



Message From Mike...A Lesson Learned

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One of the jobs I had growing up was bagging groceries at Food World. Sixteen years old and eager to earn some spending money, I worked nights and weekends. My first night shift was unforgettable. I was to work until 11:00pm (it was a big deal to be up past Johnny Carson!). Entering the final hour of a busy shift I asked the head cashier what else needed to get done. She told me that the cleaning crew was off that night so I would be responsible for mopping the store. My jaw dropped. The store was huge! But if others had done it before, then so could I.

I had not mopped before but I had seen mom mop the kitchen (kind of like saying "I stayed at a Holiday Inn Express last night"). So I took some soap and put it in a bucket of hot water and set out to work. As I worked my way up and down the aisles I noticed a strong sour odor. Figuring something had been spilled earlier I pressed the mop harder into the tiles of the aisles. Over three hours later I was done. It was well after 1:00am on a school night. When clocking out, the cashier asked me why it took me so long. I felt foolish because I had worked my tail off!

When the manager arrived the next morning he knew something was wrong because of the strange but familiar odor in the store. The reason the manager knew what had happened is because he had made the same mistake when he was a bagger many years before. The odor was very familiar. It was the odor of a mop that had covered a lot of ground but had never had the water changed out from the mop bucket...a stinky, sour mop! And I spread that stench throughout the entire store. I had grown so accustomed to the smell while mopping that I didn't even notice. The manager just laughed the whole thing off and told me what I needed to do next time. As it turns out, when I mopped the store I was only supposed to "spot" mop. That is, find the rough areas and just deal with them.

I found out later from other employees that the manager had come in that morning and when he realized what I had done, he mopped the whole store over again...inch by inch...but this time with fresh water in the mop bucket. He never once mentioned that to me. It seemed his only agenda was me, and helping me do a better job.

I do not remember the manager's name but I do remember a valuable lesson I learned from him. He could have very easily put all the blame on me. He could have dissected my every action and told me each little thing I had done wrong. He could have ranted and raved about the impression my actions had left on customers. But instead...he took the responsibility for my mistake. He made sure I understood what was expected of me and then moved forward.

True leadership, mature leadership, is less interested in placing blame and is more interested in producing results. True leadership makes no excuses because those that spend their time making excuses and placing blame are operating at a standstill if not moving backward all together. Authentic leadership is always about moving people forward. Real leadership is never content to leave us wallowing in our stench. Does this description of leadership remind you of anyone? It should. Jesus is the absolute model of authentic leadership. He took responsibility. He removed the stench. And it is he who continues to call forth the very best we have to give. I encourage us all to take some extra time with him this week because there is a whole lot more He would like to teach us!