

Introduction

In the winter of 2002, a dear friend of mine, Ed Flaherty, whom I have known since our early days in the Young Presidents Organization (YPO), told me a story. It was, in its barest essence, the story you are about to read.

He didn't tell it well. He was energized enough to relate the gist of it, but far too private to initially relate the full range and depth of the story's most interesting – indeed, incredible – turns and circles. Because Ed was, and still is, such a large part of the story, I know that his genuine modesty worked as a hindrance, rather than a help, in its earliest recounting. In fact, if there is any real omission in the finished story, it is a lack of seeing the complete nature and results of Ed's personal leadership, both then and now. He excels in leading by example, and consequently, in the best sense, he is supremely ill-equipped to tell of its effects and his role in a team's or business' achievement.

Fortunately, the story itself demanded its own telling, and I simply kept asking the questions that it literally forced me to ask. As Ed uncovered more and more of the story, I was amazed.

When he finished, there was only one remaining question to ask: “Ed, of course you already know what you must do, don't you?” He nodded, paused, and said, “But I am not a good enough writer to trust myself with this—I need to find someone who is.”

I happened to know Jack Uldrich. He is one of the most interesting people I've met, and if you've read the front piece that lists his other works, you can understand the spanning breadth of his interests and abilities. Naval officer, independent political candidate and leader, and a writer accomplished in fiction and the author of a best-selling business book, Jack is a man who combines acute observation with action.

I suggested that my two friends meet, and it has given me deep satisfaction and enormous pleasure to see the mixture of these two men—whose partnership was formed on a handshake—create such a compelling work. It has been years in the making. From cross-continent travel to do more in-depth interviews and research, to painstaking writing and rewriting without ever succumbing to embellishment, they have had to work hard to keep the written story manageable and digestible.

This is the story of a high school football team. There seems to be no shortage of them these days. But there is not one like this one. The Great Falls Central Mustangs were part of a small Catholic school that was, you will see, hugely successful in every way anyone would wish a school to be. At the same time, the team's 1962 season was surrounded by an international setting that was, by any accounts, uncertain, if not frightening. But mainly the team was deeply influenced by people. Some they knew. Others, who had set many strains in motion earlier, they did not.

This is the story of young men—and not so young. It is a story of dreams, and goals, and expectations. It is a story of fears and failures and successes and surprises, and it is the story of lives won and of lives lost. But running beneath it all is a current of human achievement: Of how to learn it, and of to earn it; of how to teach it—and pass it on. Seen in that light, the story of the Mustangs is but a moment arrested. For it began long before the season of 1962, and it continues on...even now.

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