

CHAPTER 3

The Teen Years – Importance of Decisions

A) BE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER

I was just starting out in the workforce, which in my days as a teenager, most of us worked in the fast food industry. The work was steady and the pay met my needs at the time. But as I started my journey with others of the working class, I realized that who you associated yourself with at work seemed important. I discovered that in a work environment, much like in a school environment that groups would form and develop with coworkers who would hang out after work and plan doing things together. Within a short time, I would evaluate the different groups, or cliques as you might describe them, and I became associated with one of them.

The choice was easy as I wanted to hang out with the cool teens that I worked with. It's funny how the groups formed in the workplace, most based upon personalities, and common interest. I also remember that everyone seemed friendly. But one group seemed to be what I perceived was the cool group. Yes, that was the rating we gave things that met a certain element of approval. Cool was good and cool was popular. That is what I wanted to be a part of. I wanted to be part of the popular group. Popular seemed important to me.

During my days off, and after work, I started hanging out with the perceived cool crowd from work. It was always nice to make new friends and I believed the more friends you could have the “cooler” you would be perceived. I was more concerned with how I was perceived. Another way to state this is I was more concerned with my reputation. My reputation, I believed, made me cool and it was also what made me popular. At least that was my belief back then. It makes me laugh sometimes when I think about it now, because being cool and popular is what I placed such a high value on.

As time would pass, and as I would be with the cool group, someone in the group would cause some mischief or do some things that would make me uncomfortable. Some of their actions crossed the line of right and wrong. How they treated certain individuals made me question if I should stay. They would belittle people, and carry on like they were above others in stature, intelligence and looks. I could feel my questioning of the values and principles that I was taught by my mother. But because I was concerned about my reputation I went along. Yes, I was a fool.

It did not take long for my mother to see a change, but also notice that I was not the happy son she knew. As I have stated before, my mother was the best leadership coach and mother, and her senses were keen, as great leaders develop their senses. As a coach and leader she recognized the warning signs, and as a coach and leader, she confronted the situation. Leaders confront, as they know hesitation can allow for more damage. So my mother questioned me, and I listened. She told me her observations and what her motherly wisdom perceived. She always could see right through me, and her perception was right on target.

“Marcos, tell me what is bothering you? You keep going out with your work friends, but you do not seem as excited as you once were,” she asked.

I remained silent.

“Marcos, you do not have to tell me. But I can tell that something is wrong. I can tell that voice in your head is talking to you, and that something is on your mind.”

In time I opened up to my mother about my misgivings of my new found friends. I told her about some of the mischief, and how at first it seemed harmless, but that now it seems to be getting a little worse each time. I told her about some of the belittling that seemed much more than just teasing someone. I described to her how it seemed at times that we hurt certain people, not physically but with our words. She asked, “Then why do you still hang around that crowd? The choice is simple, just separate yourself from them.”

“It’s not that easy, Mom,” I replied.

My mother stopped me as she knew the direction that the conversation was going. “Marcos, is it that you are concerned about your reputation?”

I answered, “Yes,” as I knew she would understand that. But she didn’t.

My mother, in her leadership wisdom coached me to see the difference and the importance for me to be more concerned about my character than my reputation. She said, “Marcos Antonio, reputations come and go but your character stays with you. Your character is who you are as a person.”

Character was always so important to my mother. Although it seemed I failed the test many times she would always bring me back to the lesson of character. Mom emphasized all through my life how she wanted me to be of good character and that others will know me by my character. My mother taught me that many people will worry about their reputation. The problem is even people of bad character worry of such. My mother stated, “Your reputation may open doors, but your character will keep you there. Mijo, you may face hard decisions, and in life you will have challenges. Difficult times happen in every life. When faced with a crisis a man of character falls back on himself. If you have established yourself with good character, you will have built a strong foundation that will get you through those hard times, and you will be a better man for it. In addition, you will then provide guidance and support for others. That is who you are, Marcos.”

Thanks, Mom. I learned and observed as my character allowed me to go through difficult times. Mom, the lessons you taught me are so true, and that man of character has gained strength from those experiences and hopefully has become a better man. After all when we are more concerned about our character, what can be said about our reputation?

That is a good question. One day I witnessed a manager stand on a chair on a sales floor, as he berated the whole sales team. The team listened, but unfortunately the team was used to the belittlement. In the manager's message, was how frustrated the manager was and how disappointed he was in the results of the team because of all of the effort that he as their manager put forward. The message seemed all about him and less about them. His message was one sided, and it lacked all elements of leadership. This is why I stated he was a manager, and I did not mention him as a leader. I believe one of the reasons the manager chose the timing on delivering this message is because on that day some visitors from the corporate office were present. Apparently the day of the visit, and perhaps the current results of the business were not up to the standards needed. That manager believed his reputation was at stake and therefore made an appearance of ego to demonstrate to the team, and to the visitors, his dominance. That manager was not at that business for too much longer after that day.

Leadership teaches that character, good character, is the foundation of who one needs to be and how to demonstrate. Had that manager truly had solid character, he would have had the respect of his team and of the visitors. Certainly, as a leader you can convey disappointment on results. But even in a failing moment it is better to walk away with your character in check and your reputation never questioned. As Mom would teach this to me, we as leaders need to make this an imperative teaching as we mentor others. I have stated many times that people want to be led and that they have an innate hunger to find a true leader. I believe it is the good character of a strong leader that they recognize first. Remember, your reputation may open doors but it is your character that will keep you there.

B) THE VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOPS

What mother does not want their children to be successful? No doubt that Mom would lay down her life for her children and, in addition, would also want to protect them from all harm. I am certain that my mother wished she could take every pain and ache from me, from physical pain to emotional pain. It must hurt, as a mother, to see your son or daughter go through pain. When I encountered pain I could see the anguish in my mother's eyes and then the sorrow. Sometimes that anguish would be panicked if and when I got physically hurt as that was my mother's first reaction. I remember when I was very young and having my arm broken severely. When my friends mother brought me home, my mother said a few swear words, which was her way of showing panic. Because I saw that panic I wanted to calm her down. There I was with a severely broken left arm.

"I'll be okay, Mom. I'll go to my room," I stated.

Mom called Dad, who seemed to get home in no time at all, and they took me to the doctor's office. The doctor saw the severity of my arm and directed them to take me to the hospital. If I remember correctly I even stayed a day in the hospital as that is how severe the broken arm was. But my memory of the moment is more about seeing my mother's anguish in my being harmed.

I speak of a mother's anguish of witnessing or knowing their sons or daughters will get hurt and having to face heartbreak, but Mom knew it would happen so that leadership coach in her believed it was wise for her to teach me the lessons from each one so I would be better prepared to survive, but also better prepared to avoid them if possible. In addition, she knew hardship, pain and sorrow each had lessons that would further shape who I would become. She saw this as an opportunity to think of it as how she would present me to the world and how the world would perceive who I was. She wanted me to be a leader and she believed it was also important for a leader to help others and be an example and utilize the lessons learned from hardships and pain to help others through them.

Mom always seemed proud of me and I certainly hope I gave her many moments of that pride. I did okay in Jr. High School, won some awards and started my first two years of High School with solid grades. I seemed to have a knack for math as I enjoyed math and excelled at it. It was around my sophomore year and into my junior year that I started working. My parents did not require me to get a job, but it seemed like the right thing to do. I was good in restaurants and the spending money was nice to have. It seemed about this time, with work, friends, a girlfriend, and school that my grades dipped from what they used to be. Mom was concerned. She knew that I had intelligence and wanted me to have success. She expressed her concern.

“Marcos, your grades have dropped and you are hardly at home anymore. Are you sure that you are not making yourself too busy?” she asked.

“No, Mom, it is just the subjects are a little more difficult. Plus, I am not sure I have the right teacher anyway,” I replied. The answer I gave was my own way of rationalizing, as I seemed to enjoy the busyness of my life and would not know which item I would sacrifice if I had to.

“Marcos, we do not require you to work. If you want to concentrate on school we will support you,” she said.

“I know that, Mom. But I like working. I think it adds value to what I am learning as well.”

“Okay, but I am concerned, because you were doing so well and that can take you far,” she explained.

“I’ll be okay, Mom, I know what I am doing,” I answered. Certainly as a teenager I believe we all know what we are doing.

Mom knew better. She saw a dangerous trend and wanted to, and tried, to correct it. She made many more attempts and even had my father speak to me about the subject. I was stubborn and hard headed. I did not recognize the repercussions. It is hard to look that far ahead as a teenager, but Mom always did.

As the next few years went by, and as I made other choices that would have repercussions, Mom at least wanted me to learn valuable

lessons that she believed at some point would bring me through any consequence. No matter if I was going to be a Rocket Scientist or a Restaurant Cook, Mom wanted me prepared to succeed, be the best at what I chose, and have lessons to teach others. That is the true mentorship of a leader. Mom knew that we were at a point where she could not change my direction, so she made me better prepared for the direction I was headed. What a wise woman. I can still remember our conversation and her words, and like Mom, she repeated them many more times throughout my life.

“Marcos, your choices will bring happiness and sadness in your life. Enjoy the good times and treasure them. Keep your head up and have faith in the Lord during the hard times and ask the Lord, “What is it that I am to learn from this”, and then listen. Most of all, never give up. Remember that life is lived in the valleys and you need to attack life to make it through. But those few times that you reach the mountain tops remember, to enjoy the view. It is the view from the mountain tops that will keep you fighting forward in the valley for that next moment on the mountain. Because you have been to the mountain top and you remember the view, you will fight to get back there again.” She hugged me, and left my room.



Mom, I remember those words that day and on many other days. I remember crying in your arms when facing heartbreak, and I remember sitting by your side when facing uncertainty. But most of all I remember the view from the mountain top and how I want to stay there, camp there, and not leave there. Unfortunately there are valleys, and they are difficult at times. But as you taught me I will teach others to remember the view from the mountain top.

Leadership is not always about success. Leadership is about life, which covers every emotion. In business, leadership is still the same message. We need to teach our employees how to live and make it through the valleys, and then how to celebrate and enjoy the view from the mountain tops. We need to prepare them for the inevitable trips through the valleys and how to learn from every situation. We need to teach the lesson of how to learn and what to learn. It is from our teachings that they will teach others, because great leaders pay it forward. Then we need to teach not only how to get back to the mountain top, but how to fight to stay there. Because the next thing Mom taught was to not be afraid when being moved from a mountain top because the next mountain will be much more spectacular.

C) IF YOU DID AS MUCH TODAY AS YOU PLAN TO DO TOMORROW

Growing up, my father was a workhorse and a disciplinarian, God rest his soul. As kids we would be up early on the weekend doing our chores with him. The boys did the outside work and the girls did the inside kitchen chores. This was the tradition of which we were raised. Although on Sundays, my father would bar-b-que a lot, which is probably why it is in my blood to bar-b-que a lot as well. I remember we would be up early, do our yard work and other chores and then back to bed for a nap. Of course Mom would be blasting her Vikki Carr music as I mentioned before. I believe this did teach us good work ethic and still to this day I wake up early every Saturday and Sunday out of habit.

As we made it to our teen years, we were assigned what chores we were responsible for. My father had a chalk board in the garage and he would list things to be completed by each of us. Most of the time there was no time frame other than the expectation that it was to be completed within that week. Mow, edge, and clip the yard, clean the pool, clean the pool filter, sweep and wash down the sidewalks were routine weekly items on the list. Our bedrooms were expected to be kept up, and Mom

helped on anything we left on the bedroom floor like clothing. This just seems the normal way of life. When Dad would work around the house, we would have to be there with him. Because I was the youngest and as time went by at some point it seems I was the last one working with him on little house repairs. I miss those times and would give everything to be there one more time. When my father passed there was an old tool box with the name Villareal that my older brother Chris claimed as that was a special memory for him.

I remember in our teens it seemed that my brother Bob and I were the ones assigned chores, as most of the others were growing in age and not around as much. My sister Katy was probably assigned most of the indoor chores at that time, but my memory remembers more of my responsibilities. What I do remember is the stupid fights my brother Bob and I would have on who was going to mow and who was going to edge. Our yard was not that big at the time so even now it seems so silly. There is a song by one of my favorite 70's band, America, that sings, "How about a cheer for the humor in my brother. That would brighten up the darkest nights. Just another sign of love whenever we would fight." When I play that song, even the memories of the fights we had are good memories. The song was so true, as it was just another sign of love whenever we would fight. But he was always there to protect and defend me when we grew up. Thanks Bob.

Soon, as teens, we each had different jobs and had our own vehicles and we were always on the run. School, homework, work, maybe a girlfriend and a date, or just hanging out with friends made our lives full and busy. However, the chores, duties and responsibilities, and the list on the chalkboard were still there and needed to be done. Mom kept on top of the list. I believe she did this out of respect for our father. Mom would see me come home, but always in a rush and she would remind me, "Marcos, you still need to clean the pool."

"I know, Mom, but I have to meet my friends at Farrell's. I will do it tomorrow," I said with reassurance.

The next day would be a similar routine, I would pull up in my Chevy Nova, run in and Mom was ready. “Marcos you still need to clean the pool,” she reminded me.

“I know, Mom, I will get it done before the weekend. I promise. I will have more time tomorrow,” I responded.

Soon this became a pattern, and on some occasions I did not get the work done and at those times I had to face my father. I never liked those consequences. But in reality my mom had warned me several times, as she knew I would face the consequences of Dad. Sometimes the consequences was just having to work with him all day Saturday, and my dad somehow always had a long list of hard chores. Giving up a Saturday meant everything as all my friends were doing things. But I only had myself to blame. However, the next week the pattern would continue. Mom did not like bad habits, and she knew that bad habits would affect my character, and become harder to address if they continued. So one day it was the same routine. I drive up, run in, and Mom was ready. “Marcos, you need to mow the yard,” she said with authority.

“I’ll get it tomorrow, Mom, I have to run to meet my friends,” I stated while running up the stairs to grab something from my room.

Mom was ready. She was waiting at the bottom of the stairs in a position to block me from leaving. I stopped, I probably gave her a smirk, as young teens do, and I stated, “Mom, I have to go. I will get it tomorrow, I promise.”

Mom would have none of it. She stood in my way, and in no way would I try to move her. She knew I had that much respect. I hope all children do. “Marcos, sit down,” as she gestured to the kitchen table. I walked over to the table, let out a sigh and sat down.

“What?” I asked, and probably showed some emotion, or attempted to.

“Marcos, calm down,” she said, as she would have none of my attitude. “You are starting to put things off too much, and it is becoming a bad habit. You need to stop putting things off and just plan better and get them done.”

I attempted to reply and give my reasoning, as if it really would make a difference. “Mom, I just have so many things to do now, and I...”

Mom stopped me with a wave of her hand, as she knew that was the magic sign to catch my attention. “Marcos, if you did as much today, as you plan to do tomorrow you would accomplish a lot,” she stated.

I stared at her. I wanted to speak, but I knew there was a lesson in the message. Mom could always catch my attention when she truly had a message.

“Marcos, I know you only think its small things and that it is no big deal for you to put things off. It is not about what needs to be done mijo, it’s about the bad habit of putting things off. What happens next is you will put off important things, and they therefore become less important. Soon you become less productive. Less productive people do not succeed in life like productive people. I want you to be productive and successful. So whatever you have planned you have to plan your chores in with your other items that you want or need to do. You will be amazed at how much you can get done. Understand?” she asked.

I shook my head yes, and I went to the garage, started the lawn mower and mowed the yard. Funny because mowing the yard probably took all of 20-minues time. I washed up, changed my shirt, and went and met my friends. Another funny thing is that my friends said nothing about me being a little late. It wasn’t as if there was something that I was going to miss by missing 20 minutes. I attempted each day to plan better. Many times I simply told my friends that I would arrive a little later. As I accomplished my chores during the week I had my weekends free. Sometimes Dad would ask me for help on the weekend, which I always made time for. But I could see that even he saw the change in me and he appreciated that I showed responsibility and accomplished my tasks in a timely manner.

I knew there would be other times my mother would remind me that, if I did as much today as I plan to do tomorrow, I would accomplish a lot. Mom would recognize bad habits and coach me through them.

That is what strong leaders do. But they also teach how to form the good habits to replace the bad habits. Forming good habits will then make you more effective. The good habit of planning and accomplishing as much today instead of putting it off tomorrow has made me more productive. Habits are formed both good and bad by effort. Leaders understand that they can play a role in building good habits and coaching those they lead away from the bad habits.

In business and as a leader it is important to recognize bad habits. This is why a roadmap to success is important to provide as well as for us to explain why the roadmap is successful. Today I witness too many leaders just saying, “Do it this way,” with no education on why that way is successful. In addition, a leader must recognize bad habits that will make someone less effective and confront the situation. Because a leader's mandate and creed is to build other leaders, then that leader owes it to those they are leading to be open with the situation, address the concern, coach on why it will be detrimental to success, and build the better habit for success. It is the passion of a leader to want others to lead, drive success, and pay it forward. That is what keeps leadership alive. Leaders are built one leader at a time, one habit and one lesson at a time.

D) IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

As a teenager, most your focus is on the moment at hand. I believe it is natural around the teen years to be a little self-centered. Waking up each day I am certain that my thoughts were about what I had planned, who I was going to see, or what I was going to do. I know I did not wake up worrying about others. After all, I was not even aware of others to worry about. So I would wake up and make my way through the day and made decisions based upon how it would affect me. This seemed pretty reasonable, and probably still not uncommon among teens.

Morning would come, I would wake up and get ready for school. I would give a ride to many friends that lived on our street. I had a normal

routine and a specific time that I wanted to leave. Most of the time that worked well, but naturally sometimes a friend would run late. My rule was simple, be there on time or find another way. I would simply leave and not worry about if or how they made it to school. Later that day I may see them at school, and if they expressed frustration I simply replied that they needed to be on time. The conversation was pretty one sided.

It was during this time that I met a kid in P.E., which was my daily physical education class. We were playing basketball and we were on the same team. We played well together and our team won. I introduced myself, and he said his name was John. He was a nice young man, as that would be how my mother would describe him. The next day, John and I made sure we were on the same team again. We once again played off each other well, and won the game. We became common teammates and we won many games.

John would approach me during breaks between classes, or lunch, and we would have brief conversations, but mostly while passing. I think I always seemed busy. But we would sync up in P.E. again, and we would excel as the Mark and John team. It became pretty routine and I enjoyed playing on the same team as John. Each day, I would expect the same routine. At times, John would encourage me to go out for the school basketball team, as John had made the team and he believed my skills were equal to his. My ego probably thought my skills were better, but anyway I just did not have time for the school team. I believed John really just wanted to be my friend, and I am not saying that I was unfriendly, I just never took the extra time to build a friendship.

It was just a week or so that John did not come to school. Because I was not too close to John, I was unaware of any circumstance. Then I heard the news. John passed away suddenly. Apparently he had a brain hemorrhage and died. As stated, I was unaware of what may have happened that caused this, and I never heard the details. I was just surprised, and yes shaken that someone I knew, someone my age, passed away. It was probably one of my first reality checks of life, that life isn't always fair. I only knew that life was not fair to John and to his family.

I went to John's services with friends and acquaintances. I was touched to hear the stories of John that others had to share. There were stories of John's accomplishments. Stories of how John helped others. Stories of his family, and what John meant to them. I would see other friends and acquaintances from school tell funny stories about fun times they had with John. I remember the feeling of sadness that I had not allowed myself to know John better. In a small way I was angry at myself for always being too busy for John, and I knew we would have been better friends. John is someone my mother would have welcomed into my life.

Later that night I went home in a solemn mood. I sat in the kitchen away from the living room where the others were watching television. I guess I just wanted to be alone. My mother noticed my countenance, which she knew was not my norm. She knew I went somewhere that evening, but really did not know the story or that an acquaintance had passed. She came to the kitchen, because her son was more important than a television show. She sat down and asked, "What's wrong mijo, you seem so quiet?"

I really had no response. In some ways I did not know what was wrong. I just knew something was not right. Something just was not right with the world at that moment, and it caught my attention.

"Marcos, is something bothering you? I can tell when you are acting this way that something is wrong. What is it? Where did you go tonight?" she asked.

"I went to a service, Mom. A service for someone that died that I went to school with," I explained.

"Who mijo? That is terrible! Was he a close friend? What happened?" she questioned.

"He was someone I knew, Mom, but not too well. We played basketball together," I replied.

"His poor parents. Are they okay? Do they need anything?" she asked. My mother was always thoughtful of others. She was the epitome of unselfishness. I loved this trait of my mother.

I sat quiet for a moment, and then I explained to my mother what was really bothering me. I told her the story on how John seemed to want to build a friendship and on how I was just too busy for him. I talked about the service and how others spoke about him. I then spoke of my shame that I did not get to know him better. I truly wished I could have the opportunity over, to become better friends with John. I am sure I would have treasured that friendship today. To have had the moments to have known him in friendship.

Mom was great. Mothers have such a loving touch of grace, when they see their children saddened. Mom also recognized a teaching moment. She recognized that I was already teaching myself as I realized I missed an opportunity and took life for granted. She also realized I humbled myself some, which is what she would also try to teach me.

“Marcos, I know you are sad, and that sadness is for several reasons. One, you are sad that John passed, I know that. But two, you are sad that you did not get the opportunity to know John better. Mijo, it is easy to take life for granted, especially when you are young.” She held my head against her body. Such a loving moment. She then gave the lesson. “Mijo, perhaps you need to learn an important lesson. It is not about you,” she stated.

I was confused. Was she saying the lesson was not about me? So I asked her, “What do you mean about that, it is not about me?”

“What I mean is this, you need to quit being so self-centered about yourself and look at life from a new perspective. Look at life with the perspective that life is not about you, it is about the others in your life. It is about your family, your friends, and who else God puts in your way. If you learn life from this perspective and focus on others your life will become more enriched by the others doing the same for you. When you help others, befriend others, teach others, you will learn more in life and grow faster in whatever you’re doing than when you focus on just yourself,” she stated so eloquently.

I still sat quiet, but I heard every word of her message. The next day when leaving for school, one of the individuals that would normally ride

with us was not there. When I drove away, I went a different direction and the others in the car noticed and questioned what I was doing.

“I thought we would go drive by Skippers house to see if he is just running late,” I said.

They said nothing. They were just surprised. Then as we pulled up to Skippers house I honked and he came out surprised as well as he knew he was late and was already looking at another way to get to school. Skipper jumped in the car and we drove to school. Nothing else needed to be said, because it was not about me.

This lesson was not only a lesson for life, but also for business and leading others. This is where, as a leader, when I focused on others success mine came naturally, mine blossomed. From focusing on others my life has become more fulfilling as others grew into leaders and then mentored others. As we define future leaders we owe it to them to teach them this lesson early in their development. As we mentor them they will see by our example how we spend our energy on them and on others. We then celebrate their success and give them the credit. Why, because it is not about you.

E) YOU CANNOT CONVINCe THE CONVINCED

This statement may sound confusing. You cannot convince the convinced? What does that mean?

So there I was, frustrated about a situation where I was trying to give close friends of mine advice and even warnings of a situation about their possible decision and their opinion could not be swayed. I even pointed out past examples of what they were planning and that others had attempted similar plans before and what the results and consequences of those past attempts had been. My friends liked to take trips to remote places in the mountains or the desert, but they would sometimes go ill prepared and even worse, they would lack to inform others where they were going and what they were doing. I had expressed many times the possible dangers in this type of thinking, but they actually thought that

added to the adventure. Somehow being foolish and risky was the cool part of their plans, and safety was least in their belief system. So I was listening in on the different ideas of what they were planning with the discussion about the mountainous area and about what supplies they needed. I spoke up with some questions and some cautions.

“Are you sure that you are taking enough supplies?” I asked.

“That will be all we need for the three days,” my friend responded.

“Yeah, but why not take a little more, just to be safe? What if something happens? If nothing happens you will just have extra,” I stated in a rational tone of voice.

“Relax,” another friend said while laughing. “You are such a worry wart. You are not going anyway so why do you care?”

“I am just giving you my opinion, as I believe it is better to be safe than sorry,” I replied.

Laughter erupted amongst my friends. They thought my worry or my response was funny. Maybe they thought I was less cool because I expressed a concern. I am not sure what their mindset was. I was just expressing legitimate questions and concerns to their planning, or what I considered a lack of planning. At this moment I excused myself and walked away. I do remember that my question came from what I had learned from others who did similar trips, but they would take extra supplies in case unknown circumstances would arise. They would let family and friends know where they were going, their path and expected timeline. All this seemed very reasonable for the rare occurrence that something should happen so that others would have an indication on where to start looking, etc.

It is important to realize, this is not to say we should not attempt what others may have tried and failed at. Technology and discoveries would not have advanced if others had not had the courage to do so. But those that overcame where others have failed understood that there was a lesson in the previous failures. Learning from that lesson was an important part of their planning, caution, and vision. They would

understand what the future warning signs might be and include that in their planning.

So there I was frustrated, and my mother saw this. I walked her through my frustration and the situation with my friends. She saw that I was more upset that they would not give me the benefit of their time and listen to my concerns. I had thought that through our association, friendship, and honest regard for their well-being, that they would at least give me that benefit. They did not.

My mother paused, looked at me and said, “Mijo, you cannot convince the convinced.” She explained that in life I will encounter situations where people may not give the benefit of at least listening, or they may not even want to hear what I had to say. Sometimes people get enamored with the idea instead of the plan. She said all I could do is give my effort by at least offering up my opinion and concerns.

My mother also stated that lessons will also teach me that my opinion may be vastly different, and although I may believe my opinion to be correct, the other opinions and ideas may still succeed. Just because it is my opinion does not mean that it is correct. In both experiences I need to be humble enough to learn. The fact that I gave my effort is all I could do. Obviously my opinion in these matters was more out of concern as I did not want my friends to encounter hardships or harm.

The important part of the lesson from my mother that she wanted to make me understand and learn from was for me to understand the reason that I was frustrated. I was frustrated that I tried to give my opinion and that I believed that I gave good examples and made a good argument with facts and data. My frustration, however, was that I believed my friends did not at least take a moment and listen to the information that might have assisted them as they decided to move forward.

She made me understand that I was more frustrated because I believed that I was not listened to, or that my data or facts were not considered. I believed I had a good argument and that my friends decided to move forward anyway. She counseled me that we can sometimes can only be advisors or influencers and none of us truly wants to say, “I told you so.”

The biggest lesson I learned, and that we need to learn as leaders, is to not let the frustration irritate us to the point that it continues to affect us. Other great leaders teach that sometimes people have their minds made up and all we can do is to offer our advice. Sometimes others need to learn from making their decisions and working through the results. I value this lesson from my mother. Yes, Mom, I know, you cannot convince the convinced. But as you taught me, at least I gave my opinion and concerns. I hope we all learn.

It was not long after that I would see this play out in business. On many occasions I would give an opinion on decisions or direction that my organization was planning to execute, and my opinions played no role in the decision. Sometimes the other direction succeeded, as my mother stated that just because I have an opinion does not make it the right one, or the only right one, or that other choices might still have success. The key was just making sure that you give your counsel and do not let the final decision frustrate you, or that other mindsets were not changed frustrate you. You cannot convince the convinced.

As leaders we must teach how to offer our opinion and advice professionally. How to make your arguments and responses to other opinions, and be satisfied that you are at least heard. The next phase is to work to execute the direction chosen, wholeheartedly. Furthermore if the direction chosen stumbles, be a team player and work to correct the direction for the good of the organization. If at some point the direction crosses your core set of values, then at that point you may reassess if you are with the right organization. I have a good friend who was once my manager and leader, and I know that this leader will not sacrifice on ethics. If ethics are ever in question, this leader will not hesitate to bring the issue forward, and this leader will decide the organization is not for him if he realizes the organization chooses to sacrifice on ethics. To him the choice is simple and I admire that about him.

As leaders we mentor our future leaders through the exact same core value system. Choose your values and principles, and question if you ever see them sacrificed. Offer your opinions, advice and feedback, and

be committed to the decisions made moving forward. Then understand, that you cannot convince the convinced.

On a final note, those friends back in High School went on a trip and their car broke down on a deserted road. They had slim supplies, a lack of money and no one knew where they were to track them down. After some worry, family and friends finally heard they were okay as they managed to hike their way to a ranger station where they were able to contact family. They admitted they felt foolish and had learned a valuable lesson. I was happy to hear that they were safe, and I never said “I told you so.” They actually became great planners and safety conscious from that moment forward and one of them works for the forestry service today. Perhaps it was a lesson they had to learn on their own as I now know that you cannot convince the convinced.

F) GIVE A BLESSING, GET A BLESSING

Mom was a woman of faith. She believed in the biblical teachings. I believe she chose simple things in life and trusted blessings would come her way. I believe she had a blessed life. She loved all of us so very much and I know each of us never questioned her unconditional love. She literally sacrificed her whole life for us as some might see it, but to her it was a gift she wanted to give. It has taken me my whole life to realize and appreciate everything that she was. I truly hope that I did not show at any point I took it for granted. I think maybe we just do not think of it this way as we are growing up. We just live in the moment.

Mom wanted us to always be respectful. Certainly respectful to our father and respectful to her. But she taught us to respect each other and people in general. She appreciated when we opened doors for others, and when we gave up the best seats wherever we were at to others. To me, this is biblical teachings and I believed it pleased our mother when she saw us show others respect. After all, what could anyone say badly about ones children when they could witness that they demonstrated respect for others. I believe Mom believed our ultimate respect to her and our father was to show we were respectful to others.

I remember around the holidays that in school we would decorate the classroom and learn about Thanksgiving, and about the Pilgrims and about Plymouth Rock and the original Thanksgiving Meal. We dressed like pilgrims and Indians and acted out school plays about the giving and sharing of two new societies meeting and deciding they could live together. Around Christmas we would celebrate in school and even exchange gifts. Things have certainly changed in our society since those times. I remember the feeling of excitement just to see what I was going to get.

It was in my teen years that I started to change in how I felt around the holidays. I am not sure of the exact instance, but I had a good friend who lived on the same street that focused on giving and doing for others. At first I wasn't sure what he was doing or why, but I did start to help him when I had spare time. To me, it first appeared that what he was doing was being mandated by his parents and maybe by tradition. But he showed he enjoyed it, even looked forward to it. His joy was infectious and I looked forward to when we did things around the holidays that gave or helped others.

Mom saw this and it caught her interest and it obviously pleased her. Mom always taught us to have concern for others and when she realized that I was assisting my friend to help others she did that natural thing any good leader would do and she taught me a lesson that was important to her. She asked, "Mijo, are you helping Skipper today?"

"Yes, Mom, we are doing a car wash to raise money," I said with excitement.

"That is good mijo, I am so proud of you," she said.

"Thanks, Mom, can I take some of the buckets from the garage?" I asked.

"Sure, just remember to bring them back," she replied. She then called me over to her and she hugged me.

Great leaders enjoy, and they jump at the chance, when they catch one of their individuals they are leading doing something right. Years later I would actually read that advice in a management book, but it

is a natural growing process that if someone is doing something right, acknowledge it, reward it, and they will grow from that moment. Mom's hug was the reward. The fact that she said she was proud of me was extra, but was awesome as well. But Mom took the lesson a step farther. She lifted my head with her hand when hugging me and said, "Mijo, by giving a blessing you will receive a blessing. This is God's way. He rewards those that give openly and cheerfully."

I don't believe I said anything. Maybe I seemed non responsive, but Mom wanted me to understand this important lesson. "Mijo, listen. This is important to me. I want you to understand what I am explaining. I truly believe that if we bless others, God will bless us. It warms my heart that you are helping your friend do for others. Good things will come from that."

"Thanks, Mom," I said. "I certainly hope so."

She pinched my left arm, as Mom would do to get my attention. "Mijo, don't hope, don't worry, and don't do things because you want something in return. Do things because you are capable and available to be there for others. Let the joy of helping others be your reward. Then when God blesses you with more, tell the Lord thanks. Those you have helped will be grateful and in time they will have the same opportunity to help others, you'll see."

Her lesson made sense. I certainly saw people treat me differently at the time. By helping others I could see others treat me with respect that I am not sure I saw before. Up and until this very day I enjoy a smile when I open the door for someone or let someone go ahead of me in the grocery line, and those are just little things. I wrote earlier about some good friends whose two boys we send gifts to and encourage their dreams. As Mom taught me, my reward is the joy that it brings to my heart and that joy excites me. But the bigger lesson I have seen over the years is I have seen blessings come my way. Some may call this karma, while others may label it coincidence. To me it is the very principle of give a blessing, get a blessing.

I believe the core of leadership and leaders is the give a blessing and get a blessing. Leaders look to give, without the expectation of

receiving a blessing but leaders also look to give because their very nature understands that the giving of themselves by leading, teaching and mentoring others is what develops individuals. Just as individuals may have an innate hunger to be led, a leader has an innate hunger to teach and develop future leaders. The blessing leaders receive is individuals that grow, develop and become successful that then lead others who continue the process. I enjoy teaching leadership and seeing others succeed. That truly is receiving my blessing.

G) YOUR EGO IS NOT YOUR AMIGO

Funny, but we all have a desire to want to look good, get recognition and do well. That is a healthy attitude in life. But we all need to recognize the balance of wanting all the credit to giving all the credit. In leadership, great leaders like to see the success of others, especially those that they took an initiative and interest in seeing them develop. This is what I call a good sense of pride of witnessing how those you mentored are leaders themselves. This gives great leaders their sense of purpose. One of the most important things I learned as developing as a leader, is your ego is not your amigo. In fact, the best leaders check their ego at the door.

I remember back in Jr. High and High School how I enjoyed playing sports almost every day. We would play after school many times on the field just over my backyard fence as there was an elementary school located there. I remember I was always competitive and like any young man or boy I always wanted to win. If I did not win I would work on my skills some more and go out next time and try to win. Winning felt good and at that age, being a winner gave one an ego. I had an ego.

I remember in Jr. High and my High School years that I loved playing tackle football with my friends. When we would play I would always choose myself to be quarterback. We would play and my quarterback skills were okay as I had a strong arm that was accurate and the ball would come out with a spiral. I can still remember many games and special moments of throwing a deep pass that the receiver caught in

stride that seemed perfectly placed over his shoulder. How I loved and how I lived for those moments. It is those moments and winning enough times that keep you playing.

As I grew into my High School years we would still play after school and in P.E. class we would play flag football and I would still choose myself as the quarterback. However, something changed between the Jr. High School years and High School years that had an effect on me. That change was the size of the football as High School footballs were the same size as utilized in college so they were bigger. The bigger balls made it a little more difficult to throw as it seems all of my brothers and I had hands like our Mom had, which were smaller, and even though mine are the largest of the boys it presented this challenge.

So I remember one game after school we were playing and I was quarterbacking and one of my friends asked, “Why do you always get to be quarterback?”

I answered swiftly and decisively of course, “because!” I am sure that settled the matter and it seemed to as we went back to playing. Ironically, and as fate would have it, the next play that player ran down the middle of the field and I hit him in stride right over his shoulder that he then ran for a touchdown. Argument is over. That is why I get to be quarterback. However, as fate would have it, the next time we had the ball another player was wide open and I reared back to throw the ball and I lost my grip and out of my hands came a wobbly duck, way off target. It was a sad moment. Funny but no one shouted back. I heard that player say something like, “dang it” but we went right on playing.

Later at home my routine would be to drink something cold and make me some food. I was sitting at the kitchen table when my mother walked in and she asked, “How was your football game?” Mom just always wanted to show that she took an interest in what we were doing. That was her leadership love.

“Okay I guess. We won,” I responded.

“That’s good mijo. Just be careful and don’t get hurt,” she stated. She then mentioned how she saw some of the game when she was

upstairs and caught a glimpse of us playing through a bedroom window. She mentioned that she saw the ill-fated pass and thought I had hurt my arm or something.

“No, I did not hurt my arm. I just lost my grip on the football. Why do we have to have the Torres hand?” I asked. You see, my mother’s maiden name was Torres and we always blamed the trait of smaller hands on that side of the family.

“Mijo, your ego is not your amigo,” Mom stated. She had a way of saying quotes or statements out of the blue, but they were revealing. I sat quietly. Mom then explained that because sometimes I would lose my grip that I should let other players play quarterback and I certainly had the skills to play other positions. She said my ego was getting in the way and that I needed to recognize my strengths and weaknesses and when I would learn this I would learn to play to my strengths.

The next time we played I allowed someone else to be quarterback and I played receiver. Funny, but I was a very good receiver as I had strong fundamentals of catching the ball and pulling it into my body quickly, so I made good catches. We played and we won the game and I contributed with my play as receiver.

Over time I did learn to throw the larger footballs through an unconventional style by gripping the opposite side of the laces. I worked on gaining that grip quickly and threw the ball accurately. Years later in my mid-twenties and while in the shoe business we would challenge other shoe stores to a tackle football game. When we played I would play quarterback and I remember during one game I was throwing well and we were winning. Then of course one play comes along where one of our players are wide open and I release the football and out comes a duck. Wobble, wobble and the balls goes nowhere. What I remember most is my reaction, I just burst out in laughter. By learning that my ego was not my amigo I even learned to laugh at myself. That is probably the best part of the lesson.

Since that time I have had the benefit of having strong mentors in my life starting from my parents, to teachers, pastors, and those I have

had in business. One such mentor also taught me to recognize your strengths and be honest about your weaknesses. He believed that there are ways to work to develop areas that are considered your weaknesses. In addition there is also value in determining if the effort in trying to change that weakness outweighs what can be achieved by spending that effort in maximizing your strength. This is truly something to measure and discern.

Anyway, this mentor openly and honestly stated that why he hired me to run the business is because he knew that he lacked the people skills to do it effectively and that I had that ability. I found this interesting because he openly admitted a weakness in his abilities. But in addition, he not only admitted the weakness he decided it was not worth the effort for him to try to develop around this area or that he would struggle to develop in this area. He recognized that a smarter decision was to focus on his strength and find a better solution to work around his weakness. Watching this in action and how it played out was a valuable lesson.

This person, one of my valuable mentors in life and business, also taught me and expanded on the lesson that your ego is not your amigo. What this truly meant was just to be honest with yourself and others about strengths, weaknesses, and the balance needed for both. Our partnership in my employment with him was a tremendous success. This person, my mentor, was a great business planner and he was greatly thought of as a leader as well. He recognized that to be most effective in our business that he needed another leader to compliment his areas of weakness so therefore all areas needed for success would be covered. This was a great lesson for me to be a part of.

As I have moved forward to be associated with other teams, I have witnessed where other great leaders have not allowed their ego to get in the way. However, we all have probably even witnessed the opposite in leaders where they struggled with recognizing a weakness and it affected others. I believe the best climate is one that builds a culture where it is not about ego but about execution. That is truly a culture that is exciting to be a part of. One of the best comments I have ever heard from a

leader is when that leader stated, “If I am in the way, you need to let me know. I do not want to be that guy.” That is a leader that is secure in his own skin. That leader knows that his ego is not his amigo.

H) LEAD, FOLLOW, OR GET OUT OF THE WAY

In my High School years I worked in the fast food industry. In my day that was the type of work available for our age group and I had a knack to do the work well. In fact, even as a teenager I excelled in this work environment and took on beginning management roles like being a shift supervisor. I quickly grasped the responsibilities but also had an eye for recommending improvements in processes and operational efficiencies. This caught the eye of upper management and allowed me to grow, learn and develop. What it taught me the most was that I had good opinions that mattered, even as a teenager.

It was about this time that I was with my second employer which was a fish and chip fast food restaurant in California. Once again I excelled and became a Shift Supervisor, of which I enjoyed the responsibility. The business was new to the California area and we were the second store to open and we seemed to be catching on. With the potential growth of more stores I saw an opportunity to at least work hard, learn, and possibly grow with the business. So I made sure that I shared my ideas, took initiative and let ownership and management know that I had an interest in growing and advancing. They seemed to appreciate me and I was treated like a valued employee.

As time went by there were others who also were Shift Supervisors who wanted to advance. One Shift Supervisor was promoted to Assistant Manager and was a couple of years older so they were grooming this person to be a manager. This was a person who worked hard and had good character. They did, however, when promoted seem to struggle with self-confidence or what one might call an inferiority complex. At times this person might lash out when challenged or another opinion was given and it was starting to effect the environment of the workplace.

Prior to their promotion the environment allowed us to share ideas and opinions, debate between them, and decide what was best for the business. This person was part of that prior process but they seemed to have changed and they became protective of their own ideas and own ways. In many ways this can be a growing stage of management that their manager should be observing and coaching them through this stage. Many first time managers will find themselves in what is called a firefighting stage. It is a stage they will have to develop through. Great leaders will recognize young managers in this stage and coach them through it. The manager above this Assistant Manager was busy assisting opening up a new location so this situation was lingering longer than it normally should.

It was important to me to still support this Assistant Manager and help them grow in any way possible. I would encourage the others to be respectful and assured them that it was just a transition phase. I believe that I would even attempt to be the go between in an effort to ease any tension and I would also try to offer advice or insight to the Assistant Manager. Soon it became apparent that the situation was not improving. The Assistant Manager was making the situation unpleasant and was managing in a way that stifled innovation, initiative, and a fun environment. Members of the team spoke about just quitting and finding another job. I could see how this even effected the quality of our work and our product. This is an important aspect of leadership, to understand the environment this can create and how it then effects how the team will produce in efficiency, productivity and quality.

Soon I noticed I was becoming apprehensive in speaking up, voicing opinions, and even leading as I should. I would hesitate to correct and coach when I encountered these situations because at times I did the Assistant Manager would intercede and contradict my coaching, even though my coaching was in line with restaurant policy. I soon began contemplating leaving and finding work elsewhere. I do believe it is important that if you are not in a job that you enjoy and you do not look forward to going to work, then this should be an honest consideration.

However, we had an all employee meeting scheduled in a week and I was wondering if I should attend in the hopes that maybe an announcement of new changes might be discussed, or I contemplated if I should voice these concerns at that meeting.

One day I was sitting in the kitchen at home looking at the want ads in the newspaper. My mother came into the kitchen and she noticed that I was looking at the employment section.

“Mijo, did you leave your place of employment?” she asked.

“No, Mom, but I am thinking about it,” I replied.

“Did something change there? I thought you liked that job?” she queried.

“I did, but with the recent changes it is just no fun anymore,” I answered.

“Is there nothing you can do that can impact the changes and improve the situation?” she asked.

“I have tried, but I get shut down. Our new Assistant Manager is just shutting everyone down. I am not the only one looking at leaving,” I responded.

At that moment my mother sat down at the table with me. We spoke about the subject more. She was always easy to talk to and willing to listen. I explained that when the new Assistant Manager was a Shift Supervisor equal to me that they were a good team player, but that the new role has changed them. She asked about the coaching the Assistant Manager was receiving from their manager and I explained that there was very little because that manager was assisting another store opening. I explained I did not want the Assistant Manager to fail and I actually believed they could be a good manager because they showed the qualities to earn the promotion. I even explained that I tried a one on one conversation with this person to express the concerns and I was shut down by the person and this is when things appeared to get gradually worse from that point. I then told my mother about the upcoming all employee meeting and my thoughts of voicing concerns at the meeting. This is where she gave me her advice.

“Mijo, I believe you tried handling this situation in the right way. In all things be professional even if others are not. If you are professional they can never say you were unprofessional or say anything about your character. But I do believe that it is important that you voice your concerns to your employer. I believe that you owe that to them and to your Assistant Manager who can still succeed if corrected. If after you voice your concerns and things do not change, then you can leave with a clear conscious,” she stated with wisdom.

I listened, and may have seemed a little quiet. Then I spoke, “I am not sure, Mom. I...”

“Marcos, you need to lead, follow, or get out of the way. You are allowing yourself to do none of these. I would rather see you lead and speak up. If you decide to follow, then it’s time to shut up. But I rather see you choose to follow when it is a leader you desire to follow that teaches and mentors you so you develop more. In this situation, after you attempt to show leadership and speak up and you do not witness the changes needed for improvement then get out of the way and find another place to work. I agree that if you stay you are just in the way because you will find yourself in discontent,” she stated.

Wow! My Mom had passion. I believe she passed that passion on to me. I am sure my brothers and sisters share my mother’s passion in the lessons that she passed on to them. Her advice was what we call spot on, which means it is accurate. I need to lead, follow or get out of the way. In a few days our all employee meeting was held. When it was time to speak up and voice concerns I was prepared and spoke up professionally and with examples. For a moment it seemed it might escalate and become a combative conversation, but I did not respond combatively. I expressed that my concern was as much for my Assistant Managers success as the restaurant and employees as well. Soon others added their feedback and it went into a meaningful conversation. The main manager witnessed that we cared for the organization and for our Assistant Managers success. He acknowledged that what was expressed was duly noted and that he would create a plan around it.

As the next few weeks went by the environment improved and the place became that fun workplace to work in again. The Assistant Manager was provided some leadership training and coaching and really started to show their trust in others. This allowed the Assistant Manager to build a strong team that rallied around them and the restaurant flourished. That Assistant Manager was promoted to manage a new location and we were all excited for them and in a way sorry that we would see them go. That Assistant Manager thanked me for being a team leader and for the moment that I spoke up. Humility as a leader is truly a strength and not a weakness. This Assistant Manager developed into a leader. Mother's advice was great advice as I realized that not only does lead, follow or get out of the way impact our own growth but can also impact others growth as well.

As the years went by, Mom reminded me a few times of Lead, Follow or Get Out of the Way. Great leaders repeat themselves constantly because they know that the message is important. Human nature also teaches us that important lessons teach us their importance and then allows us to teach and coach others. As leaders we must mentor future leaders that they need to define when to lead, follow or get out of the way. We want individuals to demonstrate leadership. This can be in their actions, innovation and feedback they provide. When you choose to follow then ensure that it is for the right reasons that match your values and principles. Following and being mentored by an awesome leader is a solid example. But it is important to understand when to get out of the way. If you are impeding progress, or find yourself discontent of the direction then do a self-evaluation as it may be time to get out of the way.

Lead, follow or get out of the way. Sounds so simple, but is it? I have personally been challenged in this area at times and have witnessed others in their challenge as well. The boundaries come when your values are stretched within the environment and if they are outside your values system you then become part of it. However, after all, we all need employment and the security of a paycheck. The decision comes when

you determine what area you find yourself in. This is why lead, follow or get out of the way is so tied in with values are what you live by and principles are what you stand on. If you find yourself not standing on your principles then it is time to get out of the way.

Leadership Lessons From Mom

CAPTURED MEMORIES & LOVING PICTURES OF MOM

“The Best Leadership Coach Who Chose
To Be A Housewife”



