

10/21/19

**"THE LESS I TALK, THE BETTER WE'RE DOING"**

FYI... the following and any responses are going to part of my Journal and will be edited before I publish to anyone else.... you've been warned!

And this rather long entry is one where I'm so far "into it", I'm no longer sure if it's logical or will make sense to the reader... too much detail? Cloudy thinking? Would appreciate any and all feedback! Here we go...

I guess teaching an old dog new tricks can work... you just need to repeat the lessons more often.

When I first got here in June, one of the things I said to Chapter President Logan was "The more you talk and the less I talk, the better we are doing." Attribute it to age or paranoia, but I had started to forget that rule. Recent events brought that point home once again.

The weekend started as usual... Thursday night party after a quiet week of exams, studying and projects followed by an out of house party on Friday night. So Saturday morning required only a minimal clean up... a good thing since I spent Friday night at the Glee Club concert (which was wonderful btw!).

We really wanted the House to be in good shape for Family Weekend and it was, including cookies a la Jackie. We were coming to the end of the Common Area Contest and the guys had responded very well. That upstairs attention had even carried through to the first floor. So we were relaxed and ready for the relatively few families that were expected.

About 11 am Saturday, one of the guys came and got me... there were 7 Alums downstairs. I was delighted to find Ted Soto, Jack Fuller, Bill Creasey and 4 other Brothers of the Class of '72 in the dining room. I was particularly happy to see Bill... he was the Brother who taught me to dance. Creasey's dancing was legendary, free and exuberant, all elbows, 3 steps and kicks... and that's how I dance to this day! I was sure to tell him that there were a number of women in the world who would never forgive him!

We spent almost an hour sharing old stories and bringing them up to speed on the current state of the House. To say they were impressed with the improved conditions would be a major understatement... and they were hopeful that the trend would continue. A good group, with lots of questions... great fun!

I had lunch with my friend Dale, his daughter Lori and her "Best Buddy" Anna. They were in town as part of a program where developmentally challenged individuals like Lori share experiences with volunteer college students. While Lori and Anna went to the football game, I gave Dale a tour of my new world and we enjoyed a long (and long overdue) conversation.

The evening was uneventful except for both the Yankees and Michigan losing... which was nice! And Sunday morning I was up and out to play golf with Danny in Springfield on an absolutely gorgeous day. The morning was only spoiled by a tipped over trash can in the dining room and the usual mess on the patio... and I did not clean it up before I left.

As usual, my time with Danny is spent in great conversation and reasonably good golf (I won!). On this day we were exploring "pseudo-respectful", a term I was applying to the undergrads regarding their treatment of each other, the House and me. It seems to me that they are "superficially" polite and engaged, but that there was a lack of depth in relationships and responsibility. This was understandable in their dealing with me...my role is new territory that was forced on them... and it's not easy for a 20 year old to relate to their own grandfather, much less an old guy inserted into the middle of their living situation.

But in their relations with each other, I see a lack of willingness to hold people accountable or to confront one another on (mis) behaviors. When it comes to keeping things clean or picking up they would rather do it than ask / tell someone else to do it (IF they care at all). They would rather handle it than "fight" about it. Part of this seems generational... they have been raised to "not hurt people's feelings", not bully, and, to an extent, with an assumption of "neutral equality"... we are all the same so why should I "push" anyone else. This may be an improvement over the highly judgmental culture that dominated my youth (remember the generation gap?), but seems to me that the pendulum may have swung too far.

What is life without conflict? If you cannot confront someone in a forthright and productive manner, how do you stand up for yourself? And how much does this trend contribute to the post-party mess that comes from not being able to put trash in the can 5 feet away? No, I don't think this is in the arena of "fatal flaws"; but it's something that concerns me as they move toward adulthood and the "real" world. It's the kind of personal development that should be happening in the relatively safe environment of the college experience.

So I was pretty wound up with my combination of frustration and over analysis as I headed back to the house to prepare for the chapter meeting that night. I prepared my usual list of items that I was prepared to address in my short section of the meeting. The good news was the end of the contest, a successful experiment that saw just about everyone in the house contribute. I took half of my \$ 50 prize money (another \$ 400 would come from the House and Alums) and gave it to Mike C. as the guy who had been most helpful in cleaning... Mike never walked past a mess, was always ready to take out the trash and probably mopped more than I did... great kid!

There was more good news... we passed our City Fire Inspection with NO FINES for the first time in years! We are certain that the Inspector was so impressed with the cleanliness of the House that he was not nearly as "picky" as they could sometimes be. Kudos to House Manager Ian for making sure we were ready... so I asked him to announce it, including the fact that the House saved \$ 2,000 compared to the fines of last year.

But the other issues were my usual rants on cleanliness, participation, and trying to reinforce their pride in the excellent condition of the House. I felt the need to repeat "You broke it, you bought it!" and mention breakage and taking care of chairs, tables, trash, etc. I was primed and ready... until the Exec Meeting before Chapter.

First thing that came up was the "tradition" of having advisors not be in the room during House elections. I still don't get this but I had checked with Rocco so I accepted it. Then President Logan said, "Ross, it's better if you let us handle talking to the guys about cleaning and the condition of the House."

A brief discussion later, I agreed to just do the Contest Award announcement. And when it came time for the elections, I went up to the dining room and busied myself with my usual "puttering". I also talked with the candidates before and after their speeches... that was actually fun!

In the end, the guys elected would have gotten my vote as well... all the candidates were good kids, but I was particularly impressed with the leadership potential of the winners, and I am certain they will represent the House well.

So I returned to the meeting in time for the closing "concerns" and ritual and was surprised to hear that part of the old basement (which is technically supposed to be off limits / storage only) had been trashed by someone over the weekend, including breakage of some fixtures and some stored belongings. This upset everyone and got me to thinking about how to impact that kind of misbehavior.

So by now, you're probably wondering where the lesson I had to "re-learn" comes in. When I was running "major" IT Infrastructure Projects (as many as 250 people on one gig), I used to give what my team called "Voice of God" speeches on conference calls. Basically I would tell people how to succeed on our projects... Be accountable (on time, etc)... Follow the script...and when there is a problem, escalate early! But I always included the following phrase... "If I can't trust you, I can't afford you."

In thinking through the damage and the reaction to it, the general post-party messes, and the re-assertion of the role of House leadership from Logan, I was reminded of that phrase. In this role, it's more true than ever. When I jump in, take over, "do it myself", or demand performance, I am giving them the "Let Ross do it" excuse not to perform and not to hold each other accountable. It's their House. Yes, it's "belongs" to me and the Alumni, but they have to see it as theirs first or we will never improve.

So I sought out Logan the next morning and first I apologized. I reaffirmed the "The more you talk and the less I talk, the better we are doing." line. I also offered him the "If I can't trust you..." line as applicable to House Brothers. And I told him he was correct that the House leadership needed to take the lead. My role needed to be in support, providing ideas and resources, not so much in "directing" activities. And I thanked him for reminding me of that.

I gave him a "hook" on addressing the damages. I told him to let the "troops" (my term) know that if we identified someone who vandalized House property (above and beyond that covered by their security deposits), I would personally file charges with the police. My goal was to empower him, to give him a "hammer" that would make the House less of a "soft target" where you could do damage without consequences. In this regard I had already cast myself as the "Bad Cop", but now he could take the positive... just don't do it, because there will be consequences.

I believe he was actually relieved both to have the "hook" on damages, and that I had "re-learned" the lesson that formed the earliest part of our relationship. I also told him I would probably need to re-learn this lesson a couple more times. What followed was one of our best conversations. We talked about what more we could do, on-boarding the new leadership, the necessity to carry on the behavior and positive habits of the contest without the contest, and even the possibility of opening the House as a bed and breakfast during Alumni Weekend.

And I left the entire series of events a bit relieved myself. It's not my job to tell them what to do OR to do it for them. It's my job to help assure that they take responsibility for what they do. In the meantime,

I can utilize my "late onset OCD" to keep puttering around the House and clearing a path for them to make this THEIR very best House.

And all my Brothers say "Amen"!