

Henry V. - William Shakespeare

Saint Crispins Day

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On the morning of 25 October 1415 (Feast of Saints Crispin and Crispinian), shortly before the Battle of Agincourt, Henry V made a brief speech to the English army under his command, emphasizing the justness of his claim to the French throne and harking back to the memory of previous defeats the English kings had inflicted on the French:

*“And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
Redemption
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.”*

In the face of overwhelming odds, Henry's army defeated the French and the battle was won. Henry's troops before the battle were weary, hungry, tired and at the point of giving up. How could such a feat be accomplished in the face of such odds? Was it just about the speech he gave? His speech definitely had an impact, so what could this be? This article analyzes this speech and attempts to uncover the impact of the speech and what it could mean for us today.

“We few, we happy few, we band of brothers”

Breaking this sentence down, it speaks to the reality of the situation, but also is stretching in its description. ‘We few’ ... well this is true, they were outnumbered, although numbers vary from 3-4 through to 1-6 in favour of the French, there is no doubt Henry and his men were outnumbered.

So, ‘we few’ was true, but ‘happy few’ and ‘band of brothers’... maybe at that time not so true. He needed to pull the troops together and by using emotive words he did so. The soldiers weren’t happy, nor did they feel like a band of brothers, but I’m sure they wanted to be.

One way of creating an Island of Sanity is to speak in aspirational terms; even more impactful when the reality of the situation is dire or even seemingly impossible. Emotional language connects with people’s values, as Henry did. ‘Happy’ and ‘band of brothers’ were very emotive given the situation they were facing, but also very clever; who wouldn’t want to be happy? Brotherhood is fully embedded in military culture; he knew he could call on their values to lift them and their spirits.

In this one sentence Henry managed to convince them intellectually, and move them to a different emotional level, too. He brought them together as a **team** and led them to a place that was full of possibility and togetherness – an Island of Sanity.

***“For he today that sheds his blood with me – shall
be my brother”***

There are very few examples of leaders who make it only on their own. As Joseph Campbell puts it in his Hero’s Journey, “*The Call to Adventure*”:

“The hero begins in a situation of normality from which some information is received that acts as a call to head off into the unknown.”

The ‘call’ in Henry’s speech is not so much a call to the battlefield or even a call to the soldiers to raise their game. No, it is a call to ‘be’ with him in this

journey. This call tugs at the spirit within his soldiers, and the relational energies occurring between them.

Whilst the troops may be running low on physical energy, endless amounts of spirit and relational energy can be tapped into -- the reserves here are endless and Henry knew he had to inspire these resources.

Islands of Sanity don't show up only physically; they can be visited through heart and spirit, but require leadership to facilitate people's transition to them. Henry played this role effectively.

"This day shall gentle his condition"

Reframing. Paradigm shift. Transforming context. An Island of Sanity resets everything back to zero. Henry knew that the call to adventure and their participation in this battle would reframe everything for him and his army. The conditions that the soldiers were currently experiencing would change dramatically and he had to communicate this – eloquently.

"This story shall the good man teach his son"

Years ago, I sat on the edge of the Rio Grande river near Taos, New Mexico, and after a while, asked the river, *"What can I do to fulfill my highest commitments in this life?"* After some minutes, the river said, *"Go teach what you love to your children."*

Whether the river really spoke or not is beyond knowing. I had never heard those words before and believed them. I began teaching my boys about Vincent van Gogh with passion and interest, and took them to England, Scotland and Ireland to share the richness of the people, the land and the foods that had changed my own life for the better.

I also began, as never before, to go all the way with little held back in my work and in my life. I stopped asking, *"Is this all there is?"*

“From this day, to the ending of the world”

In the Netflix television series, Black List, anti-hero Raymond Reddington, said, *“The future is a sucker’s bet.”* No one seems to have seen the future except in the present. Consider that this very moment, sitting in a chair, looking at a computer screen, searching for meaning that makes a difference, is connected to all possible futures.

Imagine a thin red line between this moment and what is to come. More and more, I think that the present and the future are singularity.... (a point at which a function takes an infinite value, especially in space-time when matter is infinitely dense, as at the center of a black hole).

If I have any Power to determine the future, which I often doubt, it rests in what I think, feel, want, and do right now. If I want a future, I’d better do it now.

***“And gentlemen in England now abed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here
And think their manhoods cheap whilst any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s day”***

So many times, I stay in bed, not wanting to face the day or my fears from the past or future. Recently, I've been avoiding the New York Times and television covering the inauguration and political appointments by Donald Trump. Going to the “Woman’s March” in Washington, DC was unthinkable. Then, at the end of that day, I got this e-mail from a friend:

“Susan and I just got back from the women's march in Washington. We were right in the middle of it all day and couldn't move. We have the sense that we were in a crowd that was way over the 200,000 expected, and coming home found out that it was half a million women and men and kids and everybody! It's so great to get home and find out that it's been a global event.

I thought of you Charlie, and what you call the Overview Effect. It's one thing to be there in the middle of it ... it's a whole other thing to get the overview of how huge and amazing it is!

It's restoring my faith in just about everything, but mostly the possibility of values-driven relationships in business and society."

I'm inspired, find courage, and start again.