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ESSAY NO. 005

Albert Camus

The Stone Returns

On Persistence, Consequence, and the Judgment to Begin Again

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Technology provides the context.
Human judgment remains the subject.

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"One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

ALBERT CAMUS

Every day, executives and their organizations push stones uphill.

Risks are assessed. Strategies are revised, Regulations change. Markets move. Technologies evolve. Decisions, once believed to be settled, return in different forms.

For Albert Camus, the ancient figure of Sisyphus is more than a story of punishment. It is a lens through which to examine the human condition: how we respond to limits, absorb consequences and find freedom within a world that offers no final certainty.

This essay explores what Camus can teach us about judgment — not in the moment of the decision, but in what follows: the discipline to persist, the clarity to adapt and, when necessary, the courage to begin again.

The Moment of Descent

The decisive insight of Camus is not in the effort to push the stone upward, but in the moment when it falls and must be pushed again.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, what matters is not the punishment itself, but Sisyphus's consciousness of his condition. He sees the repetition, understands its futility and accepts what cannot be changed.

This awareness does not liberate him from the task. It liberates him within the task. The stone, the mountain and the return remain. What changes is his attitude: he no longer acts in illusion, but with lucidity.

Camus calls this lucidity a form *of revolt* — not a rejection of the world, but a refusal to be defined by it. In embracing the struggle, Sisyphus affirms his freedom: the freedom to give meaning to his action, even in a world that offers no final guarantees.

> *The freedom in Camus is not to escape the stone, but to face its return with lucidity.*

The Decision After the Decision

Much of what we call judgment concerns the moment before action.

Should we invest? Should we acquire? Should we enter the market?
Should we adopt the technology? Should we reorganize the company?
Should we take the risk?

These are important questions. But another form of judgment begins after they have been answered.

The decision has been made. Capital has been committed. People have been mobilized. Reputations have become attached to the outcome. The strategy has acquired advocates. The organization has begun climbing the mountain.

And then reality responds. The assumptions prove incomplete. The market changes. The implementation fails. The expected result does not materialize. The stone falls.

At that moment, the executive no longer confronts the uncertainty of deciding. The executive confronts the consequences of having decided. And that may require an even greater degree of judgment.

Before the decision, judgment asks: Should we begin?
After the decision, judgment asks: Should we continue?

The second question is often harder than the first. Before the decision, there is possibility. After the decision, there is history.

There are sunk costs. There is institutional momentum. There is personal credibility. There is the natural desire to demonstrate that the original decision was right.

Persistence can therefore become psychologically easier than reconsideration. Continuing protects the decision. Stopping exposes it. And organizations are remarkably capable of confusing the defense of a previous judgment with the exercise of present judgment.

When the Stone Returns

The return of the stone is not merely failure. It is information.

Something has happened between the original decision and the present moment. An assumption has encountered reality. A hypothesis has been tested. A constraint has appeared. A consequence has become visible.

The stone is no longer the same stone we first pushed upward because we now know something we did not know before.

The question, therefore, cannot simply be whether we possess the resilience to push again. There are at least three possible responses.

Persist.	The objective remains valid. The assumptions remain substantially intact. The setback changes neither the purpose nor the underlying logic of the decision. The stone fell, but the mountain remains worth climbing.
Adapt.	The purpose remains valid, but the path does not. Perhaps the strategy was wrong. Perhaps the technology was inadequate. Perhaps the organization was not ready. Perhaps circumstances changed. The stone still matters, but the route must change.
Abandon.	The assumptions no longer hold. The objective has lost its relevance. The economics have changed. The risk has become disproportionate. Or perhaps the original decision was simply wrong.

Abandonment is often interpreted as failure because organizations tend to measure commitment by duration. But continuing an invalid strategy does not transform it into a valid one. Time does not repair a false assumption. Investment does not convert error into truth. And perseverance cannot substitute for judgment.

A decision is not validated by our willingness to persist with it. Sometimes judgment begins when persistence ends.

Judgment in an Uncertain World

The world in which executives decide today resembles Camus's landscape more than we might admit: complex, unstable and without final guarantees.

Information is abundant, yet often incomplete. Scenarios multiply, but certainty remains elusive. Artificial Intelligence expands our capacity to analyze, compare and simulate, reducing blind spots and accelerating learning. It is a powerful instrument, but it does not remove the fundamental condition that Camus described: the need to decide and to live with the consequences.

Good judgment, in this context, is not the expectation of control, but the discipline to act with clarity under uncertainty — to recognize limits, weigh consequences and remain responsible for the choice, knowing that revision may be required later.

The lesson is not to avoid risk or to search for perfect information, but to cultivate the resilience to respond, to adjust and, when necessary, to choose a different course. Judgment, for Camus and for the executive today, is a practice of lucidity, responsibility and persistence in a world that never offers final answers.

In an uncertain world, judgment is not about finding certainty, but about acting well in its absence.

Lessons for the Executive

Camus does not offer a management doctrine. He offers a perspective that illuminates enduring challenges of leadership: how to sustain action, preserve judgment and remain free to begin again.

1.

Reassess with Discipline

A decision is not a verdict. The return of the stone — in the form of new information, changed conditions or unintended consequences — demands the discipline to reexamine, without seeing revision as failure.

2.

Persist without Attachment

Perseverance is a virtue when it serves a clear purpose. It becomes a liability when it turns into denial. Good judgment distinguishes commitment from attachment.

3.

Preserve the Capacity to Begin Again

Organizations that endure are not those that never face setbacks, but those that retain the freedom to restart — to learn, adjust and choose a different path when the circumstances so require.

The strength of an organization is not in never seeing the stone return, but in remaining capable of lifting it again — or of choosing a different stone.

The Enduring Relevance of Camus

More than seven decades after *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus remains remarkably relevant because he addresses a condition that has not disappeared: the experience of acting without final certainty.

Modern executives face the same tension that Camus described in a different vocabulary: the need to make consequential decisions in environments that are complex, contested and constantly changing. Technology expands our reach, but it does not eliminate the limits of knowledge, nor the risk of failure, nor the inevitable return of unfinished problems.

Camus does not promise meaning or lasting resolution. He offers something more demanding: the discipline of lucidity, the acceptance of limits and the courage to continue acting in their presence.

For leaders, this is not a philosophy of resignation, but a source of judgment. It reminds us that success is not measured only by the absence of setbacks, but by the quality of the response when the stone, as it inevitably does, rolls back down.

> *Camus does not teach us to avoid the return of the stone, but to meet it with clarity, responsibility and freedom.*

Executive Reflections

A few questions to guide reflection, discussion and decision in your organization.

1. ***What are we persisting in, and why?***
   Is it still aligned with our purpose, or have we become attached to a decision that no longer serves us?

2. ***What would a more candid reassessment look like today?***
   If we were to reexamine our original assumptions, what might we see differently?

3. ***Do we have the organizational freedom to begin again?***
   Are our people, processes and governance designed to learn, adjust and restart when necessary?

4. ***How do we sustain judgment under uncertainty?***
   What practices, disciplines or routines help us decide with clarity when the outcome is inherently incomplete?

5. ***What is the cost of not letting go?***
   If the stone keeps returning, what might it be signaling about our strategy, our structure or our assumptions?

The value of judgment is not in avoiding the return of the stone, but in lifting it again with greater clarity.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

This essay offers an independent interpretation of Camus for executive judgment. Persist, adapt, and abandon are editorial categories, not a decision-making framework attributed to Camus.

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Colophon

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The stone will return.
Judgment determines whether we must.

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Timeless Principles for Modern Leadership

