

"Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working."

»Picasso

Pizza, Paint, and Pro Bowls



I recently watched the video of JJ Watt's commencement speech to his alma mater, the University of Wisconsin.

I like and admire JJ Watt. If you live in Houston, it is actually a requirement.

(You can look it up.)

He was a local boy who dreamed of playing at Wisconsin. Being only a 2-star recruit in high school, however, the Badgers didn't recruit him.

He instead played tight end for Central Michigan for a year before walking-on (without scholarship) to Wisconsin.

The story of how he delivered pizzas to help pay his tuition during this period is legendary and known by that audience.

Watt also shared something he hadn't told a group before.

He pointed to a section in the stadium and joked to the folks sitting there not to mess

A Searing Oversight



A recent column by Geoff Colvin and Phil Wahba for Fortune.com had me waxing nostalgic just a bit.

Their piece, "Sears' Seven Decades of Self-Destruction", chronicles the slow motion fall of the once-largest retailer in the world.

Sears was a truly iconic American brand. The Sears Wish Book Catalog was prior generations' Amazon around the Christmas holidays.

That may be underselling it.

In 1969, Sears' sales were 1% of the US economy.

Two-thirds of Americans shopped there at least quarterly and half of US households had a Sears credit card.

Sears (now in bankruptcy) is on the growing list of names I mention when speaking of once-great companies that either are no longer with us, or are shells of what they once were.

up the railings... because he had painted them.

In his redshirt year, he also earned money by working on the maintenance crew.

I loved that a wealthy and famous commencement speaker could point to a maintenance job he personally performed in the facility in which he was speaking.

Watt then pointed to another section of the stadium and counted five windows from the left.

That, he said, was Charlie Partridge's office.

He shared that every evening during training camp at around 10 PM... after Coach Partridge had finished working with the starters... and attending coaches meetings... and after everyone else had gone home... he would take the time to review JJ's scout team footage with him.

Partridge showed him how to use his hands, how to position his feet, what to look for in opposing offenses, etc.

To this day, the now 3-time NFL Defensive Player of the year credits Charlie Partridge for teaching him how to play defensive line.

Partridge personally invested hours in a young man his institution had said, "No" to a year earlier.

But, this young man refused to give up.

Watt's refusal to give up on his dream and willingness to outwork everyone around him in order to achieve it is motivating.

Like many successful companies that eventually fail, Sears was victim to a certain level of management hubris.

Its leaders did not regard startups like Walmart, Kmart, or Target as serious competition. As ridiculous as that seems today, from the mountaintop Sears was sitting, they felt untouchable.

One particular mistake cited in the article really struck a nerve.

After decades of success, the company was running on "cruise control". Sears had allowed a troubling situation to develop.

Managers at all levels were astonishingly unaware of individual store's profitability.

That type of environment makes it incredibly difficult for folks on the frontline to adapt or improve their operations.

I reflected back to times I've spoken to branch managers and their teams about having a clear understanding of their individual P&L's.

It's exceedingly difficult to make wise business decisions (or understand management's decisions) if you don't understand your results, what goes in to them, and what moves the needles on a P&L.

It's akin to trying to fly a plane without being aware of your altitude, speed, or fuel levels.

If any one of those factors reaches a dangerous status undetected, it may already be too late to save you.

I'd suggest that Coach Partridge's willingness to invest time and energy (that he didn't have to) into someone resolute in bettering himself is equally admirable.

Sometimes we are the person in need of coaching.

Sometimes we are the person able to provide coaching.

Be willing - and worthy - of both.

Regardless of their level of influence, people who stay abreast of and understand the performance numbers in their branches tend to take more ownership of their results.

They behave more like hands-on owners than disengaged order-takers.

Strive to always ensure that everyone on your team knows not only what you do, but how you are doing.

"It isn't what you have or who you are or where you are or what you are doing that makes you happy or unhappy. It is what you think about it."

»Dale Carnegie

Dave Martin, author of [The In-Store Advantage](#), has become one of the most prolific writers in the banking industry. His keynote presentations, seminars, and podcasts have an authenticity and humor that brings teams of all sizes and seniority levels together.

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