

Welcome to the thirty-first edition of Jennifer Selby Long's *Traveling Light*. Are you blessed with the talent and opportunity to lead? *Traveling Light* will skyrocket your impact and lighten the load in your life. It's based on the work of executive coach and management consultant Jennifer Selby Long.

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### **The Biggest Mistake Flexible People Make When Internal Competition is Tough**

If you pride yourself on how well you “stay flexible” or “adapt to whatever the company needs,” you’re at risk of a malady I’ve just dubbed “Gumby-itis.” Gumby is a children’s toy that can be bent and stretched considerably without breaking. In fact, that’s about all you can do with Gumby. If a child wants or needs anything but flexibility, Gumby gets left on the floor, abandoned for a toy with a more interesting purpose.

The Gumby character, who had a television show for many years, always wants to do what’s right and what’s good. He wants to be helpful. His heart is in the right place.

Highly flexible people can become a lot like the organizational Gumby. Sometimes that’s advantageous, but the biggest mistake flexible people make when internal competition is tough is to adopt the strategy of staying so flexible that no decision-maker really knows what you want.

When internal competition increases -- as it now has in nearly every company -- it’s easy to innocently make this one big mistake, but it will leave you unfulfilled and no better off.

I know I’m working with someone who suffers from Gumby-itis when the people above him or her in the organization say, “I’d like to give more constructive feedback and suggestions, but I can’t figure out what he wants.” and “She has a lot of talent and has been successful in several completely unrelated jobs, but I can’t help her get where she’s going if she doesn’t tell me where that is.”

If this is you, you must do one thing differently, starting today: *Claim Your Space*. Claim it!

There’s something you must understand here in order to see why this is so important: the majority of leaders suffer from the opposite of Gumby-itis, which might be termed, “Will of Steel-itis.” They decide what they want, they claim it, and they charge forward until it’s theirs.

They love direction and they love a clearly defined goal in any aspect of their lives. It gives them shivers up and down their spines. When you tell them “I’m staying flexible in these uncertain times and I’ll happily fill any gap,” it drives them nuts. They don’t know what to do with that. It’s not a goal. It’s a wishy-washy statement.

So when an opportunity comes along that you really want, they don’t even realize you want it because you haven’t told them, and they plug in someone who has claimed that space instead of you. You’ll get what’s left over, which is usually not a role that excites you.

Don’t blame the boss. Maybe he or she didn’t see your talent, but a boss is busy looking in a lot of directions and doesn’t always have the time to figure out what you’re not telling him or her.

You’ve got to claim that space if you want it to be yours.

What if you can't decide which space to claim? As someone who's struggled with "entrepreneurial ADD" my whole life, believe me: I feel your pain! So many great business ideas, only 24 hours in a day. But that doesn't change the fundamental fact that we flexible folks get farther and have more satisfaction by making a choice and claiming our space. Survey the territory you occupy and then just pick something that interests you, benefits the company, and is aligned with key priorities.

Define your ideal role within the context of the company, its business, its current challenges, and its long-term strategy. It's likely that this role doesn't really exist, and it may never exist, but at least it gives decision-makers something that more closely resembles a goal.

Make it known that you would like to be considered for similar roles as the need arises, or better yet, offer to take on some responsibilities in this area, in addition to your current job. Most importantly, ask for their feedback as to how you can focus your own development efforts to become the best possible candidate for such a role.

I came across a Columbia University study recently that found people are 50% more likely to help out than we think they are. If you've been helping others, you can bet most of them now want to help you right back. Give those goal-loving "Will of Steel" folks what they need in order to do just that. Claim your space!

### **Whew! Here We Are in the Middle of the Holidays**

What a whirlwind this time of year is turning out to be!

It launched with a Thanksgiving visit from my parents. Here we are with Mom, Dad, and friends Linda Pulver and Jim Meadows. We had a ton of fun just trying to get this picture right with the camera's perplexing and uncooperative self-timer.

Now we're in the middle stretch. Kirk is working and studying 24/7 until his last class of the semester on December 18.

It's a good thing we're taking a week to relax on the beach after Christmas. With Kirk's EMBA schedule, we'll be in town a lot over the next 20 months, so we leapt at the chance to get away. I can't just taste that drink with the little umbrella in it now. Ah!