

# Dear Rod: It's time to make amends

**BY MARY SCHMICH**

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Dear Rod,

You just got handed an opportunity.

It can't have felt like opportunity to you Monday, sitting in the courtroom in the avalanche of that verdict.

Guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty.

Seventeen counts of guilty, and each time the jury foreman uttered the word, it was like another boulder rumbling toward the defendant's table. The defeat was crushing.

No wonder your wife cried. No wonder she said she just wanted to go home.

But you came down to the courthouse lobby anyway and waded into the media mob.

"I, frankly, am stunned," you said.

Even people who think you're a liar can believe that. Of course you were stunned. Defeat, for the hopeful, is a kind of death, and like death, it takes awhile to process.

And after all these years of pleading innocence, of making your case on talk shows and sidewalks, of turning yourself into a well-dressed clown on a crusade to persuade, you may have come to believe you'd done nothing wrong.

Lies are mutants. The lies we tell others have a way of morphing into truth in our minds. Self-delusion begins as a kind of survival instinct, then turns out to be a self-ingested poison.

So the opportunity the jury gave you Monday is this: to tell yourself the truth.

Short of a miracle — i.e., a mistrial — your fight is over. Now you have the chance to look hard at what you did. Look at it from the angle of the law. Look at it from the angle of the people who elected you.

Maybe you really did think that your wheeling and dealing was just how the game was played. You once said that everything's a deal. You're right.

And you're right to think that you were hardly the only political wheeler-dealer in Illinois, others of whom are still illicitly glad-handing and strong-arming their way through power. You'd even be right to think that your downfall came with a whiff of mob mentality.

But those truths aren't the point now. A jury — one that weighed the charges long and hard — just found you stepped out of the legal bounds 17 times.

You've been handed opportunities all your life. Parents who helped you. Allies and in-laws who boosted you. You were endowed with a certain charm.

With these gifts, you had an extraordinary shot at power and at using it well. You blew it.

There are people who revel in your disgrace. I heard some yell "boo" as you left the courthouse. One yelled "crook." When the verdict was read, I saw a few smirk.

But there are others who take no pleasure in your fall. A lot are sad to see your family suffer.

Now you have the chance to think how you blew it and how you might make amends, especially to the people who matter most to you. Your wife, your kids, your brother. Honesty is the only place to start.

You're a Winston Churchill fan, so maybe you've heard this quote: "Once in a while you will stumble upon the truth but most of us manage to pick ourselves up and hurry along as if nothing had happened."

You're not likely to hurry far from a prison cell for a while, but you'll have the opportunity to linger over the truth of what happened, to understand your part in it. If you can do that, you'll come closer to being the man you wanted to be and might have been.



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Former Gov. Rod Blagojevich and his wife, Patti, leave the Dirksen U.S. Courthouse in Chicago after the jury delivered 17 guilty verdicts Monday.