



The Ultimate Pay-Cut

Pat was born in 1976 in San Jose, California. To say that he was a little mischievous growing up is like saying Coach Steve Spurrier is a “little confident.” Pat was, from the get-go, a handful; his parents had to keep an eye on him every second. When he was five years old, he climbed onto the porch roof of the family’s 2-story house in a windstorm, somehow got onto a tree trunk, and swayed in the breeze until his mother coaxed him back on the roof. Later he developed a bizarre habit of exploring forests by jumping from tree top to tree top without a rope, sort of a latter-day Tarzan. He also, in his teen years, had a scrape with the law over a fight and spent thirty days in a detention center. But he came from a good gene pool with nurturing parents, his dad an attorney. He was also very bright and a good football player. He received the last scholarship given by Arizona State University and enrolled there in 1994 as a defensive player, even though most thought was too slow and too small.

His coach, thinking an extra year via the red-shirt would help him develop, talked to Pat about this possibility. Pat said, “I have other things to do with my life. You can do whatever you want to, but I’m out of here in 4 years.” He exceeded that, graduating in 3 ½ years, summa cum laude, a 3.8 GPA in marketing. He was also the PAC-10 Defensive Player of the Year.

Pat continued his unusual behavior by meditating on top of light poles in the Sun Devils’ football stadium and doing handstands on rooftops.

In 1998 he was drafted number 226 (way down the list!) by the Arizona Cardinals professional football team. As in college, most thought he was too slow and too small. He started 10 out of 16 games during his rookie season.

Pat became a fixture on the not-too-good professional football team. Whereas most professional athletes sell their services to the highest bidder and jump at the opportunity of making more money on a better team, Pat’s loyalty to the Cardinals caused him to turn down a five-year, \$9 million dollar deal from the world-champion St. Louis Rams. He was an intellectual who studied Emerson and Thoreau, all the while being a fierce competitor. He marched to a totally different drummer but was sincerely respected by all who knew him.

Then 9/11 happened, and it rocked Pat’s world. He felt he needed to contribute, and so he walked out on the glamour and riches of professional football and enlisted in the Army for \$18,000 a year. He became a Ranger and was eventually sent to Afghanistan, where he was killed on April 22, 2004. His story is so compelling, his sacrifices so huge, his courage so beyond comprehension, that I have wanted to write about him for a long time.

Now Pat is back in the news, but for the wrong reasons. The focus now is on whether the Army covered up the details of his being killed by friendly fire rather than by the enemy, which was first reported. There appear to be a whole lot of lessons on failed leadership coming forward, which we might be able to learn from. My greatest learning experience came from my first squadron commander, who was the best leader I have ever known. My second-best learning experience came from my last squadron commander, who was the worst leader I have ever known.

My point in writing this now is that we must not forget Pat Tillman, the hero, as the politicians, military generals, and the media go into a feeding frenzy of news, denials, blame, and grandstanding. I fear that all he stood for, and all that he did, will be lost in the hullabaloo that will follow.

Leadership Challenge

I have said several times that although I have strong feelings about many things, this monthly article won't be used to air my personal feelings about politics, wars, religion, etc.

My challenge to all of us is to not forget the sacrifices being made by some incredible men and women in harm's way. Whether this is the right war at the right time, is for debate elsewhere. If history repeats there will be a "right war" at the right time, a war that we will have to win to preserve our freedom as we cherish it. To know there are Pat Tillmans who are willing to sacrifice, and like him, put themselves in a position to make the ultimate sacrifice, is truly inspiring.



On A Lighter Note

Occasionally things are sent to me which are very interesting and/or motivating. The following is one of the best. Hope you enjoy it.

In 1986, Mkele Mbembe was on holiday in Kenya after graduating from Northwestern University. On a hike through the bush, he came across a young bull elephant standing with one leg raised in the air. The elephant seemed distressed, so Mbembe approached it very carefully. He got down on one knee and inspected the elephant's foot, and found a large piece of wood deeply embedded in it. As carefully and as gently as he could, Mbembe worked the wood out with his hunting knife, after which the elephant gingerly put down its foot. The elephant turned to face the man, and with a rather curious look on its face, stared at him for several tense moments. Mbembe stood frozen, thinking of nothing else but being trampled. Eventually the elephant trumpeted loudly, turned, and walked away.

Mbembe never forgot that elephant or the events of that day.

Twenty years later, Mbembe was walking through the Chicago Zoo with his teen aged son. As they approached the elephant enclosure, one of the creatures turned and walked over to near where Mbembe and his son Tapu were standing. The large bull elephant stared at Mbembe, lifted its front foot off the ground, then put it down. The elephant did that several times then trumpeted loudly, all the while staring at the man. Remembering the encounter in 1986, Mbembe couldn't help wondering if this was the same elephant.

Mbembe summoned up his courage, climbed over the railing and made his way into the enclosure. He walked right up to the elephant and stared back in wonder. The elephant trumpeted again, wrapped its trunk around one of Mbembe's legs and slammed him against the railing, killing him instantly.

Probably wasn't the same elephant.

April Fools! Am real sorry to have tricked you, unless you feel, as I do, that a little laughter along the way is critical to keeping our sanity in a sometimes insane world.

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.