

The theme of this book is that it takes a balanced person to enforce the law, not just in the courtroom, but also on the streets. Imbalance can take the form of prejudice, the kind that Bua Tran has for white men based on her personal experience. Or it can stem from race or gender, categories that a person has no choice about when they come in conflict with others. Sometimes prejudice is a blessing, like the full scholarship that Lisa Oro received because she was a female Indian. But overall, the expectation is that prejudice is bad and should be rooted out of law enforcement. Exactly how that can be accomplished is a modern dilemma, since everyone has preconceived notions about others. Politicians who say the police need more sensitivity training are just giving lip service to the problem because how a policeman reacts to difficult situations is more about their temperament and experience than their training. And that's where the main character in this story has an advantage. He is Even Keel, the guy who doesn't get flustered when things go wrong, the one who doesn't blame others for his own mistakes, and the one who doesn't congratulate himself for his successes.

He sees himself as a tiny cog in a much larger mechanism and focuses strictly on doing the best he can with his small task. And when others praise him, he doesn't see what is special about his mediocrity. By definition, he's in the middle, but isn't that just another way of saying he is balanced? It depends on the scale you are using.

When Keel applies the "right versus wrong" scale, he questions his judgment and is thrilled to have a partner to be his sounding board, because he's clearly ambivalent when it comes to blame. But when using his recollection scale, he assumes the worst, as illustrated by his reaction to a weak student, Celia Adrian, becoming his new boss. But he quickly chides himself for not giving her a chance, so he can return to the middle. When the scale is one's personality, he is solidly neutral, assuming he should ignore his first impressions, thereby giving them the benefit of his doubt.

Out of curiosity, his friends and family would like to see him display extreme emotion every once and awhile, to be hot or cold, but not lukewarm. Well, that wouldn't be him. If depression or exaltation is required, that's for somebody else to perform. It just isn't in him. For example, he is bothered by departmental changes but when his new partner, Detective Gil, coaxes him to say something about it, he falters. He doesn't like confrontation and isn't allowed by the rules of his profession to be upset when people lie to him or act like he's a bill collector. And the only exception to his moderation is when they malign his family. He will take on the school board for his daughter's sake and defend his wife's decision to continue working as a district attorney with a newborn.

And that is because his family is his safe haven, the source which renews his temperament and enables him to maintain his balance. When his cases become really complicated and his leads dry up, he is able to shrug his shoulders and go on to the next case or just go home.

He is a good team player because he likes being in the middle, not a beginner or a grandstander. On the experience scale, he's a veteran, but he will praise a co-worker for telling him what he already knows, as though it's news to him. Likewise, he avoids competition with Detective Prichard because it has no value to him. He reeks of humility.

At the end of this story, he tells his new boss that she was made for her job. And without realizing it, he is saying the same thing about himself. He has the ideal temperament for surviving in his profession. He leaves the safe haven of family life every morning and enters a world where he needs to be brave. He has a job which enables him to use his gifts of observation and deduction, even though not everything about the job is good. But that doesn't matter because he's in equilibrium with success and failure. He makes comments to himself about the nature of people, remarks which might brand him as a cynic if he said them out loud, but all he's really doing is stating the facts based on his experience, not demeaning anyone. When attitude and experience suggests reserving judgment, he is an ideal candidate for law enforcement. And that's point, it takes balance to be a policeman.



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