



EWING

Greater than yourself

This is the third in a series of six articles in the new Ewing Professional Development Series. STMA and Ewing have partnered in this series to bring sports turf industry professional development and career issues to the forefront.

By Steve Farber



“I just seem to meet the right teachers at the right time.”

Editor's Note: At the upcoming 20th Annual STMA Conference and Exhibition, STMA members will be treated to lessons in Extreme Leadership from leadership expert Steve Farber.

Farber's new book, "Greater Than Yourself: the Ultimate Lesson of True Leadership," will hit bookshelves early in 2009. Here, he has allowed us to pre-print the Prologue and Chapter 1 of his new book:

The obsession seized me with all the subtlety of a sumo wrestler hopped up on anabolics. I'd been playing guitar for 35 years, and I'd owned a couple of decent ones from time to time, but suddenly I needed—needed—that 1959 Gibson hollow-body electric hanging on the rack at Vintage Brothers Guitars in Carlsbad, CA.

I don't know what it was. I'd seen nicer guitars, to be sure. There was nothing unusual about its sunburst finish, and with only one pickup in the middle position, the ES-330 wasn't considered the most desirable of collectable instruments. But other than a few minor nicks on the headstock, it was in perfect condition, and as I sat in the store's small demo room, playing it hour after hour, I fell deeper and deeper in love. The neck was fast, the tone, sweet, rich and mellow. Yeah, I was in love, man, but not all love and obsession winds up in marriage, so eventually I put it back on the rack, inquired just one more time about the price, and walked out into the salty, San Diego, Pacific Ocean air.

I've played better guitars, I kept telling myself, and I've seen better deals on vintage instruments. But as I walked towards my car, I

couldn't shake it. Then the sumo got me, spun me around and shoved me back down the parking lot from where I'd come. My pace quickened as I approached the shop, and my wallet was out before I even got through the door. I paid the price and grabbed the case, and minutes later, grinning a grin that tested the limits of my cheek-muscles, I tucked that baby into the passenger seat and buckled it in like the prize it was.

I had to have that guitar. Had to.

And now, just a few days later, I know why.

I'm not really sure what to call it when things line themselves up without my slightest knowledge or influence. It's like someone is executing a profoundly interlaced conspiracy to make all the random pieces of my life fit together. What is it? Karma? Kismet? Synchronicity? I don't know, but it happens to me a lot, and more often than not it works out well. I just seem to meet the right teachers at the right time.

I've been blessed (maybe that's the word) with the opportunity to work with some of the world's preeminent thinkers in business leadership, like Tom Peters and Jim Kouzes to name a couple. And in recent years, under extremely odd and seemingly fortuitous circumstances, I've learned directly from some of the masters of Extreme Leadership, like William Maritine and Agnes Golden and Ted Garrison, names that'll be familiar to readers of my previous books.

I've done a pretty good job of conveying the lessons I've learned along the way, and I think that's why I've made a bit of a name for myself in certain circles. Some have even used the words "Steve Farber" and "leadership guru" in

FACILITY & OPERATIONS

the same sentence, which, although gratifying to my ego, makes me squirm like I have a load of wet worms in my socks.

Right teachers. Right time. Odd circumstances.

I was thinking I should print that on my business card, because it was starting to happen all over again.

I was back in my apartment on the bay side of the Mission Beach area of San Diego. The ocean and its frenetic boardwalk were a couple of blocks to the west, but calm, tranquil Mission Bay lay just a few short yards to the east of my building, affording a view through my living room window worthy of tourist's post card.

I had returned from Carlsbad a couple hours earlier, cleared my agenda by taking care of a few time-bound tasks, and was now finally ready to spend some quality time getting intimate with my new companion.

I gingerly placed the tattered, 49 year-old, mottled brown guitar case on the dining room table, flipped open the latches, lifted the top, and let my gaze linger over the sunburst-colored curves of my new six-string babe.

Sitting on a bar stool with the guitar propped in my lap, I twisted the tuning knobs until the sound was just right and fired off a couple of quick blues licks in the key of E. I'd plug it in later; for now I was enjoying the smooth feel of the Brazilian rosewood fingerboard and the muted, rich sound resonating off its un-amplified, maple body. I was just about to settle in for a few hours of serious playing (which sounds like an oxymoron but it's not), when something in the case caught my eye. I set the guitar in a stand and got up to take a closer look.

Farber points out the simple but profound truths of how an ethical leader becomes so; becoming, in effect, a leader who considers others greater than themselves.

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The pink, plush lining on the inside bottom of the case was pulled slightly back at the seam and a small, yellowed piece of paper stuck out from under the fabric. I pinched the corner and pulled on it gently. It slid easily from under the velvet and revealed itself to be a handwritten note.

I felt a voyeuristic jolt similar to what an architect must feel when finding a relic that gives a glimpse into another's life in another time.

"Dear Jessica," the note began. "This guitar is my gift to you. It was made in 1959, 31 years before I taught you your first lesson. What a player you've become in just 5 short years, and now that you're old enough to vote and on your way to school and the distractions of adult life, you'll need this guitar to remind you of your wonderful musical gift. And may it help you to become a better player than I ever hoped to be. I have no doubt you will.

You have brought this old teacher of yours

more joy than you could possibly know and I want you to know that I'm very, very proud of you.

"Your friend and teacher, GZ"

"You've been around, haven't you?" I said to the guitar in the stand.

I read the note one more time and tried to imagine the teacher, the student and the strong bond that had obviously existed between them. It was an unusual thing, that kind of connection. I'd been lucky enough to experience that student-teacher bond in my professional life, and I knew how rare and priceless a thing it could be, so, naturally, I found myself wondering where these people were today and what, if anything, had happened with Jessica's life as a guitarist—or if she even continued playing at all.

The way I figured it, (I had to use a calculator, I admit), this note was written somewhere around 1995, and if Jessica had just been reaching college age, that would put her in her early 30's today.

Had "GZ's" pride been well-placed? Had Jessica grown into the kind of adult he'd hoped she would? And why, if their relationship had been as special as the teacher's note implied, had Jessica eventually gone on to sell this wonderful and sentimental gift? And you'd think if she'd returned even a little of her teacher's affection, she'd at least have kept the note.

I know I would have.

Given my sudden and intense curiosity about all this, I found myself faced with two possible paths: I could either make up imaginary answers to these questions, or I could snoop around to see if I couldn't uncover the real story of Jessica and GZ.

And I bet you can guess which road I traveled by. ■

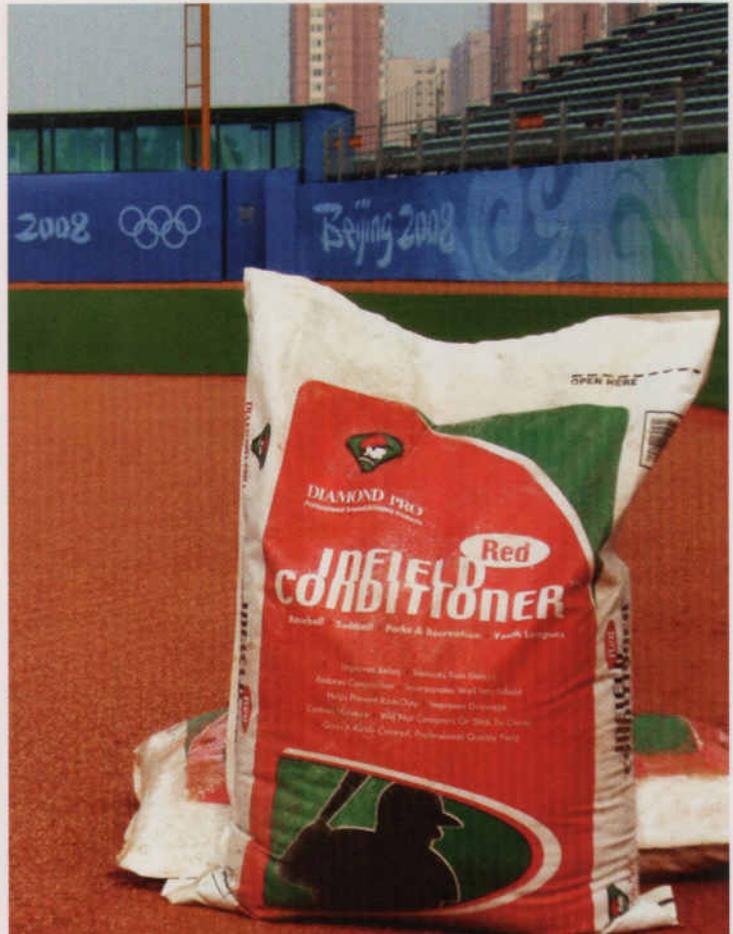
Please see "The Greater Than Yourself Challenge" on page 26

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The "Greater Than Yourself Challenge"

Ethical, effective leadership starts with servant leaders. "Real leadership is not about calling yourself "leader;" rather, it is about taking up the cause to change some piece of the world for the better," says Steve Farber, a leadership speaker who counts Tom Peters among his mentors.

In his latest book, "Greater Than Yourself," Farber uses an entertaining part-truth, part-fable tale about a special 1959 Gibson guitar and "creators of masters" to point out this core truth about ethical, effective leadership: Use your life experience to start raising someone else up. He calls it a "Greater Than Yourself" philosophy. Farber points out the simple but profound truths of how an ethical leader becomes so; becoming, in effect, a leader who considers others greater than themselves:

- Expand yourself • Give yourself
- Replicate yourself

There are resources more vital than money that "greater than yourself" leaders can give:

- Talent • Knowledge • Confidence
- Trust • Time

In order to give yourself to others in a significant way to the progress and expansion of another person, "you have to expand yourself first," Farber writes. "Self-expansion is a perpetual enterprise. And because it is the foundation of whatever you do for others, expanding yourself is the furthest thing from selfishness. You expand yourself in order to give yourself to others." He compares self-development to a storehouse with no walls and no ceiling. "No matter how smart you get, no matter how many times you travel the world, no matter how many great people you think you know, you can always learn more, you can always experience more, and love more." You constantly ask yourself, "will doing X add to your inventory?"

The first element of "expand yourself" is to shift your perspective from isolated to connected, and from alone to interdependent. Most of all, there needs to be a shift from "me" to "us," Farber says.

"A practical idea for a leader who wants to maximize his or her contributions to others", Farber notes, "is to make several lists about themselves, such as ones about "lessons I have learned" and "things I do well."

The task of leadership can become so overwhelming that good intentions fade to obscurity, Farber notes. That is why he suggests building a legacy of service "one brick at a time." This is done by picking one person to make your "greater than yourself" project. "Raise that person; boost him or her above yourself. Start there and see what happens."

Through CEO Cat Cassidy (you have

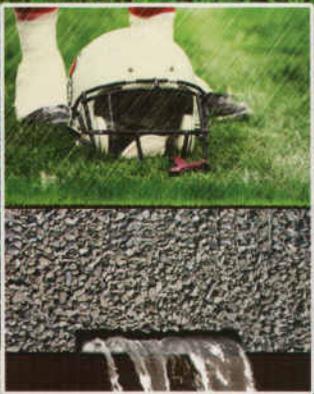
to read the book to find out more about this fascinating character), Farber points out that the corporate benefits of having a "greater than yourself" philosophy woven into daily operations include having dramatically lower turnover and higher efficiencies. This is because employee loyalty is higher, and their better development leads to greater innovations, higher customer satisfaction, and by extension, higher profits.

The summarizing idea of Greater Than Yourself, also spoken by Cassidy, is: "We want our lives to be more than just about ourselves. To "philanthropize" your life means developing radar of sorts. It is about growing your sensitivity to the needs of others and cultivating your desire to promote their welfare, success, and capacity for achievement." ■

For more information on "Greater Than Yourself" and Steve Farber's writings and other books, visit his website <http://www.stevefarber.com/>

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