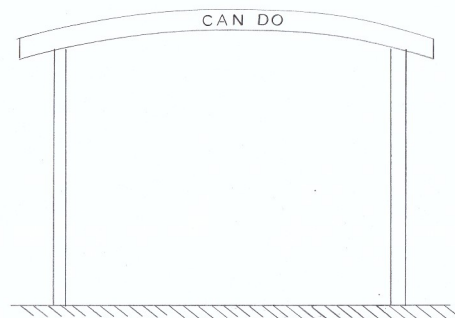


Figure 1. Welcome gate to training area.

The gate is two tall telephone poles with a wooden banner arc stretched across the tops of the poles with the words "CAN DO" painted in bold letters. Each trainee is inspired by those words, but it also serves as a warning. You see if a drill sergeant ever hears the word "I can't do it Sarge", 10 minutes later the trainee will be doing the impossible after serving up some pushups as a penance. The U.S. Army had a way of convincing these young men and women that their obstacles to physical performance was mostly psychological. There is also a healthy dose of peer pressure. If some poor guy went first and came through unscathed, then maybe I can do it too.

Humans do have physical limitations. We cannot run 100 miles per hour, but what is possible is usually more than what is presently imagined. The practical limitations are what the Army was encouraging young soldiers to explore. Once that is known, then the decision to attempt some new and unknown task becomes an exercise in risk management. Exploration on the high seas, in the air, in caves, and in outer space has always been with risk that was managed based on known physical limitations, and a bit of daring. A wrong choice is not a failure. It is a data point that provides an opportunity for a course correction. Driving a car is a continuous series of errors and corrections. Failure is when the mind surrenders to "can't" and stops trying.

Just as the mind creates a barrier to what we think we cannot do, it can also raise that barrier. The obstacle to human achievement is primarily psychological. The word "can't" should be removed from our vocabulary and placed in some museum