

A Lesson from Lawrence of Arabia

By Dan Richards

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We all have favorite scenes from movies. Some choose Meg Ryan's orgasm in *When Harry Met Sally*, others the closing segment of *Casablanca*, still others might opt for the "Make'Em Laugh" number from *Singing in the Rain* or the "horse's head" scene in *The Godfather*.



My favorite scene comes from my all-time favorite movie, *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Set during the First World War, it focuses on the efforts of T. E. Lawrence, played by Peter O'Toole, to organize the Arabs in the Middle East in an insurrection against their Turkish rulers. In the film, a key stumbling block is the inability of the British to secure a port to land artillery for the Arabs – all of the ports are held by the Turks and heavily fortified against any attack from the sea.

Lawrence proposes an alternative course of action – attacking the port of Aqaba from the land, where there are no defenses except the vast Nefud Desert, considered impassable even by locals.

Refusing to be discouraged, Lawrence sets out for the 20-day journey across the blazing desert with a group of Bedouin warriors led by Sherif Ali (played by Omar Sharif). The blazing sun beats down on the intrepid travelers for long periods, who are out of water and barely able to stay on their camels. Just as they reach the other side and are starting to celebrate their successful crossing, they discover that one of the Bedouin warriors has fallen off his camel and been left behind, doomed to certain death.

Lawrence decides to return in search of the missing warrior. Omar Sharif is enraged, shouting that both Lawrence and the missing Arab will be lost and asserting that his colleague's death "is written."



Lawrence sets out regardless, finds the missing warrior and returns with him to the campsite. As they arrive to ecstatic cheers, Omar Sharif walks up to O'Toole with his canteen. Before taking his first sip of water, O'Toole looks at Sharif and utters the words "Nothing is written." Over the campfire that night, Sharif turns to the Arab beside him and speaks the immortal line, "Truly, for some men, all that is written is what they write themselves."

In markets such as the ones we've seen of late, it's easy for advisors to become discouraged by the unfairness of it all – and if you're not careful you can slip into feeling sorry for ourselves and the "woe is me" mindset of victimhood.

Falling into this trap is often easy – when markets are in turmoil, when you lose a key client because his brother in law's broker went to cash in August of 2008, when what was supposed to be a safe investment craters or when a prospect you've been cultivating for years has his daughter marry a financial advisor at another firm and gives him the account that you've been banking on.

When you run into this kind of adversity, remember the line from Lawrence of Arabia: while all of us will suffer the occasional reverses and unkind markets, in the long run you truly are in control of our future – just as long as you, like Lawrence, believe that you are indeed the master of your destiny and ultimate success.

** Dan Richards conducts programs to help advisors gain and retain clients and is an award winning faculty member in the MBA program at the University of Toronto. To see more of his written and video commentaries and to reach him, go to www.strategicimperatives.ca.*

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