

King of Nothing: Your Choice Between Position and Impact

From the time we start interacting with other human beings, we all have the drive to be kings or queens. We all want to be top of whatever pyramid we're climbing.

This drive starts to play out intensely in school. We want to be the most popular, the most athletic. We want to be valedictorians or class presidents. The drive continues in work. As soon as we begin our careers, we angle for title and position over others. We want to be managers and directors and leads and executives.

No matter where we go, we think position is the goal.

Occasionally, though, something will happen in work or family life to shake someone loose from the positional mindset. Usually, it comes in the form of a question.

What if the pyramid sucks?

Just because you're king doesn't mean your kingdom is worth a damn.

Being the CEO of a one-person start-up means far less than just being a competent team member in a 100-person company.

Being the patriarch or matriarch of a family of addicts and abusers means far less than just being a member of a family that values love and honesty.

Being the creator of something shoddily-made means far less than being one among many contributors on something that's actually good, whether it's a book or a product or a tool.

All of this is pretty clear, but more often than not, the positional mindset will choose to be the king of nothing. Why?

I think most people prioritize the appearance of impact over actual impact.

The positional mindset is all about the appearance of impact. When we're top dog, it doesn't matter what's actually happening underneath us – we can claim some immediate credit merely for being on top.

Fortunately, there's another mindset.

The impact mindset realizes that many of the places where you can have real impact are at the bottom or in the middle of the pyramid. The impactful mind has great ambitions, and it's willing to put aside ego gratification to make those ambitions happen. It empowers

other people to help, it knows how to follow good leaders, and it knows how to choose good ideas it didn't come up with itself.

This is wisdom. You may never be recognized for your impact, but you will certainly see it.

Don't be so eager to put yourself on top of pyramids, particularly if you're young. Don't be so desperate to cling to position, particularly if you're old. Learn how to let the good be your guide long before you look to gain rank on anyone else. One of the Hebrew psalmists had a great way of putting it:

"I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."