

## Overcoming Self-Interests: Businessman & Lawyer Kenneth C. Frazier (United States)

Story Adapted from Chapter 7, *Brave Leaders*



*“By shedding light on our fears we reduce their power over us.”*

In January of 2011, the very same day that Ken Frazier took office as the new CEO of Merck & Co, a promising late-stage drug failed. In the pharmaceutical industry, a new drug goes through many clinical stages, often taking years, so a late-stage drug is usually expected to be successful.

Unfortunately, Ken’s predecessor had already made a strong management earnings forecast to Wall Street, based on this drug’s anticipated success.

Ken had a tough decision to make. Keep this financial promise to the investment community — which would require him to substantially slash the company’s research budget (“the science”), or break that promise. After some thought, he went to Wall Street and said, “I’m sorry, but I’m not prepared to borrow from our long-term future for these shorter term gains.”

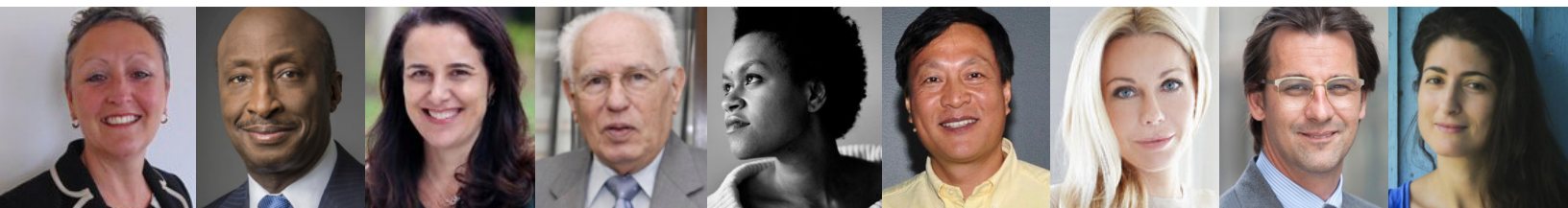
This was not an easy decision for Ken. Although he said he was “a little afraid” about making it — and the board was initially not happy about it — the hardest part for Ken was knowing that he would still have to lay off thousands of “dedicated and committed” Merck people. While he knew the layoffs were “the right thing to do,” he said he was unable to take that step until he identified and managed his fear.

What was holding him back? In his words, “That I would inflict pain on my colleagues...and I’d feel badly.” Once he realized that his biggest fear was his own self-interest—people wouldn’t like him — he was able to take the right action.

*See our tips for self-guided writes on our website, then follow this 3-step process to reflect on a current challenge of your own:*

### Think It Through

When you think about your own challenge, what keeps you from taking “the next step”? Try giving your biggest fear or concern a name (Ken described his fear of “not being liked.”) Then, describe it to yourself in detail. Write down any thoughts you have.



## Write It Out

Open your notebook or journal to a clean page. Take a few deep breaths and imagine your fear or concern sitting in front of you. Sit with it for a few moments, then set a timer for 7 minutes and begin to write. Describe this fear/concern in great detail. Keep letting your thoughts flow from head to hand to paper. Write as quickly as possible. Don't "stop and think" and don't stop writing — rewrite thoughts if necessary. When you hear the timer, stop writing and proceed to Connect the Dots.

## Connect the Dots

After taking a few deep breaths, reread what you've just written. Make comments in the margin or highlight words or phrases that stand out. When you are done, write a reflection using this sentence prompt: *I realize now that this fear/concern is...*

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## Interested in Coaching or a Small Group Workshop?

**Contact Jeanne Westervelt Rice**

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