

The Sam Effect

A Missing Ingredient for Success

By Rolfe Carawan

It wasn't long ago that I spoke to a group of leaders and coaches concerning their desire to be "tougher than the times" and to navigate the economic changes impacting their industry. As part of my presentation, I emphasized the need for influencers to tap into the under-used yet invaluable resource called Encouragement!

However, I began to wonder if I had adequately conveyed this instrument's transformational impact in the process of ensuring others succeed. To illustrate the synergy created when encouragement is applied correctly, I highlighted the relationship portrayed in the Lord of the Rings trilogy between Samwise Gamgee and the story's protagonist Frodo Baggins. Affectionately known as the SAM Effect.

For those unfamiliar, in J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings," Frodo Baggins is the individual charged with saving Middle Earth. While some fantastical stories operate under the "hero" model of ONE person – standing alone - and holding the day, Tolkien took a much more realistic (and, to me, inspiring) approach. In the series, Frodo is given his own "hero"... his own encourager via the character Samwise Gamgee, better known as SAM.

While clearly fiction in its genre, the movie takes a very realistic approach to what it takes to be a hero-maker. Multiple times during the trilogy, it was apparent that Frodo would be more than willing to walk away - defeated – had it not been for the counsel, support, humility, loyalty, and encouragement Sam provided. Together, they found the courage and strength to destroy the ring, the symbol of unbridled power. In so doing, they saved Middle Earth.

But what about the real world? There are a significant number of "Frodo's" looking for (or should be looking for) their own "Sam," and there are plenty of "Sam's" wanting to find a "Frodo" that will

allow them to deliver what they have to offer. Though its power and potential are seldom honored, few things of REAL significance are accomplished without the SAM effect.

THE SAM EFFECT

While we hear MUCH about the "Frodo's" of life, the leaders, the "front-men," the "top dogs," we hear far too little about the "Sams" and the effect they have on the leader they support. But, what is the SAM Effect? It's hard to quantify because there are so many facets to it. We can start by defining it as the *profound impact a person can have on another...through encouragement. An impact that empowers and enables the individual to grow, flourish and fulfill their mission.*

The SAM Effect: The profound impact that a person can have on a leader ...through encouragement An impact that empowers and enables the individual to grow, flourish and fulfill their mission.

Bette Midler sings a beautiful song that perfectly captures the actual VALUE of the SAM Effect in the life of a hero. Here are a few of the lyrics:

*"It must have been cold there in my shadow
To never have sunlight on your face
You were content to let me shine, that's your way
You always walked a step behind
So I was the one with all the glory
While you were the one with all the strength.*

*Did you ever know that you're my hero
And everything I would like to be
If I can fly higher than an eagle
You are the wind beneath my wings
It might have appeared to go unnoticed
But I've got it all here in my heart
I want you to know I know the truth*

*Of course I know it
I would be nothing without you"*

Indeed, it can be cold for the Sams of life, living in the shadow of a business leader, a politician, or some other modern-day "hero" while their tireless efforts appear to go unnoticed. Yet, I believe our government, economy, businesses, families, churches, and education system would crumble should our influencers be robbed of their own Sam Effect.

The French poet and philosopher Anatole France once said, "*Nine-tenths of education is encouragement.*" The SAM Effect's evidence leads to an even stronger conclusion: Nine-tenths of any worthy accomplishment involves encouragement. In a constantly evolving marketplace and economy, in a world in which it seems everyone is "stretched thin," encouragement is an under-used and under-valued resource that can be enlisted to revitalize any team, boost morale and performance, and achieve any goal.

Popular Scottish Theologian William Barclay writes, 'One of the highest of human duties is the DUTY OF ENCOURAGEMENT.' Encouragement is a free resource yet can prove priceless to those willing to receive it. It has the ability to strengthen, motivate, unite, energize, and empower. When used liberally (and authentically), encouragement can cause those around us to excel and exceed self-imposed limitations.

In Thessalonians, we are commanded to "encourage one another and build each other up." Can encouragement actually make a difference in our everyday lives? Can it truly impact how our team performs and what we achieve? How profitable are the Sams of our organizations, churches, and government offices?

I am a huge football fan and recovering football fanatic. I have many sports stories that I have enjoyed reciting during a speaking engagement, but there is one that I must share with you regarding encouragement. I read about a college football coach who would privately talk to a new player at the beginning of each football season. He would tell the player how impressed he was with his ability. He would say to him, "If you work hard, I think you're good enough to play in the National Football League." Here is the kicker: He told this to every player on the team! Predictably, his coach had a significantly high number of players make it into professional football. Coincidence? I think not. Encouragement is life-changing in action.

Is encouragement a profitable tool for home, work, and play? You need only look as far as your personal experience to find the answer.

So, how do you know if you are a Sam? How can you become a better encourager? How do you recognize the Sams in your life? In your company? In your organization? Sams have defining characteristics that equip them to impact outcomes and inspire others.

- First, they have a humility about them. Sams are focused on others rather than themselves, believing the best about others and not easily offended. Most Sams find a way of expressing an appreciation and admiration for another's efforts. William James, an American Psychologist & Philosopher, believes, "The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated."
- Encouragement comes naturally... affirming and inspiring those around them. You will see Sams readily in your world if you look for those people committed both to you and the mission. Ego and self-serving motives are curtailed or set aside, and you find them "behind the scenes" of many great undertakings. Like a car's engine, you may not see it unless you look under the hood, but its presence is always felt.
- They are loyal and value loyalty.
- They respect authority and honor the position of a leader. They understand that the burden of authority and responsibility is a heavy one, and they come alongside to shoulder their share. Sams may not always agree with the one in charge, but unless there is something illegal or immoral about a decision or direction, they can set aside their own opinion and lend support. They recognize that when they, too, are in a position of authority, they need the help of others.
- They are willing to suffer. While they may not complain about the personal cost that encouragement requires, there is a cost, nonetheless. They have simply committed to moving forward anyway.
- They are patient and expect that all things worth doing are worth doing well. They value persistence and commitment.
- They are courageous. Yes, they have counted the cost. They show up, stand up and speak up when necessary.

Can you imagine having a life full of Sams? Committed, loyal, goal and mission-oriented people? Can you imagine having your endeavors supported with ongoing encouragement

and appreciation? Do we value our Sams and express gratitude for them? Are we willing to recognize them for their contribution to the success of the mission or goal?

In reality, the "Frodos" of the world are recognized, and the ones cheered as the hero. But more often than not, a Sam is standing in the background or absent altogether. They are off basking in their own sort of recognition, measured in life satisfaction and sense of fulfillment because they played a part. For me, it's the Sams of the world that are the real heroes.

If you are a Sam, I hope this report affirms you, encourages you, and inspires you to accept your actual value to those you serve and support. If you have read this and recognized that you have a Sam in your life, I hope you are now motivated to reach out and acknowledge their invaluable contribution.

The Sam Effect is a timeless phenomenon that I expect to be eternal. And to all you Sams reading this ...Thanks!