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## **The Simple Rubber Band**

### **Skills and Professional Development**



Have you ever given any thought to the rubber band and how it's a metaphor for life? Probably not. With the newspaper going the way of the dodo bird, there is likely little regular use for the simple rubber band — beyond tying a little girl's hair.

Like us, rubber bands come in all shapes and sizes, and it can be used for a variety of different tasks. Regardless of what it is used for, in order for the rubber band to be effective, it needs to be able to stretch, twist, bind and adjust.

*Stretch.* One of the first things we do when we have a rubber band in our hands is to stretch it. Stretching tests its limits. Stretching is growth, making it possible for us to do more the next time than what we could do the last time. When we choose to stretch ourselves, our minds, hearts and souls, we are choosing to grow.

*Twist.* Another automatic action we take with a rubber band is to twist it; however, as human beings, we tend not to like to be twisted. Think of the phrase, "twisted in knots." We see this as a negative. But being able to twist, like stretching, shows us what we are really made of. If we think of twists in the contexts of roads, we may have a favorable response to the metaphor.

*Bind.* One of the classic purposes of the rubber band is to tie things together. To this day, when newspapers are tossed onto doorsteps, they are bound together by a rubber band. We are also useful in this way. Whether in personal or professional relationships, there is usually someone who serves as that person who holds the group together. It may be the designated leader or it may be someone who naturally rises to that position.

The person who does this well is the one who stretches and twists in such a way as to create just the

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right amount of tension and give to help the group achieve its purpose. Without the band around the newspaper, the deliverer would either have to walk the paper to the front door, wasting precious time on the delivery route, or toss it — leaving the paper at risk of flying all over the place.

*Adjust.* The commonality of the three items on this list is summed up in the ability to adjust or change. While change is difficult for many of us, it is one of life's constants and, therefore, learning how to deal with it is paramount for being effective in our interaction with and leadership of others.

In order for the rubber band to do any or all of these things, its most needed characteristic is flexibility. Without flexibility the rubber band is useless. If you've ever seen an old band, it is dried out and rigid. The pliability that allowed it to stretch, twist, bind and adjust is gone. When we are stuck in our ways and unwilling to make adaptations beyond our comfort zones, we too become useless.

The beauty in the rubber band is that it isn't required to be anything other than a rubber band. The requests made of it are not to transform, but to be more of what it is naturally. We can do the same. We don't have to change who we are at our core to be available for people. Changing who we are creates stress. But the occasional modification, tweak or alteration that allows us to be all of who we are, should result in fulfillment, as it is moving toward our destiny — our purpose — which is what we are all meant to do.

The next time you are required to stretch, twist, bind or adjust to help someone else reach his or her goals, don't think of it as taking anything away from who you are. Instead, think back on the purpose of the rubber band and let that thought power you through the requested actions.

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**Whitnie Wiley** was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the *Lead the Way* column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.