



March Madness Revisited

You come home from a movie at 8:15 pm, peek in the window and see that the babysitter is asleep. You had made it absolutely clear to the sitter that there was to be no sleeping on the job. The babysitter complained about having to stay up most of the night before because of exams.

How do you feel about the babysitter?

You go to a play (very expensive tickets). The lead actor gives less than a stellar performance. The review in the paper the next day says he had been jilted by his girlfriend and was distracted.

How do you feel about the actor?

You have not been feeling well for about a week. You go to your family doctor who diagnoses the flu and prescribes the famous and all healing “Z-pack”. You could tell in the appointment the doctor’s mind was elsewhere. You go home, hunker down and follow doctor’s orders to the letter. No improvement for three days. You go to a different doctor. He says “Wow, you have got pneumonia.” You have to go to the hospital for two days to get back on track.

How do you feel about your family doctor?

You are in your kitchen whipping up Sunday brunch. You happen to look out and see black smoke coming from your detached garage. You call 911 who relays your call to the fire station which is three blocks away. About 7 minutes after the call, flames start to shoot out. At the 15 minute mark just as the fire truck pulls up, the garage with your brand new cherry-red BMW convertible is essentially gone. You start asking the hard questions and find out the fire chief had been on the phone arguing with his wife when the call came in.

How do you feel about the fire chief?

With all the excitement of March Madness I am reminded that in a previous life I played basketball for Coach Frank McGuire here at the University. Very few individuals have had as much heartache in their personal life as Coach McGuire, a part of his life that not many people saw. His wife, son, and son-in-law met tragic circumstances. One year right before Christmas, his house burned totally to the ground, losing everything—basketball memorabilia, national championship trophies, family heirlooms, family pictures, all the mementos of a lifetime...gone.

He had a stroke in his later years and was confined to a wheelchair. Yet the whole time I was around him, and I was around him a lot for two years as a player, I never once heard him say “Why me, I don’t deserve this. When is all this going to end”? He was always looking ahead.

The first year he was here we went up to play Duke. As you know, he had won a national championship at North Carolina, so there was not much love lost on the part of Duke fans for Coach McGuire and his newly adopted team. This was a huge media event with headlines in the Durham newspaper:

McGuire Returns to Tobacco Road

One of our problems was that Duke was number two in the country and undefeated. They had a great team with four of their first five players drafted into the NBA. They beat us like a drum. It was a track meet. Most times you look at film three days after a game and you are embarrassed by what you see. We were embarrassed while the game was going on!

After the game we went into the locker room. You could have heard a pin drop. We felt bad for him on his big day, bad for the school and bad for us. Coach McGuire went, as he always did, to talk to the reporters. After what seemed like a long time he came into the locker room. He was smiling, almost laughing, looked around and said, "Hey, what's going on in here? That game is over, let's forget about it. We have another game coming up on Friday night. We will do better next time." He never mentioned the Duke game again.

I attribute a great deal of his success to his understanding that his attitude, feelings and emotions had a lot to do with how his team performed. He had a willingness (I did not say ability) to separate the negative events going on in his personal life from his professional life. One of the great things that separates man from animal is that we have a choice in our thought processes. We can make positive statements about our situation or we can make negative statements. We have a choice.

The Leadership Challenge

- Is it possible to separate our personal feelings from our daily performance?
- As a leader, do we have a right to expect our people to perform "No matter what?"
- What do our customers expect?
- What did you expect from the babysitter, actor, doctor and fire chief? Do they get a "free pass" because of outside circumstances?
- As a leader, do you let your personal affairs affect your daily performance?
- How often in the last year do you think the people around you have said "He or she is having a bad day?"
- What have you let slide just because you "didn't feel like it?"
- Does the title of **leader** carry with it a certain responsibility to suck it up and keep moving forward?
- Except in unusual circumstances, do we have the right to allow the everyday "bumps and bruises" to affect our leadership?

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.