

city. They claimed they could weave the finest cloth imaginable—in incredibly beautiful colors and magnificent patterns. Even better, they explained, the cloth would be invisible to anyone who was stupid or incompetent.

“It would be wonderful to have clothes made from that cloth,” thought the emperor. “Then I’d know who was stupid or incapable of advising me.” So he gave the two crooks a great deal of money and asked them to weave him some cloth.

The crooks called for the finest silk thread and the purest gold yarn. But instead of weaving it into cloth for the emperor, they hid it away for themselves. They pretended to work late into the night. But there was never any fabric on their loom.

The emperor became impatient to see the cloth. But remembering that it would be invisible to people who were stupid or unworthy of their positions, he decided to send in his place his most trusted and sensible adviser. Not, of course, that the emperor himself had anything to fear.

The old adviser went to observe the two crooks as they worked at their empty loom. Opening his eyes wide, he thought, “Goodness! I can’t see a thing!” But of course, he did not say so.

“Come, take a closer look,” the two crooks said, pointing to the empty loom. “Aren’t the colors beautiful? Isn’t the design magnificent?”

The poor old adviser opened his eyes wider and wider. Still seeing nothing, he thought, “Gracious! Am I stupid? Am I unworthy of my position? I never thought so before. My goodness! No one must know that I can’t see the material.”

“What do you think?” asked one of the weavers.

“Oh, it is magnificent!” said the worthy adviser, peering through his glasses. “The colors! The pattern! I’ll report to the emperor that I am quite satisfied with the cloth.”

“That makes us very happy,” said the two weavers.

The crooks then asked for even more money and more silk thread and more gold yarn—all of which they hid away. Late into the night, they pretended to weave away on their empty loom.

The emperor sent other officials to observe the weavers’ progress. They, too, were surprised to see nothing, but of course they told the emperor how wonderful the cloth looked. They even advised him to hold a great parade, so he could show off his new clothes.

The emperor then presented each crook with a medal of honor.

Soon the entire city was praising the magnificent cloth.

The crooks stayed up all night before the great parade. Everyone saw them rush to finish the emperor's new clothes—cutting the air with large scissors, and sewing without any thread. Finally the crooks announced, “Behold! The clothes are finished!”

The emperor arrived with his highest-ranking officials. The two crooks, pretending to hold up clothing, said, “Just look at these pants! And the cloak! They are as light as spider webs—so light you might think you were wearing nothing at all!”

The officials, seeing nothing, agreed.

“If it please His Grace, would His Royal Majesty kindly remove his clothes,” said the crooks. “We'll fit you with your new ones, right in front of this mirror, so you can see them for yourself.”

So the emperor took off all his clothes.

When the crooks had finished pretending to dress him, the emperor turned around and looked into the mirror.

Everyone exclaimed, “Goodness, how well the new clothes suit you! What a wonderful fit! What beautiful colors! What a magnificent pattern!”

Then the master of ceremonies announced, “The royal procession awaits outside.”

“I am ready!” said the emperor. He turned once again toward the mirror. He knew he had to look as if he were admiring himself in all his glory.

The royal officers pretended to hold up the hem of the cloak. No one suspected that the officers saw nothing.

As the emperor proceeded down the street, everyone exclaimed, “Goodness, the emperor’s new clothes are incredibly beautiful! The finest he’s ever worn! What a perfect fit!” No one wanted to admit that the emperor was naked, for that would make the person seem stupid or unfit for his or her job.

At last a small child said, “But he doesn’t have anything on!”

“Goodness!” said the child’s father. Then he turned to his neighbor. “Just listen to what this innocent child said,” he whispered, repeating the child’s comment.

One person whispered to another, and then another and another. Soon everyone was shouting, “But he doesn’t have anything on!”

The emperor shuddered. He knew they were right, but he could never admit it.

So the emperor kept marching along, acting prouder than ever. And the high-ranking officials followed him, carrying the hem of the cloak that wasn’t there.

To think about . . .

When you ask your friends for advice, do you want to know what they really think? Or would you rather have them say something that will please you?

In this story, the emperor doesn't care about anything except his own pride. He insists that people regard him as smart, and worthy of being emperor. But by refusing to admit he is wrong, he ends up looking stupid and incompetent, the very thing he was trying to avoid.

The emperor's advisers, unwilling to risk appearing foolish or unworthy of their jobs, let their leader make a fool of himself. Only a child refuses to play this game, and eventually leads the people to speak out against their ruler.

If you were emperor—or president, or head of a company—would you want to know the truth, even if it hurt your pride?

Like the citizens in the story, do you go along with the crowd just to flatter your friends or your supervisors?

Or, like the small child, do you dare to stand up and tell the truth?