



Innocent until...

You are sitting at home watching your favorite TV show and alternately thinking about how things seem to be going your way. The kids are doing well, one a sophomore in college, the other a senior in high school. You have a great job.

A year ago you sold your grandfather's home on 30 acres that you had inherited. You rarely went there and it had become somewhat of a drain financially to keep it up. With one child in college and another about to enter, this has really helped out. Not a bad life until....

The door bell rings about 8:15 p.m. You open the door and there are two policemen with pistols drawn and two other "suits," who obviously are not there to wish you happy birthday. One of the "suits" says, "You are under arrest for the violation of solicitation and prostitution statutes of this state. You have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and" – the guy has the Miranda thing down pat.

You are handcuffed as your spouse and daughter look on in horror. You are put into the squad car and away you go. You ask some questions of your "new friends" and they don't even look at you. You are trying to think what in the world is going on here. Surely that parking ticket you forgot to pay doesn't elicit this sort of response. You're a CPA, who is the most cautious and picky human being on earth, didn't make a mistake on your taxes, and even if he did, this would certainly be an overreaction. You are so undone that the statement about solicitation and prostitution didn't even register.

You are finger-printed, photographed and taken into a room where the "suits" have gathered. One asks, "Can you tell us about what's going on at the family farm." You try to explain it was sold to strangers through a broker a year ago, but it is falling on deaf ears. You call an attorney whose retainer fee just knocked your daughter out of her first year of college. Two days later your mug shot is on the front page of the newspaper with the details of the indictment. Four days later, after a group picketed your company's headquarters demanding that you, having been a part of this travesty against women, be fired, the company caves in to the pressure and lays you off, saying the adverse publicity is hurting business, and if and when you are found not guilty, they will "consider" re-hiring you. The great life you thought you had just a few days ago is in shambles.

You think this can't happen? Ask the Duke University lacrosse players whose lives have been forever changed by false allegations. They were tried and found guilty in the court of public opinion before the ink was dry. They were kicked out of school and the coach forced to resign.

Fast-forward to today and the allegations about Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick. A letter to the editor in Tuesday's (Columbia, SC) *STATE* newspaper says, "Vick should be thrown in jail and banned for life from the NFL." This is only a few days after the allegations have been made. It is hard to believe someone would write that and even harder to believe the *STATE* would publish it.

PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, picketed the Atlanta Falcons Corporate office and Nike's flagship store, Niketown, in New York, with the stated goal to get Vick's top sponsor to drop him. He has, in many instances, been tried and convicted on the allegations.

Maybe he did do those things. If he is found guilty, then being thrown in jail and banned from professional football for life should be the minimum punishment. But until he is proven guilty, or admits his guilt, we have in this country something called presumption of innocence and due process. It is offered to every citizen. It is offered to you, who, remember, have been falsely accused in reference to the family farm -- and it is offered to Michael Vick.

The Leadership Challenge

First, listen to the whole story before making judgments, because as we know from experience, most truth lies somewhere in the middle.

Second, always support the people you lead until the truth is known. I will bet \$1,000 right now that if the accused had been the son or daughter of the people slamming Michael Vick, every single one of them, without exception, would say, "Now don't be too quick to judge. Every person is innocent until proven guilty." And of course they would be right, so let's give Michael Vick the same courtesy.

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.