



# EP 9 - Managing The Middle: 5 Strategies For Charlie Bucket

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## About the Managing the Middle Series

- This series is a guide to managing the middle: Advice on how to serve as a better bridge between the divides within our organizations, societies, and lives.
- It's the kind of advice I would have benefitted from when I started managing projects and people.
- I'll provide advice on ways to counter polarization and extremism, and how to embrace the shades of gray between issues.

## 5 Strategies For Charlie Bucket

- One of my all-time favorite movies.
- I've decided to pull Charlie aside and offer him some advice on the eve of his new opportunity within a large, well-known corporation.

*In this episode I reference the original 1971 film adaptation of Roald Dahl's book:*

## Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory - Wikipedia


Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory is a 1971 American musical fantasy film directed by Mel Stuart and starring Gene Wilder as Willy Wonka. It is an

W [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willy\\_Wonka\\_%26\\_the\\_Chocolate\\_Factory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willy_Wonka_%26_the_Chocolate_Factory)



## Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl

Each of five children lucky enough to discover an entry ticket into Mr. Willy Wonka's mysterious ...

 <https://app.thestorygraph.com/books/8f7d52ec-b006-4924-a6f4-a2ee2474e0ac>

## Episode Notes

In the episode I give 5 pieces of advice to Charlie Bucket for his journey up the corporate ladder:

1. The leader isn't going to be what you expect
2. Your new colleagues are as flawed as you
3. What seems magical at first will become routine, so don't take it for granted
4. Keep an open mind
5. You're going to make mistakes, but manage their severity

### 1. The leader isn't going to be what you expect

- All leaders have their quirks.
- The company has either evolved from their vision, or its been entrusted to them.
- Keep an open mind as you're introduced to the leader and their inner circle.
- Realize that you'll be exposed to aspects of both the leader and the company, which might chip away at your idealized vision of them.

- Hold off any judgements for a while: Take the time to completely understand situations from all sides. This may require patience as you learn about company people and ways of doing things
- Remember: Leaders run the company. They don't run you.
  - Despite any perceived or actual similarities you share, regardless of your burning desire to move up in the world, and/or the potential you see in them as a mentor, don't lose your sense of self.
  - Avoid idolization or attempts to mold yourself totally in their likeness.

## 2. Your new colleagues are as flawed as you

- Augustus Gloop:
  - Loves to gorge themselves on the product & rocks the employee discount every chance he gets.
  - More generally, he's a constant consumer: Keeping himself busy digesting inputs to stop and think.
  - At first the quantity of inputs makes him seem like a product expert.
  - Soon he'll be exposed: Compiling knowledge without thoughtful action is a real drain on resources.
- Violet Beauregarde:
  - Her obsessiveness is endearing at first.
  - She's driven and opinionated. Always chasing the next win, record, trophy, plaque, and any other recognition up for grabs.
  - This kind of approach works great in some careers, but not a job where it takes a team to make imaginative products.
  - Her incessant competitiveness will frustrate her co-workers, as well as the management.
- Veruca Salt:
  - Has she ever heard the word no?
  - She decides what she wants on a whim and wants it NOW.

- They expect the world to bend to their every wish. Everything becomes urgent, the Most Important Thing In The World.
- Demand after demand is going to alienate her to the team.
- She'll learn that the universe doesn't revolve around them.
- A leader might not have patience to let her make long-term personality adjustments on the company dime.
- Mike TeeVee:
  - His head is always buried in screens.
  - Driven by distraction. Constantly sucking on digital pacifiers to the point where he's addicted to virality and dopamine hits.
  - He'll always be talking about this show or that social media channel. And there's no way he'll be able to turn off that behavior when he's on the clock too.
  - When you're at work, do the work.
- Some blame should fall on those who enable them.
  - Serving up ever larger quantities to fuel a child's appetite.
  - Seeking self-glorification through their child's achievements.
  - Throwing their wealth at satisfying their child's every whim.
  - Allowing screens to parent their child so they don't have to.
- You're about to enter an environment with seemingly limitless possibilities.
  - One that will test you, the same as the others.
    - Can you withstand temptation?
    - Avoid obsessions that distract from the company goals?
    - Stay responsible as you cash those shiny new paychecks?
    - Stay sane by breaking free from the hyperactive hive-mind of modern media?
  - But don't walk into the company being smug in the idea you're immune to enablers.

- New opportunities have a way of exposing flaws in ourselves and those close to us.

### 3. What seems magical at first will become routine, so don't take it for granted

- There's nothing quite like those first few days in a new job: A fresh start, a near-empty inbox, gathering office supplies, all the introductions and trainings. Nearly everything you see is viewed through a positive lens.
- Never forget that companies are in business to make money.
- Even if they have a larger mission along the way: Without profits they're a ship headed for an iceberg.
- All the cash spent on team lunches, standing desks, fizzy lifting drinks, promotional swag, etc...? They're intended for teambuilding, to reflect corporate identity, to inspire hard work & long hours, build loyalty, and especially to help retain talent.
- It likely won't take long for the magic to start fading:
  - Maybe it'll be a disgruntled employee making snide comments.
  - Or a business trip with colleagues gets unexpectedly creepy.
  - You'll discover the sticky edges and bad eggs that add friction to the continued making of magic.
- It's all part of the natural process of life at any office becoming routine.
- You'll need to fight against that trend in order to keep a firm grip on the magic.
- Don't let roadblocks discourage you. Avoid letting the cynical opinions of others become a soundtrack in your mind.
- Remember why you're doing what you do: Be ever inspired by the role the company plays in society. Make it your own.
  - One way to do this is to understand the virtuous cycle the company exists within:
    - Wonka makes great chocolate
    - People enjoy it and spend money on it

- Profits allow the company to continue spending on materials and personnel, and potentially grow larger and more influential
  - The money spent by the company and its employees brings revenue to communities
  - Those communities then spend more money on chocolate
  - But don't lose sight of the chocolate itself: The sweetness and joy it brings to people.
- If there's a cycle for lickable wallpaper and Scrumdiddlyumptious Bars, then you can figure out the cycles and societal roles for any company.

#### 4. Keep an open mind

- If you're reading this, you're interested in growth: You see the value in listening, observing, and digesting advice.
- You know intuitively that everyone and everything has the capacity to teach.
- It's the open minds that adapt best. That recognize they can grow their skills at the same time they help their employer pay their bills.
- Always place a high value on those who take the time to teach, mentor, and foster an environment that helps you develop your potential.
- No matter the help you're given, the ultimate responsibility is always on you.
- Maintain healthy habits and/or develop rituals that keep yourself balanced.
- All of the work and circumstances that got you into the factory won't be enough to get you into the C-suite.
- Invest in yourself for now.
  - Fund education and experiences that are growth-focused.
  - Volunteer for committees and project teams that will expose you to new ideas and provide opportunities to develop skills.
- As you ride that Wonkavator to the top, you'll earn more disposable income for hobbies and entertainment.
  - But even then: Don't relax for too long.

- Maintain a growth mindset: Building your skills further, extending your influence, ever-improving your ability to make the world a sweeter place.

## 5. You're going to make mistakes, but manage their severity

- Soon you're going to realize that the job requires a lot of hard work.
- As a newbie, you'll likely be pulling hard hours with the goal of proving yourself: Striving for promotions, raises, and increased influence.
- With all that hard work, nobody could fault you for letting off a little steam. Work hard, play hard, right?
- This could very well be the first time in your life where temptation meets access.
  - But be careful: When the fizzy lifting drinks start flowing, don't lose your head.
  - Remain mindful of the line between kicking back and being social and losing yourself in a moment.
  - Even in social settings, co-workers and management are observing. Most of them will remember what happened, even if you don't.
  - Those mental notes become patterns and lasting impressions.\
- Be careful with trade secrets & intellectual property such as customized machines and processes.
  - They're all what enable the profits that allow the company to be successful.
  - Don't damage them in a mindless, weak moment.
- When you make a mistake, just own it.
  - Don't point the finger at others, or the culture, or the product.
  - You messed up. Own your words. Own your actions. No matter what influenced them.
  - Say you're sorry, pick up a mop, and start cleaning up your mess.
  - Learn then lesson and move forward better.

Awareness and industriousness got you that Golden Ticket, Charlie. Don't forget those skills when you walk through those gates, and you might just get your chance to ride

that Great Glass Elevator right through the roof. So up & out!

## ▼ Episode Notes Bonus - My high school senior English thesis on Charlie & The Chocolate Factory

I was so happy to find this thanks to the [Internet Archives](#), who had a [mostly in-tact version of my Willy Wonka fan website](#) from 2001! So here's a copy of the English senior thesis that made me briefly famous among the Class of 2000 at Mahopac High School:

*Chris Kreuter - April 4th, 2000*

### *A Reflection of the Mind of Roald Dahl Through His Literature*

Roald Dahl was a man whose inner emotions and thought processes coincide with the twisted and unusual. His unusual thinking is greatly reflected in many of his works. Given an intense look at some of his work, his themes and thoughts are easier to understand and decipher. Dahl was born in 1916 in South Wales of the United Kingdom to a good home and hard working parents. His father, Harald, was a shipbroker, painter and horticulturist, which influenced Dahl's interest in the arts to a small degree. He grew up in a boarding school environment where he was treated very harshly, which had a profound impact on his writing, that focus on cruelty and revenge. Dahl decided to enter the workforce after his experience at boarding school instead of going to college, getting a job for the Shell Oil Company in 1933. After working in Tanganyika from 1937 to 1939, he enlisted in the Royal Air Force to help in the war effort. He would stay in the RAF until the end of the war in 1945 as a fighter pilot and air attaché in Washington, D.C.. Dahl eventually rose to the rank of wing commander. Dahl first became popular during this time, having his war adventures published in such magazines as the Saturday Evening Post and The New Yorker.

In 1943, we received our first glance into the mind of Roald Dahl with his first novel, Gremlins. (Which became a popular motion-picture in 1984), Ò...a book for children about the hazards of being a RAF pilot. These were the original Gremlins - Dahl has since claimed that he coined the name. The Gremlins were the anthropomorphized explanation for any mishaps experienced by pilots and their machines. (De La Rue 1) His experiences in the RAF undoubtedly had a profound impact in Dahl's work, adding fuel to his feelings of morbidity and cruelty. His heightened his awareness



towards death is evident in his later works, with many harsh, shocking and dark scenes that seem misplaced to the casual observer. It is widely felt that Dahl, "specialized in writing short stories of unexpected and macabre surprise..." (Crystal 248) Dahl went on writing, having many of his short stories published including two collections of his stories, *Someone Like You* in 1953 and *Kiss, Kiss* in 1959 that, "firmly established Dahl as a serious writer of fiction." (Encarta 1) However, Dahl was a man of many genres, and he also published several adult-oriented stories. The most famous story being *Switch* in 1974 which, "continued Dahl's tradition of morbid, eerie tales for adults." (Encarta 1) As previously mentioned, Dahl's stories had very diverse styles and audiences. He is the author of 19 children's books including *James and the Giant Peach* in 1961 and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in 1964, both made into movies and enjoying some success. All of Dahl's children's stories were geared towards realism and for 'strong' children. Dahl did not believe in toning down his stories to appeal to the masses. Similar to his stories geared for the older audience, his children's books displayed a taste for grotesqueness and morbidity.

In an attempt to indulge the mind of Roald Dahl, one can explore one of his most popular children's works, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, predecessor to the Hollywood film, *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971), which has now become a children's classic. While the story itself is very entertaining and magical, it is merely the surface of what Dahl is attempting to portray. At first glance, the book is a compelling tale about a poor boy named Charlie whose dreams come true as he gets to tour the famous Wonka chocolate factory. Along the journey, a series of events occurs in which each of the other four winners fall victim to their own weaknesses, and are subsequently removed from the rest of the story.

Given a deeper look at both plot and characterization, it is easy to see the morbid undertones and moral meanings of the story. Beginning with the four children mentioned above, each is the owner of a weakness that Dahl felt children should be taught to avoid. For the child to have this weakness, the parents as well as the children should be punished. Of course, coinciding with Dahl's style and feelings, they meet their demise and their magical journey is cut short, and their lives altered forever. All of the four children are compared to the main character, Charlie Bucket, who stands as a symbol of what Dahl feels is the ideal child. The first 'victim' is Augustus Gloop, the obese child of obese parents, who spends most of his time with or thinking of food. He stands as a sharp contrast to Charlie, who, on many nights,

lies in bed hungry and dreaming of a few more scraps of food for dinner. Dahl makes Augustus fall into the chocolate river that Willy Wonka, the factory owner, deems “unfit to touch human hands.” (Dahl 68) This river stands as an innuendo to the forbidden fruit of the Adam and Eve story told in the Old Testament of the Bible. After the demise of Augustus, we are approached with our first true sign of the inner insanity in Dahl’s mind. Dahl does something interesting here in that he reveals Willy Wonka as a symbol of himself looking upon the children of the modern world by displaying a morbid and wild show on the boat ride through part of the factory. The song he sings is a perfect example of this revelation,

*There’s no earthly way of knowing,  
Which direction we are going  
There’s no knowing where we’re rowing  
Or which way the river’s flowing  
Is it raining? Is it snowing?  
Is a hurricane a blowing?  
Not a speck of light is showing  
So the danger must be growing!  
Are the fires of hell a glowing?  
Is the grisly reaper mowing?  
Yes! The danger must be growing  
For the rowers keep on rowing...*  
- Roald Dahl

Each of the other three children falls to a similar demise as Augustus, based upon their weaknesses. Violet Beauregarde, an obnoxious gum chewer is the daughter of an overzealous car salesman too focused on his business to teach his daughter proper manners. After eating a piece of gum under development in the factory, she blows up into a blueberry, and must be rolled away for juicing. This scene depicts Dahl’s feelings towards the attitudes and habits of gum chewing children and parents who are too busy to set moral standards for their children.

The next child to fall is Veruca Salt, the selfish, spoiled, and self-absorbed daughter of a rich, spineless factory owner. She contrasts Charlie for his mother works for cents in the Laundromat while he earns money delivering papers. Her greed eventually leads to her demise as she reaches for her newest obsession, a golden goose. Veruca shows how Dahl feels towards rich, spoiled brats who always get what they want and how unhappy they truly are in the end.

The fourth and final child to leave the story is Mike TeeVee. As his name suggests, he is a television addict who revolves his life around it. When he is shown the Wonkavision machine and acts as he is an expert, he is turned into a television sized child. Dahl's view of this character flaw can best be seen in the lyrics sung by the Oompa Loompas after his demise, "What do you get from a glut of TV? A pain in the neck and an I.Q. of three!" (Dahl 174)

The Oompa Loompas are best described as knee-high people with normal colored skin and hair who dance around in buckskins. (A sharp contrast to the orange men found in the film) After each of the children's demise, they proceed to sing a long song that summarizes to the reader why the flaw of the character should be avoided. The reader is also told that if they heed their words, they will be rewarded by happiness. Dahl uses the Oompa Loompas as symbols of moral righteousness for Dahl, for they are present throughout the book to point out the correct moral path for children.

Charlie Bucket is a child Dahl creates unabashed by greed, money, food, and dirty habits. In the display of Charlie's rough life in the beginning of the book, Dahl shows the reader how Charlie is the only one of the four children who truly deserves the chance at a better life. In the beginning of the book we are given a very macabre description of Charlie's family starving in the winter and the skin on Charlie's face getting drawn and tight. Dahl further shows how Charlie gets thinner and thinner because of the lack of food. The explicitness of the scene creates a feeling of cold misery and an illusion to the emptiness of Charlie's life until the Golden Ticket Contest fills him with hope and adulation.

The main struggle of the book revolves around the quest for Willy Wonka to find an heir to his factories ownership. For the job he wants a 'good' child who's morals stand strong, and is not corrupted by temptations and petty weaknesses. Charlie is the perfect archetype for the morally sound child, but in order to prove it, Dahl creates a test for Charlie in the form of the Everlasting Gobstopper. The temptation

of Mr. Slugworth (who really works for Mr. Wonka) to sell the secret to him for \$10,000 stands as this test. The money could help his family tremendously, much more than a lifetime supply of chocolates. On the other hand, he would lose the trust of Willy Wonka, for he promised that he would "...never tell another living soul..." (Dahl 124). Charlie, living up to his character, gives Willy Wonka the Gobstopper back, thereby winning the factory.

As a final glimpse into Dahl's mind rearing its head in the book, the reader is presented with a truly morbid scene as Charlie is flying around in the Wonkavator after winning the factory, "When Charlie takes a ride aboard the Wonkavator, he sees the other ticket winners leaving with their lifetime supplies of chocolate. Each has been permanently altered - Augustus is skinny as a rail, Violet is bright blue, Veruca is covered in garbage . . . and Mike is literally pencil-thin and ten feet tall..." (Kinney 2) It is easy to tell that Dahl felt deeply about how children need to be morally sound or they will falter in their lives.

Roald Dahl was a man whose moral views surrounded the bleak and unusual, and his stories told of revenge and the demise of the week. Deep down, Dahl felt that anyone could be a hero, but they must be strong enough to realize their own weaknesses and deal with them accordingly.