

Praise for *Sync or Swim*

Sync or Swim is a quick and easy read with a simple but powerful message for anyone who hopes to effectively manage and lead others. It reminds us of what we all need to remember but too quickly forget—that everyone needs appreciation, but that everyone needs it communicated in their own unique way. This book is a beautiful introduction to the basics of the true art of appreciation in the workplace.

—**JACK CANFIELD** | Coauthor of *The Success Principles* and *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work*

I've always said that business is easy . . . until people get involved. The key word is teamwork. If you can't work together, you can't win together. In *Sync or Swim*, Chapman, White, and Myra tell a quick, fun story that gives you the tools you need to bring your people together like never before.

—**DAVE RAMSEY** | *New York Times* bestselling author and nationally syndicated radio show host

I was sitting waiting to board a flight, with twenty things on my to-do list. But I decided to look at this fable . . . and couldn't stop reading! It really drew me in and I instantly started thinking about how I need to purposefully tell (and show) my amazing team members how much I genuinely appreciate them—and to do so much more often. *Sync or Swim* makes a tremendously important point in an incredibly simple way—that I don't think I'll ever be able to forget.

—**SHAUNTI FELDHahn** | Author, *For Women Only* and *The Male Factor*

Congratulations! *Sync or Swim* is a quick and easy read with valuable insights. Wherever you work, whatever your role, you will see yourself and your team in this little story . . . and you will learn. Extremely well done.

—**GARY BRADT, PHD** | Primary trainer for *Who Moved My Cheese?*
Author, *The Ring in the Rubble: Dig Through Change and Find Your Next Golden Opportunity*

Not since Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* has someone encapsulated a critical leadership lesson in a quick and fun-to-read fable. After fifteen years as a turnaround executive and seven years as a leadership coach, I recognized old familiar patterns in *Sync or Swim* and picked up several new useful techniques for keeping executive teams motivated and working together. A valuable and enjoyable read!

—**GLENN HELLMAN** | CEO, DrivenForward; executive coach

In an age fixated on quarterly results, bottom-line growth, and increased value for the stakeholders, this book turns our attention to HOW those results get produced. The people who make them happen (or not) are real-life human beings, not cogs in a machine. And each of them is unique. *Sync or Swim* sheds valuable light on the everyday human interactions that can make or break any organization. Leaders and managers will do well to take heed.

—**DEAN MERRILL** | Publishing executive and bestselling author/collaborator of more than forty titles

“It’s about people, stupid.” That’s the first line in our book *Brains on Fire* and that’s the big management lesson I learned reading *Sync or Swim*. We all want to be seen as individuals. And heard. This short fable is a simple and wonderful reminder.

—**ROBBIN PHILLIPS** | Courageous President, Brains on Fire
Coauthor, *Brains on Fire* and *The Passion Conversation*

Sync or Swim points out how easy it can be to help others improve their performance with positive affirmation, genuine encouragement, and open communication. Every manager and executive will recognize themselves—and others—in this fun, readable tale.

—**JUDY BRYSON** | Pioneer Clubs president/CEO, retired

There are many Friscos, Tias, Alanas, et al in the workplace. The trick is for managers to appreciate the differences and lead accordingly. This book will help managers appreciate people for WHO they are and recognize them for what they DO in an appropriate manner.

—**PETER W. HART** | CEO, Rideau Recognition, Inc.

I was surprised at how I was drawn into *Sync or Swim*, despite the fact that I’m a lover of practical, proven management case studies. This fresh and creative approach gave me insights on how to appreciate, understand, and communicate with each colleague through their eyes that I wouldn’t have gotten from any “typical” business book. Now I’m challenged to put into practice these unforgettably practical lessons.

—**JOHN LARUE** | Founder, ChristianityToday.com
Chief Development Officer, Jesus.net

The title *Sync or Swim* was not lost on me. As a leader, I not only see myself and my team in Chapman, White, and Myra’s latest book, I identify things we could have done much better in our own journey. If you lead or ever want to lead, this is a must-read. You did it again guys!

—**MIKE NOVAK** | President and CEO, KLOVE

I really enjoyed the story and the perspective it gives business leaders at all levels. *Sync or Swim* is a great, easy read with a terrific message that allows the reader see the value of targeted, sincere appreciation.

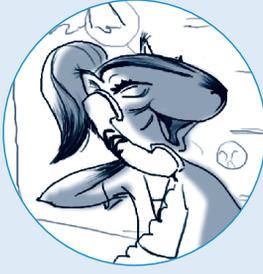
—**MIKE BYAM** | Terryberry Company

Sync or Swim is a compelling tool for management training and a refresher course for those who’ve spent years leading people. You’ll find yourself smiling and resonating with the sequence of events in this delightful fable.

—**CAROL THOMPSON** | Chief Operating Officer, Christianity Today

Sync or Swim is a brilliant modern-day fable that captures the essence of everything that is wrong in the workplace, and it offers real, authentic solutions steeped in practical wisdom! If you manage people or plan to in the future, you must read this fable!

—**AARON BROYLES** | Entrepreneur, speaker, and author of *Do Great Things*

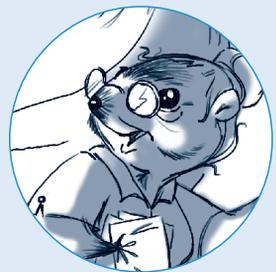


Sync or Swim

**A FABLE ABOUT WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION
AND COMING TOGETHER IN A CRISIS**

Gary Chapman, Paul White,
and Harold Myra

NORTHFIELD PUBLISHING • CHICAGO



© 2014 by
GARY CHAPMAN, PAUL WHITE, and HAROLD MYRA

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Edited by Betsey Newenhuyse
Interior and cover design: Erik M. Peterson
Cover and interior illustrations copyright © 2014 by
Nathan Little/nathanlittleart.com. All rights reserved.
Gary Chapman photo: P.S. Photography
Paul White photo: Michael Bankston

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chapman, Gary D.

Sync or swim : a fable about workplace communication and coming together in a crisis / Gary Chapman, Paul White, Harold Myra.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-8024-1223-2 (hardback)

1. Employee motivation. 2. Employee morale. 3. Communication in management. 4. Organizational behavior. 5. Corporate culture. I. White, Paul E. II. Myra, Harold Lawrence. III. Title.

HF5549.5.M63C4383 2014
658.4'5—dc23

2014029144

Northfield Publishing
820 N. LaSalle Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60610

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction: Why We Wrote <i>Sync or Swim</i>	9
The Story	
SAM COMES TO PARADISE	13
THE BEAR ON THE MOUNTAIN	19
TIA'S COMPLAINTS	23
SAM THROWS A PARTY	26
BRIANA TELLS THE TRUTH	29
SEAWALL WISDOM	33
LISTENING TO TIA	38
GLIMMERS OF HOPE	42
JACKSON'S WARNING	47
THE MONEY GAME	51
BRISK WINDS AND A RED ENGINE	56
THE CAT WHO SPAT	59
THE WIND PICKS UP	63
STORM!	67
IN THE SHELTER	69
THE FRISCO ATTITUDE	71
THE DANCE	75
Leaders' Insights from <i>Sync or Swim</i>	79
Questions for Reflection and Discussion	91
The Fable's Core Principles	94
Resources	97
Acknowledgments	99
About the Authors	100

INTRODUCTION

Why We Wrote *Sync or Swim*

Perhaps you've noticed something in your workplace, something pollsters are reporting as sobering contradictions. Up to 90 percent of American organizations have a recognition program, yet the majority of workers say they receive no recognition. The number-one reason Americans leave their jobs is because they don't feel appreciated. Then there's this: over half of all managers think they do a good job of recognizing employees, but only 17 percent of workers agree that's true of their managers.

Those are hard realities, considering most workers (67%) say they're more motivated by praise from managers than anything else—including money.

Workplaces have become high-pressure environments demanding more production with fewer resources. Employees worry about the economy and their future, and they often feel used and undervalued. One of the most disturbing trends we've tracked is the sharp increase of cynicism.

“They don’t give a rip about me,” one worker told us, “only my performance.”

We’ve also noticed something that’s more hopeful—a great thirst for solutions. Since negative trends have spread in businesses, healthcare, government agencies, and non-profits, the bright ray of hope is that everyone is looking for ways to make things better.

Through our work with thousands of employees we’ve discovered practical principles for making recognition and appreciation authentic. We’ve trained leaders to use those principles to help their organizations thrive and become healthy, positive places to work.

And we’ve written a fable that illustrates those practical principles.

Why? Since earliest times, fables have been passed on from generation to generation. As scholars attest, humans are “hard-wired for story.” Fables cut through complexity to reveal simple wisdom. In them we see our own predicaments and reactions, both wise and foolish.

Sync or Swim helps us solve the frustrating contradiction of morale-building programs hurting morale and of “recognition” resulting in cynicism. The story is written to be a fun, quick read, illustrating ways to communicate authentic appreciation that generates productivity and effective teamwork. The bear, squirrel, bird, beaver, chipmunk, and cat all respond in different ways—as each of us as individuals does.

We shared *Sync or Swim* with a wide variety of managers, trainers, and other leaders, and among the many responses were these:

- “Because of my heavy workload and new demands, I identified with the characters’ pain. In my second reading I found myself getting drawn in and enjoying it even more. I love the realism and practical insights!”
- “We’ve all struggled with these issues, and the principles are so wonderfully illustrated. The story is an easy read for everyone, including those who don’t read very much.”
- “The fable is a great tool for groups to create awareness, stimulate lively discussion, and give hope for changing their current atmosphere into a thriving workplace.”

Another respondent sent us this reaction: “The characters are so true to what we’re like—we’re often oblivious in just the ways they are!”

After the fable you’ll find more of their responses to stimulate your thinking. But first, we invite you to read *Sync or Swim*.

GARY CHAPMAN

PAUL WHITE

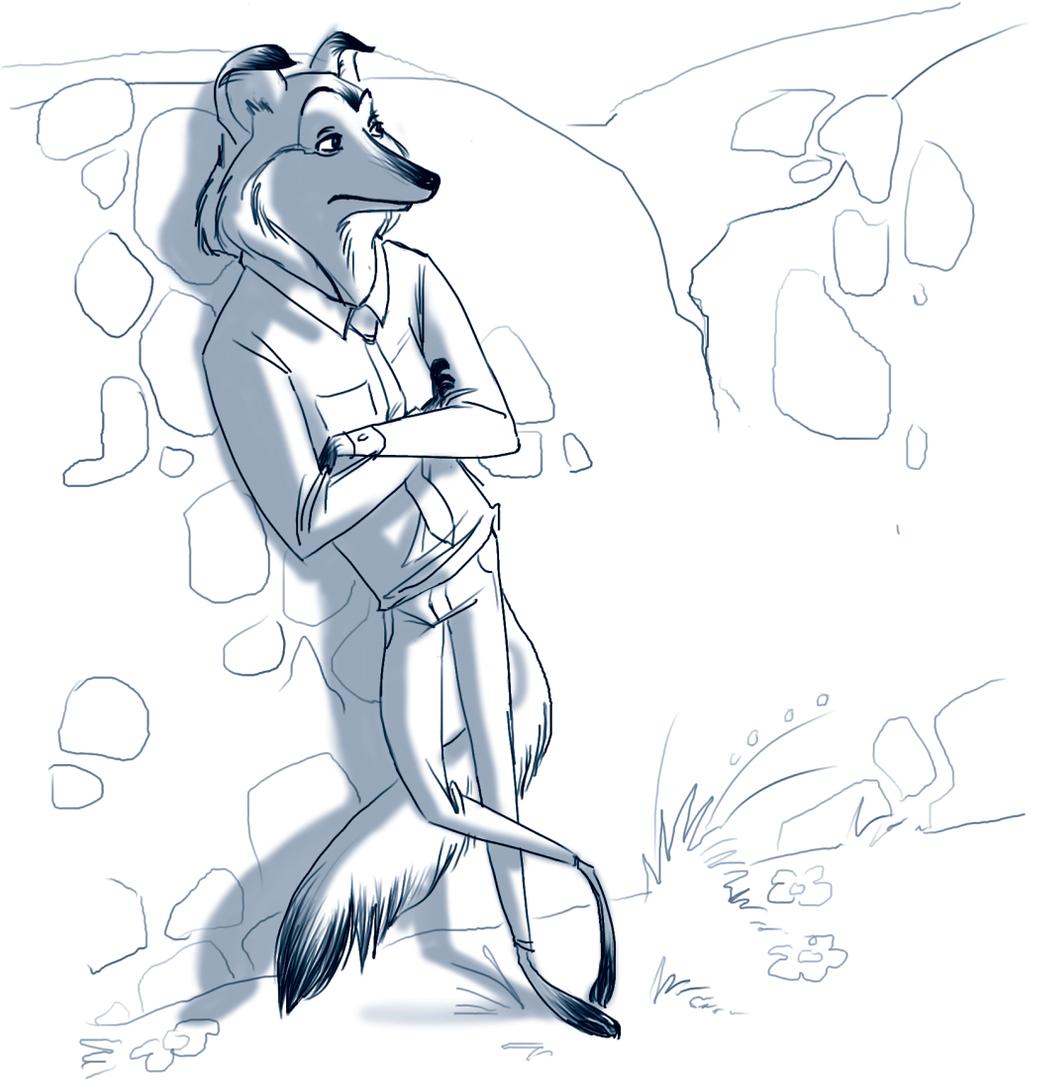
HAROLD MYRA

Sam Comes to Paradise

Sam the Shetland sheepdog loved big challenges, and landing his dream job as CEO of Monarch Enterprises, the family-run company that owned Spruce Isle, felt like the challenge of a lifetime. Standing atop the island's seawall, he studied the breach where storm waters had blasted through a while back, flooding several streets and shops and impacting Monarch's bottom line. His mandate was to ensure it never happened again and that Spruce Isle's all-important tourist trade would continue to grow and flourish.

Friends had warned him that it wouldn't be easy, and that as CEO he'd be caught between Monarch's head-in-the-sand board and its prickly staff. Sam sniffed the sea air. He had years of experience dealing with prickly personalities. *I'll get them on board and get it done!*

The sun was bright, the breezes warm, and it was hard to imagine the fury of a storm assaulting the levees. Tourists



Bring on the storms!

were filing off the ferry at the dock and heading for the quaint shops and restaurants renowned for their seafood. The ocean's blues, greens, and frothy whites lifted his spirits.

All his life Sam had dreamed of coming here. Spruce Isle was named for its majestic trees on the mountains and famed for its flowers and butterflies, including a species that swarmed in its forest each year. Everything—shops, mountains, butterfly migrations, beaches, and even the system of storm barriers—everything invigorated him.

Bring on the storms! His resolve rippled through him like a shot of adrenaline.

Looking out at smaller, distant islands, he noticed a seabird flying toward him. As it neared, he saw it was a puffin. It soared in, landed, settled itself, and stared out at the sea.

Sam had seen puffins in photos. He thought of them as odd but somehow natty seabirds, with their white faces and black caps and stout, multicolored beaks. But this one looked tattered, her chunky body a bit unsteady on her red-orange feet.

The old puffin said, "Bigger storms are coming." She hunched forward as in a stiff wind.

Sam glanced her way. She'd be amazed, he thought, to know he was in charge of leading the entire Monarch organization and protecting the island. He had come from the turbulent world of sports management with a reputation as a problem solver, someone who could work with big

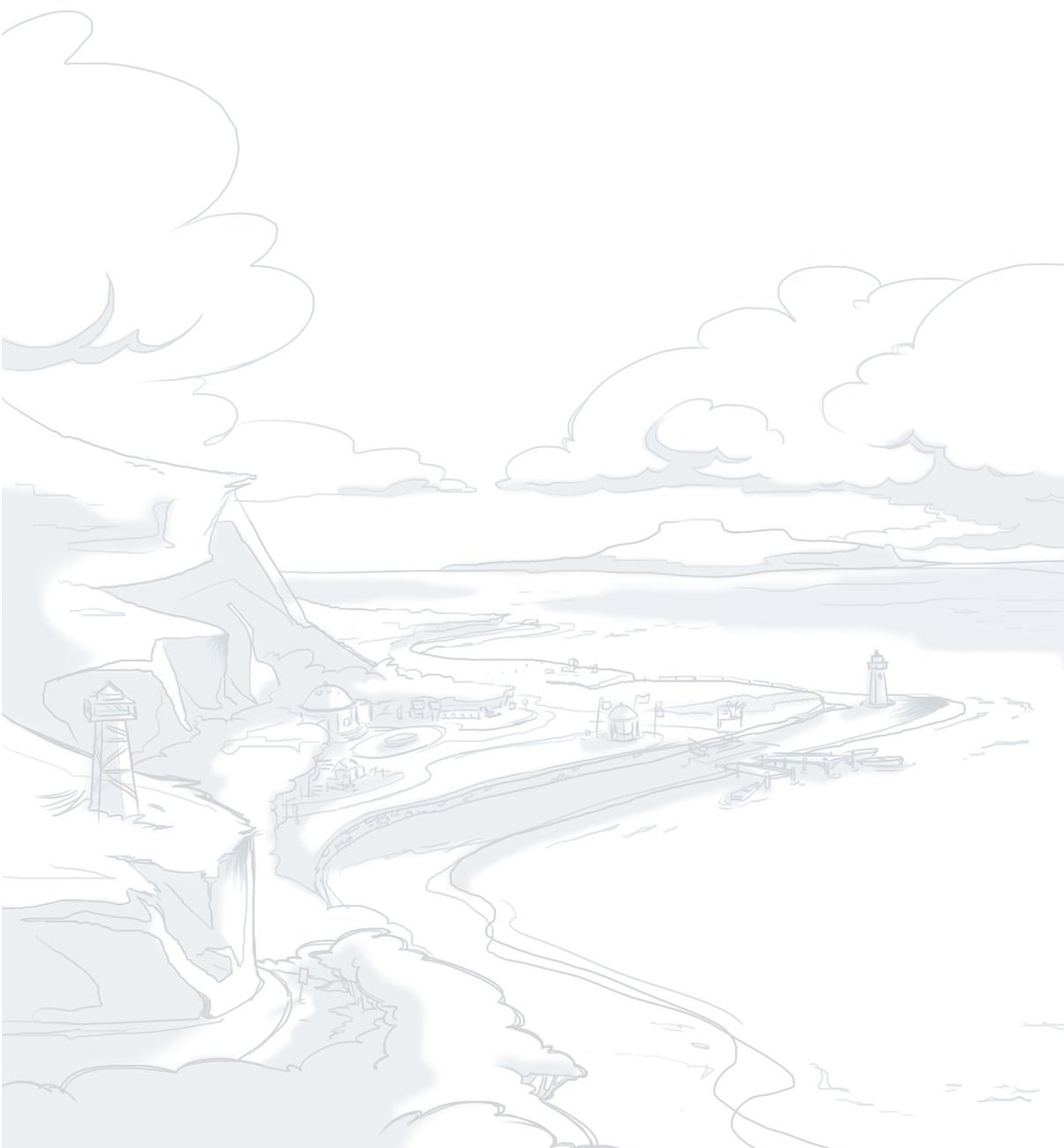
egos. Whatever it took, he'd rally the team and get it done.

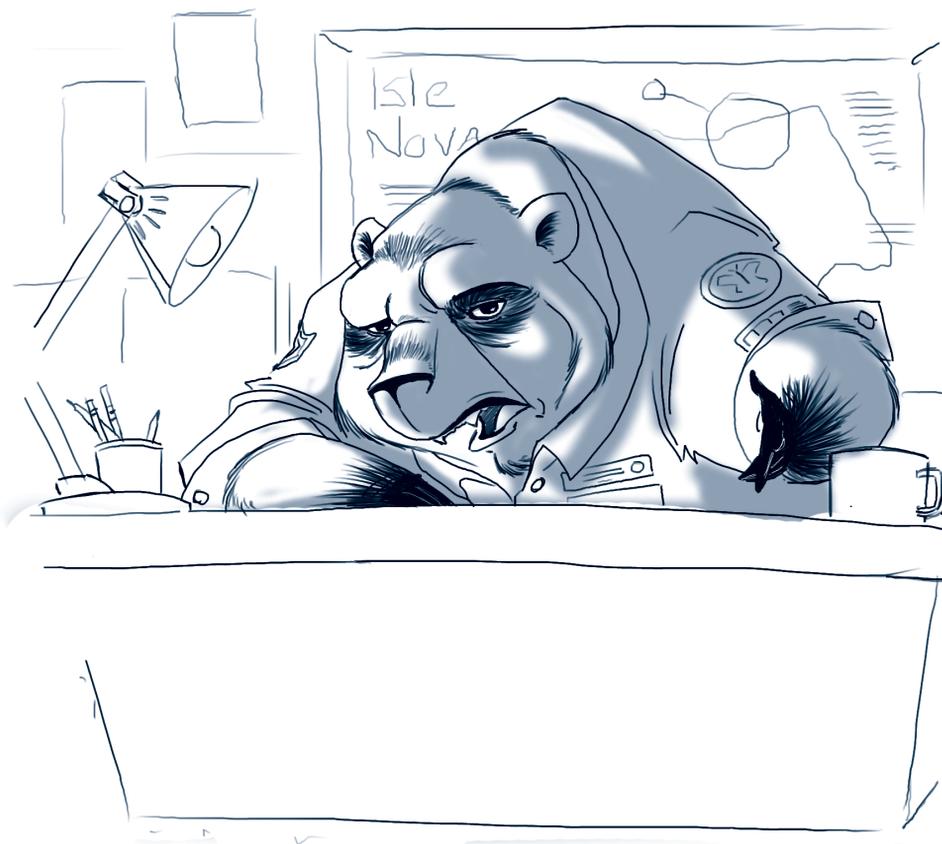
The puffin flapped her stubby wings and shifted her weight. "The next storm could bring disaster."

Sam looked over at her. *I know that. What's with this bird?*

The puffin wagged her head, eyes still on the sea. Then her short wings suddenly beat furiously, lifting her into the air.

Annoyed and slightly unsettled, Sam watched until she became a little speck in the distance.





“We’re understaffed and underfunded.”

The Bear on the Mountain

Sam started climbing the mountain that dominated the island's interior. Its wildlife, trails, and butterfly pavilion drew thousands of tourists, and they were drawing him. Eventually he was looking down on the shoreline below, a long, thin squiggle of brown separating the ocean blue and island green. That squiggle had to hold back the coming storms from the lowland shops, beach, and hotel.

He reached the highland forest with tall oaks and pines and meadows bright with wildflowers. Although early for the swarming butterflies the island was famous for, blue swallowtails circled a puddle and orange-tips zigzagged over a meadow. A bird chirped and a feathery flash of scarlet caught his eye.

Sam passed hikers studying a trail marker and went on to the butterfly pavilion, one of the island's most popular attractions. After standing in line with other visitors and then entering the vaulted enclosure, he feasted his eyes

on the hundreds of butterflies on the trees and plants and in the air. A poster on the wall helped him identify clearwings, swordtails, cabbage whites, and painted ladies. He watched light play on sparkling metallic colors of a metalmark. A hovering leafwing landed on his shoulder and stayed there a while.

The experience was all he'd hoped.

Yet the pavilion itself was in need of paint and a bit shabby, with cobwebs in corners. He'd take that up with Frisco, the head ranger.

Sam followed a trail to the preserve's headquarters, a complex of log buildings with flags flying, including Monarch's corporate flag—sky-blue, with a monarch butterfly poised on the leaf of a gnarly branch.

Monarch's proud history started with a pioneer who saw the island's potential for tourism despite the dangerous storms. Over time the company built seawalls, developed hotels and shops, and cut trails so visitors could see the butterflies swarm. Much of the forest was set aside for camping and hiking. Then came the butterfly pavilion, and tourism spiked.

Sam found Frisco in his headquarters cabin. The big spectacled bear stared at him. "Heard you were coming." His expression said he'd like to send Sam back out the door with a swipe of his paw.

Sam's hair bristled but he forced out friendly words of wonder at the butterfly pavilion. He said nothing about its

cobwebs but quizzed Frisco on his priorities.

The ranger's responses confirmed what Sam had heard: Monarch workers were very good at playing the blame game. "We're supposed to have emergency shelters up here all stocked and ready in case a storm breaches the levees," Frisco blustered. "But go look for yourself. They're not ready because we requisition supplies but the stuff never arrives!"

Sam perked up his ears. "I'll check on that."

"We're understaffed and underfunded. Hordes of tourists keep coming, and we can't worry about shelters we'll never need." The big bear reared up higher and stared down at his new boss. His meaning was clear: The seawall is your problem, and you don't look like you can handle it.

Sam had dealt with plenty of big pro athletes. He stared back.

Unblinking, Frisco complained, "My staff can't keep up with all these campers and gawkers. Headquarters *never* delivers on promises, and *nobody* cares." He thrust a list at Sam. "Here's what we need."

Sam took the list. He wondered what the rest of his direct reports would be like.