



# Tom Asacker

## The Molehill Man. If you feel yourself coping instead of creating, it's time to shake things up.

I PURCHASED a new car last month; I needed one. I was hesitant to take possession in the dead of winter having slid off the road on a number of occasions over the years. But, like I said, it wasn't a discretionary purchase.

Last week a hunk of ice fell from a building and crushed . . . okay dinged its pristine, and flimsy, hood. I was beside myself. I hadn't even had the pleasure of escorting it to its debut oil change.

For the next several days, I obsessed over that stupid ding. I eyeballed it from multiple angles and in different lighting. I tried to push it out with the heels of my palms. I even Googled "How to get rid of a ding on the hood of a car." (FYI: Don't try).

The reality? That ding had absolutely no impact on my work, well-being or relationships, and therefore should have been a temporary annoyance, at worst. But my mind created its own reality and turned that trivial molehill into a meaningful mountain.

As I thought more about it, I realized that my ding obsession was strangely similar to the inconsequential concerns of most busy professionals. Our preoccupation with order and structure, our obsession with numbers and interpersonal control, is, in fact, a pseudo-reality.

The 20th century comedian and radio personality Fred Allen once quipped, "A molehill man is a pseudo-busy executive who comes to work at 9 a.m. and finds a molehill on his desk. He has until 5 p.m. to make this molehill into a mountain. An accomplished molehill man will often have his mountain finished before lunch."

Molehill men believe that perfection and productivity are attributes of a strong individual. We assume that rigid methods and control keep everyone secure and in their places. The reality? Our obsession produces an inflexible institution of the mind that majors on the minor; one that

cramps all day at the expense of curiosity, reflection, and growth.

Are you preoccupied with to-do lists, spreadsheets, and schedules? Is your day filled with routines and rules? Do you spend more time creating reports and attending meetings, than perfecting your craft and engaged in the world of your audience? Congratulations! You're a molehill man (or woman).

Molehill men are our own, and others, worse enemies. We slowly, and unknowingly, suck the potential and life out of ourselves and our organizations. But molehill men are not pathological. Our focus on the immediate and unimportant is simply a means of coping with our present reality, our situation-induced anxiety.

If you feel yourself coping instead of creating, it's time to shake things up. When the familiar becomes the focus, it's time to experiment. Don't lumber along in the same old routine, change direction. Stop trying to control an unknowable future and instead be a connected and passionate part of the here and now.

Be present and pay attention to the world and your place in it. Sit quietly, reflect, and ask, Am I making a difference? Is my work moving people forward, toward a worthy ideal, meaning, and a better life. Is this the best that I can do? Will my children be proud of my actions?

Change the patterns of your life. Call a customer, thank her for her business and ask her how to improve and add even more value to her life. Give back by starting a community good works project. Take some maverick employees to lunch.

Shift your perspective. Let the pull of what excites and intrigues you be your guide. Do anything to get your mind off of your "ding" and out of your rut. It will revitalize your business and make you more attuned to opportunities. Just don't park under an ice-covered roof.