

Thank for downloading this second sample of my work.

I know it's hard to know if a writer can do good work until you give them an assignment to work on. So, I decided to start sharing some samples of actual work I've done.

I've included a concept paper, a short story and a magazine article for your consideration. I will be posting more sets of some of my work, hopefully once a week.

A note on the short story. I think it is very emotional. it involves a suicide, just so you know. Still, I hope you enjoy it.

I write the Concept Papers whenever I think I have a really good idea worth sharing with others. Sometimes I try to actually get them implemented. And sometimes, I know that I'm not the best person suited for the idea. I am willing to share them and hope that someone can do something with them. Please feel free to try anything I share here.

Also, feel free to share this document with anyone you think might benefit from them. If you have any questions, please contact me at: Arnoldo.mata@hotmail.com. Yes, I am available for work, as my front cover indicates. Let's talk and find out if I can help you and your organization. There's no charge just to talk!

I look forward to getting your feedback. I appreciate your time. Again, please share it. Ideas are like books, they don't do their job if they're locked away.

Thanks

Arnoldo

The South Texas Golf Tour of Champions

Many nonprofits hold fundraising events, including golf tournaments. When they are well-organized, golf tournaments can be extremely successful. They do need to reach a particular level of interest, either drawn by the prizes or the environment of the event. Many nonprofits have chosen to stop hosting golf tournaments because there are already a number of other such events across the region. To make a new golf tournament a success, the event would need to have a unique element to make it more interesting and attract more players and sponsors.

One possible approach is to do several golf tournaments across the region that would build up to a final tournament that would involve the top teams from the other tournaments. It would be similar to a competitive tour of amateur players.

This would work best for an organization that has a presence across the Rio Grande Valley and operates in all four counties. This makes it easier for the organization to attract support across the region. However, a coalition of organizations could also host this multi-site event. They could host golf tournaments in Brownsville, Harlingen, Raymondville, Weslaco, McAllen, and Rio Grande City. In the McAllen area, there could even be a second one if, for example, one is held in Mission and another in Edinburg. The final tournament could be held anywhere.

For sponsors, the attraction is the large number of contacts they could make and the repeated brand contact at multiple events. There could be regional sponsors and local sponsors at different levels.

The final tournament of champions would include the top winning teams from the previous tournaments along with some other higher priced teams or sponsored teams.

While this is certainly a project that requires extensive staff support, it has the advantage of drawing support from across the region and taking advantage of the organization's regional name recognition. It would also be a unique event and would take advantage of players' competitive spirit.

Because it is a unique approach to a long-used event format, it would attract more attention from players and the media. More importantly, it can result in more revenues for the organization and has the potential to draw more attention to their message.

The marketing and design of the events would take extensive support and preparation.

An Untitled Short Story

The scream started out, was muffled and then swallowed back into her chest as she gasped for air. The sight of the body hanging from the tree felt like a punch across her entire body. She stood stunned, unable to breath, trying to cry out and not quite able to understand how to do it or how to take another step. Her mind was lost for an instant, traveling outside her body into a dark void somewhere deep into the earth, far into the soil and rock far below. Her head drooped forward, snapping down on her chest as the blow took full effect.

Her eyes closed tight, squeezing all light out of her head, falling farther down into the darkness. It was not until she fell backward onto her haunches that she opened her eyes again and took a breath. She reached forward, only managing to scratch at the dirt as she tried to crawl toward the tree. Her head raised up to look at the still body and let out a small yell of pain that quickly rose to a guttural scream as her arms flailed at the dirt. Her legs started to push forward as she kept her gaze on the body.

The features on the face were dark and unemotional. The lips seemed to bulge out while the eyes were perfectly closed, no expression on the face. Arms fell out to the side slightly, fingers half clenched. The legs hung as if he was standing on the tips of his toes while looking down.

“ANTONIO! ANTONIO! ANTONIO!”

She stood up finally and reached up to the body, trying to push the body up, but the legs just folded at the knees and swayed in the thick morning air. The heaviness of the body weighed on her frame as she struggled to get him to respond or relieve the pressure from the rope around the neck.

“ANTONIO! ANTONIO! ANTONIO!”

She reached up and slapped at the body, trying to get some response, any response, from the face she kept trying to reach. But her head barely came up to the belt the young man was wearing. Her slaps sounded flat and empty on the body. Her scream grew louder with each slap.

“WAKE UP! WAKE UP! WAKE UP! LOOK AT ME! LOOK AT ME!”

Time seemed to fall into a vortex of screams and flailing for her. Her head spun in that vortex, and she almost passed out but held on to the body in a desperate lunge to push up on the body. Her body trembled as she pushed as hard as she could while screaming as loud as she could.

“ANTONIO! ANTONIO! ANTONIO!”

The body swayed away from her almost as if was trying to get away from her. She followed it as it moved around, like a branch bending in the wind. She grasped it again and tried to lift it again, but the body pushed back and knocked her face-down into the dirt.

The back door opened as her husband rushed out to the sound only to stop at the edge of the porch trying to understand what was going on. The body was suspended from a branch of the mesquite tree, swaying slowly, twirling in the growing light. His wife was sprawled on the dirt.

He rushed to the young man, looking up desperately at the unresponding face. He tried the same things as his wife, pushing up on the body that just folded at the knees and waist.

Holding onto the body, he turned and screamed at the house in an angry, frothing voice.

“Felix, Angelita, Sergio, come here!”

“ANTONIO! ANTONIO!”

Soon, three more bodies came to the back door, rushing to get through. They jumped from the porch like animals leaping from a sudden attack. They clawed at the body, trying to save the still unmoving body.

This went on for a few minutes before it became clear that the boy was dead.

“ANTONIO!”

All five were sweating profusely. She sobbed as her husband held on to her. All five stood quietly as the sweat mixed with tears. The sound of crying broke out in high pitched wails and low throaty gurgles.

Hernan looked up at the body of his son. He went into the kitchen and came back with a knife. By now, the neighbors had heard the commotion and had started to peer out the windows. He looked around at the faces behind curtains and blinds in the two houses next to them.

He pondered how to cut down the body. Felix went up to the trunk of the mesquite. All four of them had climbed that tree countless times as kids, deftly avoiding the branches which had the sharp needles. He reached up to grasp a handhold on the twisted trunk but was unable to hold on. Sergio came behind him and hefted him up. Felix finally managed to grab a handhold and pulled himself up.

“Throw me the knife,” Felix called up.

Sergio walked over, took the knife from his father’s hand and tossed it up to Felix. The point of the blade hit Felix and then dropped back to the ground. Sergio tossed it up again. This time, Felix was able to catch it by the handle. He scooted up the limb until he was over the rope.

“Hold on to him.”

He sawed at the rope, trying to hold on to the branch. Below, the group grasped the body and pushed upward to relieve the tension on the rope. As he sawed, the rope pulled back and forth with each stroke, wagging the head, making him seem to come alive. The faster he sawed, the more the head jiggled back and forth. He laid his body along the entire branch to gain leverage, holding on with his left arm wrapped around the branch, his face pressed into the rough, gnarly wood while his bare feet dangled from the branch.

The knife cut through the rope with a dull twang as the rope tension snapped. The body dropped into the waiting arms. It slowly folded at the waist and doubled over. Angelita caught the head and cradled it. Serafina let go of the legs and moved to up to hold the head. Hernan held on to his son’s body, clutching the torso to his own. Tears started flowing again and sobs filled the air. They started to lower the body to the ground.

“NO! Not here,” shouted Serafina. “Not on the dirt! On the porch.”

They carried the body as Felix, now down from the tree, helped Sergio carry the legs. They walked slowly trying not to hurt the body. The rope, still wrapped around his neck, trailed them in the dirt, marking his short journey to the porch.

“Bring a blanket,” Serafina said to Angelita. She let go of the head and went into the house. The body was placed gingerly on the wooden porch. Serafina pulled at the rope attempting to get it off the neck. The knot had jammed tight, grabbing into the skin, now darkly bruised.

Hernan pulled her away and tried to undo the knot. Between sobs and tears, he struggled to take the rope apart.

“Give me the knife.”

“Be careful! Do not cut him!”

“I won’t.”

He sliced delicately at the thick rope. Strand by strand, he sliced at the rope. He cut it as gently as possible, shaking the body as he did. Serafina knelt and put her hand on her son’s brow to keep the head from moving. Felix tried to take the knife and help but Hernan waved him away without a word.

From the neighbors’ windows, it was agonizing to see the slow progress amid the tears and sweat. Serafina seemed to comfort her son as he rocked slowly back and forth with each stroke of the knife. The other three stood around them, their muffled cries carrying into the houses next door.

The rope finally came loose, and Hernan gently pulled it from around the neck. The dark bruise had spread in a ring around the neck, tearing skin in some spots marked by little streaks of blood. He threw the rope away like a poisonous snake. It landed with a quiet thud in the dirt.

Angelita covered the body. The sheet seemed to sink into the body as it outlined the figure. Serafina sobbed as she kept caressing the brow.

“Antonio,” she wailed.

The police arrived.

The funeral director sat quietly as Serafina and Hernan looked at the figures on the paper.

“It will be a nice funeral. We can hold a vigil on Thursday night and bury him on Friday unless you need to wait for some relatives to come. We can bury him on Saturday.”

“Yes, Friday will be a good day. What time do we start?” Serafina asked.

“In this case, we can start at nine in the morning. We will leave here and be at the cemetery in a few minutes. The weather will be good. You can have someone say a few words, and it will be over by ten.”

She looked up him with a questioning look. He knew what she was thinking.

“Mrs. Lopez, I have been in this business a long time, almost 25 years. I started in 1930, just as the Depression started. I have seen many people die in many different ways. I have dealt with all the churches. I have seen preachers and priest come and go. I am Lutheran myself, so I don’t always understand why some churches do what they do. I just know what they will tell me. I know Father Wilson. He will not let you hold a service for your son in the church. This is not the first time. He has a different heart. You are not the first to go through this.”

Serafina’s and Hernan’s faces were blanched, frozen in bewilderment.

“No, Serafina. I cannot. Your son took his own life. It is out of my hands. There are some things that cannot be forgiven. He is not here to ask for forgiveness. You cannot ask for him. He is not here to repent. You cannot repent for him. You cannot ask me to break my vows. I cannot undo what he did.”

Serafina stood up from the chair.

“He was a good boy. He attended church every Sunday. He went to confession. He was an altar boy when he was little. You were not here then. He was a good boy. He deserves a Catholic burial. He is not a killer. He is not a criminal. He did not hurt anyone. He deserves to be buried as a Catholic.”

“We have been members of this church our whole lives,” Hernan added. “We have served when we can. All our family has. We have been good Catholics.”

“No, this is not about you. It is about him. It is about him only. Only he is facing God right now. I cannot change that. It was a terrible thing he did, but he did it. Not you. Not your family.”

“No, you are wrong Father!” Serafina yelled. It was the first time she had ever raised her voice to a priest. The priest looked sharply at her. His eyebrows scrunched up and his lips turned into a scowl.

“No, the answer is final” the priest declared as his voice rose slightly. “I cannot say the Rosary for him at the funeral home and I cannot let him have a burial service in this church. I cannot let you bury him in the church cemetery.”

Serafina sat down as if knocked down.

“Nothing? You give us nothing,” Hernan asked. “We can’t even bury him in the cemetery? Is this what God’s love is?”

The priest sat up straight.

“No, I will have that discussion with you!”

There was silence and the two of them stared blankly at the priest.

Father Wilson seemed to get a hold of himself and relaxed back into the chair.

“Serafina, Hernan, I am truly sorry for the pain you are going through. I cannot imagine it. And this, how he died, it must be even more so. But, understand. The church has some rules it follows that cannot be changed. Even the Bishop cannot change them. I do not want to give you hope that is not there. I cannot change some things.”

He stood up, expecting the two to leave quietly. Serafina looked at the priest, refusing to break his gaze.

“You do not understand pain. If you did, you would not be adding to my pain. To my family’s pain. To my son’s pain. That pain is nothing to you. You live by your rules regardless of the pain it causes. I never understood your sermons about pain until now. You say that pain is part of our life here on Earth. This, what you are doing to me, is the real pain of life here on Earth.”

She turned to Hernan. They stood and walked out.

The sparse weeds and grasses stood still along the edge of the dirt road. They were scattered in small clumps. As the hearse passed by slowly, the weeds and grasses waved slightly in the small breeze created by the passing vehicle. A few other cars followed. The weeds and grasses stood still and silent again after the short procession made its way to the cemetery.

The cemetery was located on a ranch a few miles outside the town. It has been started in the last century before there was a town or churches. Back then, people buried their families on their farm and ranches. It was surrounded by a simple wire fence meant to keep out the wandering cows and horses from trampling the graves. Hernan knew the owner of the ranch. They had let him bury his son. It had maybe 30 headstones, most from many years ago. It has been years since anyone had been buried there.

A small crowd gathered around the hearse as they waited for the body to be brought out. The six men pulled it out and carried it solemnly toward the grave. The crowd followed silently. Only one of the neighbors had shown up. As the casket neared the grave, Serafina let out a deep wail.

“ANTONIO!”

Now, others openly cried.

The funeral director directed the men to place body over the grave onto a simple metal frame.

“On behalf of the Lopez family, we lay the body of Jaime Antonio Lopez to eternal rest. He entered this world a young soul and leaves it as he came to it. We ask for his entry into heaven.” He paused at looked around at the family. “Is there anyone of the family or friends who would like to say a few words...”

Serafina wailed and sunk into the chair she in sat. Hernan looked up with tear filled eyes and looked back down at Serafina.

“Mr. and Mrs. Lopez, with your permission, I would like to say a few words.”

The young nun stepped from the back of the crowd. No one had noticed her as she had followed behind the group.

Serafina looked up and recognized the young nun from Mexico. She was not in her habit, and it was strange to see her that way. Hernan nodded.

“In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Father, we ask for your compassionate heart to accept this young man into your loving arms. We ask that you forgive him and heal him as he enters your mighty kingdom. We are all sinners, and he was like all the rest of us, a poor sinner who lost his way. Now he is walking toward you in the hope of a new resurrection. Lord, please accept our prayers and we ask for your holy mercy on all of us. Amen.”

“AMEN.”

She pulled a small bottle out her pocket and sprayed holy water on the waiting casket. Serafina and Hernan smiled through their tears, and the nun walked back slowly to her place at the rear of the small crowd.

Hernan woke in the darkness again. Serafina was not in bed. He waited a few minutes and get got up to look for her. In the week since the funeral, she had been waking up at night to wander the house, looking in on the room her sons had shared, now only two there. At times she stood at the back of kitchen looking out at the tree. The other half of the rope was still there. It had been a swing Hernan had put up for his children many years ago. They no longer used it. He should have taken the swing down a long time ago. Tonight, he decided that he would cut down the rest of the rope. Maybe that would help Serafina sleep. He did not see her by the boys' room. He walked toward the back of the house but did not see her there.

He walked into the kitchen when he noticed that the back door was open. He heard a thudding noise. He paused to listen for it. He couldn't quite tell where it was coming from. He heard it again and realized it was coming from behind the house.

He walked out in his bare feet to see Serafina with an axe swinging at the mesquite. Her blows bounced off the tree. Small chips of bark flew, but the hard wood was not cut. She swung the axe again and again.

"Serafina! Stop!"

Her reached for her and held her arms as she swung once again. She was trembling, soaked in sweat. How long had she been trying to chop down the tree? She looked at him, a tight grimace on her face.

"I'm going to cut down this cursed tree!"

She pulled away from him and swung the axe again. It bounced off once more. He tried to stop her again, but she kept pulling away. He stepped back and let her swing the axe. After a few minutes, she stopped, unable to lift the axe up. He took the axe from her hands and laid it down. He carried her to the porch and sat her down. Her breathing was sharp and ragged.

"Let's go in and rest."

"No, I'm going to cut down this cursed tree!"

"Yes, we will cut it down, but you can't do it by yourself. Come. Rest. Sleep. In the morning, the boy and I will cut it down."

The mesquite was an old tree, hard wood that broke axe handles and dulled blades. The roots went deep, deeper than the height of the tree itself. The gnarled, twisted branches ended in sparse patches of small green leaves that filtered the early morning sun, casting a soft shadow on the ground.

In that morning sun, Serafina sat on the porch with her eyes fixed on the tree. The three started with an axe. Half an hour into the task, they put down the axe. They had been able to chop out a small chunk of wood from the trunk. It took them an hour to find a tree saw. Serafina had not moved.

It took them another half hour to cut through the thick trunk. As the tree began to wobble, Serafina stood up. The trunk shook as a loud crack pierced the yard. The trunk snapped, and splinters and pieces of bark flew from the point of the break. The branches shook and settled as if the tree was a deflating balloon. It looked like a body cast to the ground.

"Burn it!"

The three of them looked at Serafina as she scowled at the tree.

It took them the rest of the day to saw through the long, twisting branches into manageable pieces. The stack of logs grew at the back of the yard. The next day, Hernan started a fire with old wood since the newly cut wood was still green and would not catch fire easily. Serafina stood again at her place on the porch. He added the green logs one at a time. As the fire grew, he added more logs. His two sons took turns watching the fire and adding logs, making sure the fire did not grow too big or get out of hand.

Serafina watched the logs burn, occasionally staring at the trunk that remained. That first night, Serafina watched the fire from the kitchen door. When Hernan finally convinced her to go to bed, the fire was burning low. Felix covered it with dirt to keep the coals going over night without a flame to worry about.

In the morning, Hernan and his sons uncovered the fire and started adding logs again. Flames soon burst through the top of the pile. It took that entire day to get to the last log. The coals kept going overnight still.

On the third day, the coals eventually went out by mid-afternoon. Serafina went to poke at the ashes, convinced that the tree was completely gone. The boys finally covered the pit with dirt.

Serafina walked back to the house. As she stepped onto the porch, she turned and looked at the stump. The three men had tried their best to cut it as low as possible. She knew it was not dead. The roots were still there. It would take a tractor to pull the roots out. It would come back before another year passed. She walked back and spat on the trunk.

When being good may be bad for you and your team

It's something I've thought was true, and now there's proof: being good at your job is not always good for you. According to research from the Duke University Fuqua School of Business and published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, very good employees get punished with more work and with higher expectations than other workers while getting paid the same.

My wife used to tell me the same thing. She argues that good teachers get punished. When she was teaching first grade, she realized that discipline was essential. She spent the first few weeks of every school year working on establishing a routine and order. She wasn't a screamer, but she was consistent and firm. Her students were disciplined and learned because of it. She also spent quite a lot of time at home working on her lesson plans, making them interactive and hands-on. They were fun and interesting for the kids. Some of the other teachers didn't want to spend the time doing that, so they just ran off worksheets all week long – dull and boring for the kids but easy for the teacher. Some of the teachers just waited to see what she was doing and copied her work. Somehow, their lessons were never quite the same because they only copied materials but had no deep understanding of how she imagined their use.

When school board members' relatives, the principal's relatives and other teachers enrolled their kids in that school, they wanted them in her class. When another teacher had a difficult or unruly student, they were often transferred to her class – because she had discipline. That other teacher was rewarded because she did not have the skills or discipline to handle that student. When the principal was being reviewed, her class was the model room the principal took visitors and administrators to. She could never have an “off” day. It was all added pressure.

When her students moved up to second grade the following year, the second grade teachers fought to get her kids because they knew they were prepared and disciplined. She certainly took pride in that, but she understood that the second grade teachers – and the principal – expected more from her than from the other first grade teachers.

Knowing how good she was, the principal kept adding on assignments that the principal did not trust other teachers to do. She kept working more and more after school, not that anyone noticed or cared. That pressure – among other things (more paperwork, more documentation, more testing, etc.) – eventually took its toll. All that time, she was doing extra work while getting paid the same as the other teachers. She left the classroom.

This is a danger to both the employee and the employer, as Christy Koval, a Ph.D. candidate and first author on the Fuqua School of Business study, pointed out. “Managers ... should take note. If you take those high-self-control people for granted, you may risk losing them. While relying on go-getters might be a good short-term strategy — they'll get stuff done — in the long run,” Koval suggests, “they might become dissatisfied with this burden we're placing on them.”

In other words, they are more likely to leave unless that burden is more evenly spread around your entire team. So, instead of relying on one or two superstars on your team taking up the slack, it's time to start getting everyone else to start improving their work and polishing their skills if needed. Team work implies that everyone – including YOU THE LEADER – does their share of the work and continually moves to push themselves to improve and do more.

You, the leader, have to be the person who models the way. You have to show that you are willing to improve your skills, learn something new, step out of your comfort zone, take on challenges you hadn't before, work harder, and bring everyone else along with you, even if you have to drag them kicking, crying and screaming. If you don't show that you are willing to do that, why would anyone on your team take you seriously if you ask them to improve?

Arnoldo Mata heads Leadership Resource Group, specializing in Leadership and Management Training, Grant Writing, and Strategic Planning, with more than 25 years working with non-profit organizations, community organizations, local governments and private businesses. He can be contacted at arnoldo.mata@hotmail.com.