

Swanvesha

OCTOBER 2025

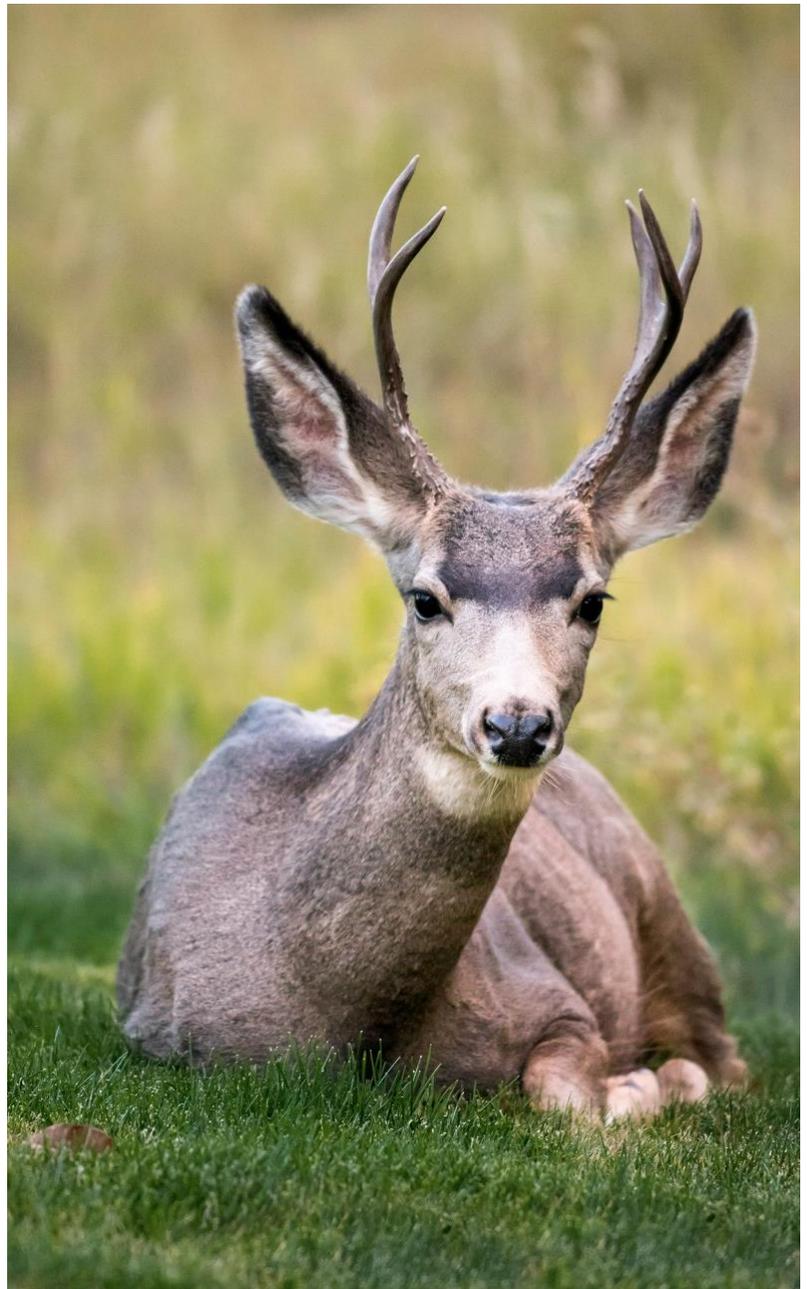
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Smile – It’s good.



WELCOME TO SWANVESHA

Swanvesha (*Swa-Anvesha*, Sanskrit for *Self-Inquiry*) offers insights, stories, and actionable strategies to help leaders grow and adapt in an ever-changing world. Stay informed, inspired, and lead with purpose.

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“I’m glad I live in a world where there are Octobers”

- L M Montgomery “*Anne of Green Gables*”



WELCOME NOTES

October's quote comes from *Anne of Green Gables*, where Anne Shirley marvels at the changing seasons. It's a reminder to pause for gratitude—October carries both color and gentle melancholy, and I've tried to capture that spirit in this newsletter.

In ***Musings***, a simple story raises a big question: what labels do we carry, and when do they weigh us down? In ***Novella***, we laugh with (and at) consultants, but it's really about all of us—how context shapes how we're seen. And in ***Corporate Culture***, a classic *FRIENDS* episode becomes a lens for leadership, showing how authenticity, curiosity, and timing matter as much in business as in sitcoms.

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THE WEIGHT OF THE FAMOUS STICK



In a village in Congo, the elder was respected for his wisdom—and equally for his walking stick. It was no ordinary stick. With years of use, it had been reinforced with nails, coins, and bits of metal. The weight of time showed on it.

The stick had become famous. Visitors came from far away just to see it and take photographs. The elder, however, found it painful to carry. His hands twisted under its weight, yet he kept holding on because the stick had become part of his identity.

A few times, he tried to let it go. Once he left it on a bus, but a passenger rushed after him to return it. Another time he gave it to a stranger who was delighted to receive such an “antique.” But when the villagers saw the stranger with the stick, they assumed he was a thief and beat him before returning the stick to its “rightful” owner. Finally, the elder gathered the village and confessed his struggle. He spoke of the pain, of his attempts to leave the stick behind, and of how the weight was becoming unbearable. The villagers laughed, and then did something simple: they gifted him a new stick—one light enough for him to walk with ease.

We often get tagged with something—a skill, a style, a reputation—that becomes synonymous with us. Over time, we begin to see ourselves only through that label, and the other parts of who we are retreat into the shadows. Like the elder, we carry the weight of expectations long past their usefulness.

Actors offer an excellent example. Some of the greatest ones have deliberately broken their successful “image roles,” risking criticism, to reinvent themselves and show their true range. They don’t let one tag define them—they choose courage over comfort.

Leadership is the same. It isn’t just about living up to an image. It’s about knowing when to set down the “famous stick” and explore something new. That choice takes courage, but it’s also what allows us to grow, walk lighter, and lead stronger.

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The famous consultant, Mr. Ant, was visited by a caterpillar grappling with the perplexity of how to increase its speed while effortlessly synchronizing its hundreds of legs. Mr. Ant took his time and then said, “Let’s keep it simple. Focus on one foot at a time. Lift one foot, then the next, and move forward.”

The caterpillar froze. It tried to think deliberately about each foot, and instantly, its legs tangled, it wobbled, and it nearly fell. Mr. Ant watched as the caterpillar muttered about the difficulty of coordinating so many limbs. He had seen this before and had a follow-up solution.

Mr. Ant suggested that the caterpillar stop walking on all 100 legs. Instead, bundle the legs into groups of 25, strap on rollerblades, and skate. This way, there would be only four groups of legs to manage. And, as historical data suggests, animals with four legs tend to move the fastest.

At first glance, this seems like a simple, humorous story—or perhaps a satire about consultants. But a similar thing happened in real life. In 1998, McKinsey was commissioned by the Tata Group to assess its sprawling portfolio and suggest a restructuring strategy. The report recommended that the group concentrate on five core sectors: automobiles and auto components, consumer products, IT and software, services, and hotels and real estate. It also highlighted the potential of Tata Tea and Consolidated Coffee, suggesting the group strengthen its position in those sectors.

However, the Tata Group did not fully embrace this recommendation. Instead of narrowing its focus, it continued to operate a diverse range of businesses—a strategy that has always been a hallmark of the group. This choice allowed it to adapt to changing market dynamics and leverage synergies across sectors.

The lesson? A solution might be clever, but understanding the client—their unique needs and philosophy—is key. Just ask the caterpillar, who later sought Dr. Ant’s advice—Mr. Ant’s twin and a psychiatrist of some repute.

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Corporate Culture



WRONG TURN

In *FRIENDS* Season 9, Episode 21 (*The One with the Fertility Test*), Joey tries to impress Dr. Charlie, a paleontologist. To appear smart, he asks Ross to teach him about the museum exhibits at the Metropolitan Museum. Ross tells him to take a right upon entering and helps him memorize a monologue about the artifacts there. Joey delivers the monologue perfectly during the date—but he takes a left instead of the right, reciting the monologue about things that are not even there. He had all the right words, just in the wrong place—classic sitcom brilliance.

Beyond the laughs, Joey's mishap offers four key lessons for leaders.

1. The Danger of Inauthenticity

Relying on memorized scripts, Joey's performance spectacularly backfired. Leaders who mimic others or present a façade of expertise face similar consequences. Authenticity—being sincere and consistent between words and actions—builds trust and engagement. Without it, credibility suffers, and teams become less willing to follow.

2. Play to Strengths

Joey's charm and performance skills were wasted trying to be a paleontology expert. Leaders, too, must recognize their strengths and those of their team members. Play to your strengths and tailor your approach to your audience—it's far more effective than trying to be something you're not.

3. The Value of Genuine Curiosity

Joey memorized facts without curiosity, leaving him helpless when things went off-script. Curiosity encourages leaders to explore different perspectives, foster creativity, and create a culture of continuous learning. Unlike Joey, who relied solely on rote memorization, curious leaders dig deeper, adapt, and find innovative solutions.

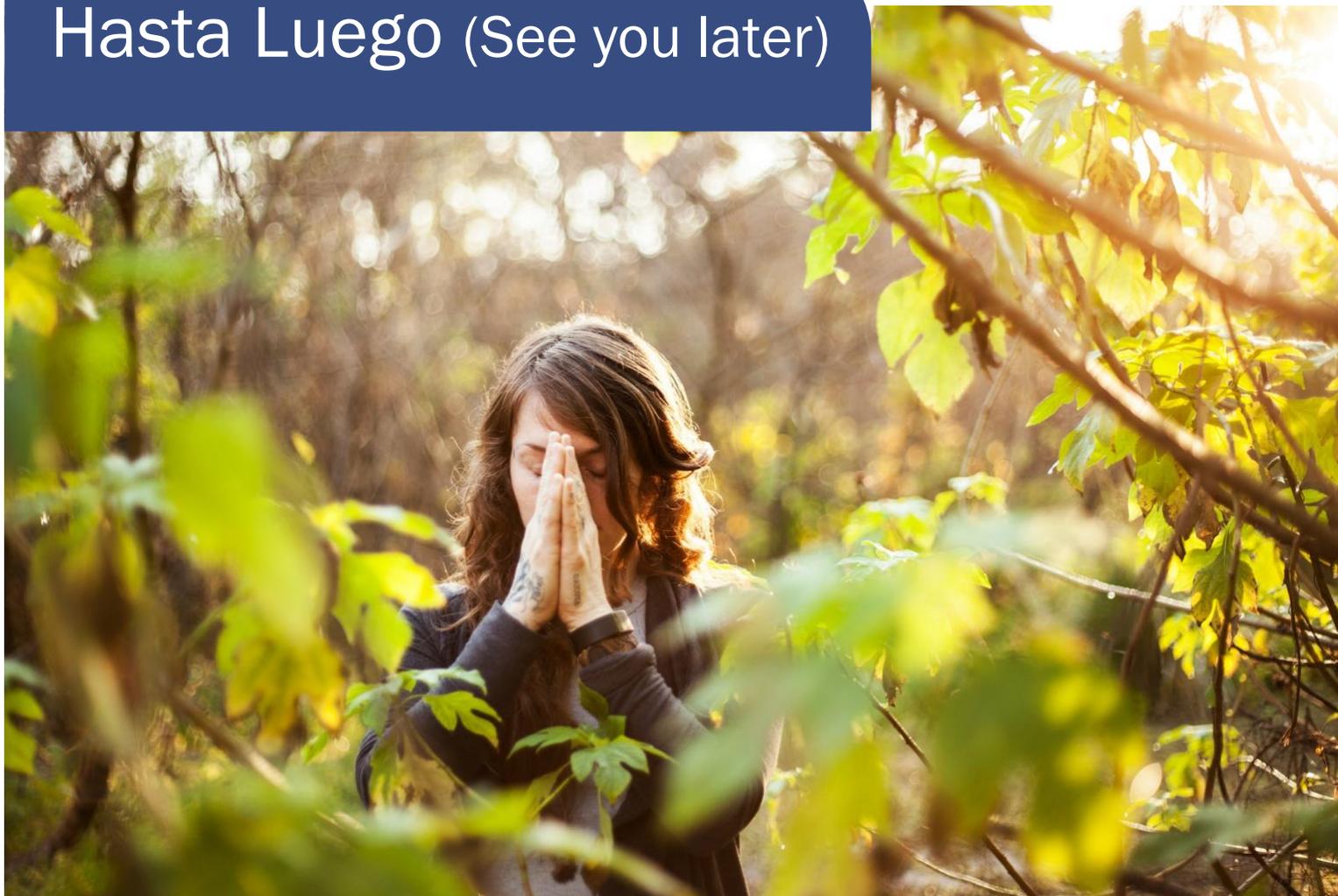
4. Mentorship Matters

Ross tried to mentor Joey, but the effort floundered because Joey lacked genuine interest. Effective mentorship requires clear expectations, open dialogue, and mutual trust. Both mentor and mentee must actively engage to make the relationship productive—otherwise, even the best guidance can fail.

Effective leadership isn't about saying the right lines—it's about authenticity, leveraging strengths, curiosity, and mentorship. Because, in management as in museums—it's not just what you say, it's where you're standing when you say it.

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Hasta Luego (See you later)



THANK YOU

Thank you for reading this month's newsletter—I hope it brought you insight (and maybe a smile). With Halloween around the corner, here's a little spooky fun:

- *Why did the employee bring a broom to the meeting?*
Because they wanted to sweep through the agenda!
- *Why don't skeletons fight each other at work?*
They don't have the guts.

Stay safe, stay curious, and keep leading with purpose.

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