
\$18.95**1996**

Mary calls from Raleigh, N.C. and says, "I would like to order a copy of your book for my boss. I think he would enjoy it."

I respond, "Great! Give me his name and I'll write a note to him in the front." She replies, "Thanks. His name is Clyde."

I have hesitated to talk to my accountant about the profitability of selling one book because of the fear of getting chastised. My accountant thinks I am Random House and would be taken aback that anyone would be naïve enough to think you could make money on an \$18.95 sale after paying for the books, storing the books, taking the order over the phone or via fax or e-mail, processing the credit card (some don't go through and checks have been known to bounce) signing the book, packing it up and taking it to the post office. Whew! After re-reading this it is easy to see how someone would think that way.

Ten years later – 2006

Randy Waddell, from Mississippi, calls and asks, "Are you available to make a keynote address on February 27 of next year?"

"Sure," I say. He responds, "I will pass along your availability to the decision maker."

1996

Mary, who ordered the book, calls back and says, "I ordered a book from you a couple of weeks ago." (I did not remember.) "My boss wants to order 10 copies for our office staff." Still not Random House, but the accountant, if he knew, would be a little more approving of ten books.

"Give me the names and I'll send them along," I reply.

2006

Frank, from Florida, calls and says, "My name is Frank Leonard. Rand passed the information about your availability for our February 27th meeting. We would like to go ahead and reserve that day. The meeting will be at the Sandestin Resort in Florida." (Don't worry, all the players are identified – Mary, Clyde, Randy and Frank.) I say, "Thank you. I look forward to it." I didn't want to say I had no clue where the Sandestin Resort is. I immediately Googled it and found it is located in the Panhandle about 50 miles east of Pensacola.

1996

I get a call. "My name is Clyde Fulp. I ordered some books from you a couple of weeks ago." (I now remember). "Do you speak to groups, and if so, can I come see you do your thing?"

"Yes, I do, and as a matter of fact," I say, "I have a seminar at the Hampton Inn in Winston-Salem in two weeks and would welcome you to join us."

"I'll try to make it," says Clyde.

2007

I had not been to Pensacola but once in 30 years, and that was with my friend Phil Latham 20 years ago when we flew A7's into the Air Station for a quick overnight. My fondness for Pensacola is well known and documented in the November 2005 Leadership Challenge ([click here to read](#)) about my meeting, in 1970, Colonel Don Conroy, The Great Santini, father of the writer Pat Conroy.

1996

Clyde Fulp comes to the seminar in Winston-Salem. He never says a word, and at the end leaves without so much as a thanks or goodbye. So much for that.

2007

I drive into Pensacola on a beautiful blue sky-70°- Sunday morning in February, two days before the meeting. You always take a chance going back to a place of such fond memories as there might be disappointment in the “new” replacing the “old.” Maybe Rosie O’Grady’s, my favorite saloon, is now a Burger King, and the “new” Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ) where we lived in 1970 will now be a day-care center.

I am not disappointed. The town of Pensacola has changed very little, with the tallest building about eight stories and most of the oldest structures just the way they were. Rosie O’Grady’s is alive and well, but closed on Sundays, so I can’t have a cool one for old times’ sakes (the only small disappointment in a fabulous trip). The BOQ is still there with the swimming pool where, after happy hour, we threw a fully uniformed Navy Ensign in because...well, just because! The office where I met Colonel Conroy is still there and the academic building where aerodynamics ate me alive is still majestic and ominous.

1996

Clyde calls. “Sorry I couldn’t speak to you on the way out of the door the other day, but I was late getting back to Raleigh. Are you available to speak to 300 of our folks at the Holiday Inn Four Seasons in Greensboro next month?”

“Yes,” I reply. “I am.”

2007

I go jogging out of the base gym – “Great to have you here, sir,” tour the new Naval Aviation Museum, and play golf on the base course. It hugs Escambia Bay and is terribly unforgiving on shots “to the sea.” The flight path to the Air Station goes right down the middle of the course (as very few of my shots did), and it is beautiful to see the red-and-white-painted trainers and fighters taking off and landing. I will never forget the day 38 years ago when I took off on that same flight path on my way to the USS Independence for my first carrier landing. Boy, I was one scared puppy! I had forgotten how much noise a jet fighter makes in afterburner, but it was fun to recall our response to complaints: “It’s the sound of freedom!”

I also think about the small, but growing fast, number of friends I flew with that are no longer with us. Looking at the brick and mortar and airplanes brings back thrilling memories, but when you drill down to what was really important, it’s the people.

1996

I did the program at the Holiday Inn. After the event Clyde asked if I would mind if he passed my name along to some others as a resource.

“Be my guest!” I say.

2007

Sunday afternoon late, I drive from Pensacola to Sandestin along Highway 98 through Gulf Breeze, Pensacola Beach, Fort Walton, and Destin. Gorgeous drive!

The meeting is at the Hilton. It’s wonderful. Now, I will be the first to admit that when I travel on business or go on vacation, I don’t usually stay at Hiltons as I tend to be a Hampton Inn, Comfort Inn, Courtyard sort of guy. However, since the group I am speaking to is staying at the Hilton, it’s only natural that I “have to” stay there as well! Of course, the client paying for my room has nothing to do with my decision!

1997

I get a call out of the blue. “My name is Tom. Clyde Fulp gave me your name and I was wondering if...”

2007

Monday, Feb. 26th – perfect weather, not a cloud in the sky, 75°. I play golf, jog, eat a nice meal, walk on the Gulf Coast beaches -- the prettiest beaches in the world with the prettiest water (this is a fact!) - - spend the evening reviewing the presentation for the next morning.

The presentation on Tuesday is fun, made that way by 120 committed professionals who do important work, but who love to have what I call "serious fun."

You never know how a trip will turn out. The weather could have been cold and rainy, the base could have been closed to visitors because of security, attendees could have had a bad attitude, Rosie O'Grady's could have been a laundromat!

This was one of those trips that combined an incredible walk down memory lane with great work and wonderful people -- one of the better business experiences I've had in 30 years.

It all came about because of one \$18.95 book. Clyde Fulp was Vice President of the North Carolina Farm Bureau. He passed my name to the other Farm Bureaus, and I have since done programs in Mississippi (many times); Gainesville, FL; Waco, TX; Baton Rouge, LA; Little Rock, AK; Columbia, SC (sort of ironic: I live in Columbia but didn't work for them until after Clyde Fulp passed my name along!)...and now the Sandestin Resort!

This is a wonderful company with great people.

Leadership Challenge

Look on every order as a potential big customer. We get so busy chasing the "big order" that we don't pay attention to the little ones. Those "little people" behind the little order could very well

be the multi-million dollar decision maker of the future. If you treat the little order with the attention, respect, and courtesy it deserves, that act of kindness and courtesy, and that great customer service, will not be forgotten down the road.

The Farm Bureau has been my best client since 1996. There are lots of times you can't trace exactly where business comes from. But **all** of this business, without any doubt, came from an order worth \$18.95. That's something to think about.

I encourage your response to these thoughts. farlgroup@aol.com

Have a great day!

Please forward this on or send us the e-mail addresses of co-workers, friends or family members who might enjoy a monthly leadership thought.