

TITLE
by Dave Biscella

“Everything happens for a reason, but sometimes that reason is that you did something very stupid.”

That quote ran through Todd’s head over and over for the past few weeks. Things were about to fall apart all around Todd, and it was hard for him not to accept that it was all due to his own decisions.

Of course, when he first heard that quote as a 10 year old Little Leaguer who just threw a weak fastball right down the center of the plate leading to a game winning homerun in the bottom of the final inning, he never imagined those words would be on repeat in his head for a week 20 some years later.

“Don’t listen to people when they say not to let it get you down,” Wink Williker, Todd’s Little League coach for as long as he could remember said to him after handshakes and refreshments. “Everything happens for a reason, but sometimes that reason is that you did something very stupid. Throwing a fastball right down the middle of the plate with their best hitter at bat definitely qualifies as stupid. This loss is definitely on you, don’t let anybody try to convince you otherwise. But, until you know what it feels like to lose, you’ll never know how to win.”

The day Todd heard those words, they didn’t mean anything. He still ended up going home and crying himself to sleep with his face buried in his pillow. In hindsight, that’s the exact moment Todd realized how much he hated losing. He didn’t realize it then, but that was a turning point. His focus and dedication, his desire to be the best, increased drastically that day.

That all lead up to a new focus on baseball, a scholarship that got him through school, then a continued drive after school to find a great job and climb the ladder quicker than most.

Until now, when it was about to all come crumbling down.

Todd took pride in his work. He started in the mailroom at Barnaby/Sloan straight out of college. He turned down better jobs at the time, but wanted to get his foot in the door. He was confident in himself that he'd be able to rise out of the mailroom soon, and he was right.

Within three months he landed a job on the sales team, a few years after that, found himself in management, and just a few more years after that he was in upper management, all the way until a few weeks ago where he found himself sitting right below the CEO of the company, Mr. Jamison Barnaby himself.

Through the years, he'd also met and won over Jennison Barnaby, Mr. Barnaby's youngest daughter. They'd been together for just over four years, and a little over a year ago, Todd finally proposed. For the last nine months they'd been planning their wedding, which was supposed to be next week

Until now, as that was about to change.

The higher you climb up the ladder, the more information you have access to. Mr. Barnaby always liked Todd and really admired his work ethic and desire. Todd would have moved up the ranks regardless, but also having the heart of the youngest daughter of the company's founder had put him in a position as a possible successor when Mr. Barnaby decided to step away, which would likely be within the next few years.

Todd liked information, and having access to more details helped him position himself to be even better at his job. He now had access to certain numbers that he could keep in the back of his head that made negotiating that much more powerful. However, sometimes those numbers didn't add up, like in the Millford Falls account.

Millford Falls was Barnaby/Sloan's plan to purchase properties in the poorest neighborhood in the area so that they could clear the area and create a new industrial park. This was common, a large part of the job was convincing people to leave their homes for a price so that Barnaby/Sloan could repurpose the land and sell it for a much higher value than they paid for it. But something about Millford Falls didn't sit right.

The residents of the neighborhood they were intent on clearing were far more poor than the residents they usually dealt with. When looking at the numbers, Todd thought the opening offer was very much on the lowball side of things, which seemed like Barnaby/Sloan was trying to take advantage of just how poor the residents were. It was a large sum of money to somebody that doesn't have much, but not enough to go buy a house somewhere else. Not enough to start over.

So Todd dug into the numbers a little more. Maybe the Millford Falls project wasn't going to be as profitable as he originally thought, so it's possible that's why the maximum offer price was so low. That wasn't the case. In looking at the numbers, Todd realized that they could increase the maximum offer by 150% and still exceed the targeted goal profit of the entire project by over 20%. Todd liked numbers, and ran the math over and over again. He was convinced he was missing something. He's loved this company, and the family that runs it, but these numbers were pure greed, not business.

Todd could have just dealt with it. He could have went through and done his job, offering the lowball offers, getting people to move from their homes, and causing ridiculous profits for the company that he'd someday run, but he couldn't find it in him to do that. He approached the heads of the program and brought it to their attention, but was brushed off. He then took it straight to Mr. Barnaby, who would be his Father In Law in just a few weeks.

“Todd, just do it,” he answered simply, making it clear these numbers were not cause for discussion. The plan to lowball an entire community and uproot them without having enough to fully start over, even though they could up that offer and still make a ton of profit, was moving forward, and there was nothing Todd could do to stop it.

Or was there?

“Just because something’s stupid, doesn’t mean it isn’t right.”

As a senior in high school, Todd lead his team to the state championship game. He had pitched the entire game, and was one out away from locking up the win. Up 3-2, with a runner on second, the other team had their best hitter at the plate. Todd fell into a hole by starting off with two straight balls. Third pitch was a curveball that barely caught the corner, called strike. Fourth pitch, same location, called a ball this time. Fifth pitch, fouled off.

Todd stood there on the mound, with a full count. He collected his thoughts to himself. The batter would be looking for a curveball, so that was out. His changeup was his weakest pitch, so relying on it in this situation wasn’t an option. It had to be a fastball. He could try to go low and inside and hope for a swing and a miss, or high and outside and hope to get him looking, but at this point in the game Todd was tired and didn’t fully trust his accuracy.

He thought back to that game when he was 10 years old, floating up a weak fastball straight down the middle. Ever since that day, Todd has worked on his fastball every day. He was confident in it. He had to throw one. He couldn’t get fancy with the location. In his head, the only thing that made sense was throwing a fastball straight down the middle. It’d be the last thing the batter is expecting, so it could throw him off guard enough to not make contact. Or, he wouldn’t make great contact and Todd could trust the defense behind him to make that last out.

Or he could make solid contact and lose the game, causing Todd to cry himself to sleep with his face in his pillow just like he did when he was 10 years old.

Todd made up his mind, wound up, and gave everything he had to deliver one last fastball, straight down the middle.

Swing and a miss.

After the celebration and handshakes, Todd looked into the stands and saw Wink Williker. He hadn't seen him in years, not since he gave up coaching after Todd's 12 year old season.

Todd rushed over to the fence, "Coach Williker," he yelled out.

Wink Williker saw him and smiled, then worked his way over to him. "Fastball straight down the middle with the game on the line is a pretty stupid decision," he said. Todd chuckled and smiled, he knew he was right. "But just because something's stupid, doesn't mean it's not right," Wink continued. "You did good, kid. I'm proud of you."

That was the first time he had ever heard those words from Wink Williker, his baseball coach from the ages of seven to 12. Todd never really thought about how much he needed to hear that, but once he heard it, he knew how special it was.

It's now fifteen years later, and Todd was about to do something stupid.

Common sense would be to accept the numbers and do the job. Todd had a great job for a great company that he would soon be running, and was about to marry a great woman. He had it all.

But, he also had a conscience.

He knew that he wouldn't be able to sleep at night if he made that offer to those residents. He knew he didn't want to be involved in a company that could be so filled with greed

and have so little compassion for others. And he knew he couldn't be a part of the family that was behind it all.

"I just sent over an email with all the numbers," Todd said into the phone. "Everything you need is in there. Make sure it gets out. Make sure the residents know not to take the money."

"You sure you want to do this?" the voice on the other end of the phone asked. It was the voice of a local reporter that Todd had emailed a few days ago. Todd knew he couldn't realistically get to every resident personally and urge them not to accept the offer from Barnaby/Sloan, but he knew there were other ways to get the word out there. He knew the local paper having access to the same numbers could put out a story that would reach all of the residents and expose Barnaby/Sloan for the terrible thing they were trying to do.

He also knew that he'd be throwing everything away in the process. A great job, a wedding next week. There was no coming back from this.

"Positive," Todd said with confidence. "Just write the story."

Todd knew he had just done something very stupid.

But, that didn't mean it wasn't