



McDonald's Parking Lot

At 44 East Main Street, Webster, Massachusetts sits a McDonald's. It has been there since I was a young boy. I come from a small, rural area and in high school the McDonald's parking lot was where everyone would meet on Friday and Saturday nights. Invariably, it was also the location where any disagreements would be decided between two high school boys (or girls, but that was rare). Cars would pull up into a circle and us boys would fight. I learned some valuable lessons in that McDonald's parking lot, but one that has always stayed with me is that if you are going to *talk* like a tough guy, you had better be ready to *fight* like a tough guy... and getting punched really hard in the face, even once, helps curb your desire to *talk* like a tough guy very often.

In an effort to reach out to a greater audience than just those clients that can afford to work with us, I have recently become more active on social media (Twitter). I have quickly come to realize that most people on social media didn't have a McDonald's parking lot experience like my own or may only have frequented it to be one of the "billions and billions served." Social media allows its users to say whatever they want to say, in whatever tone they want to say it *in*, to whomever they want to say it *to*. Social media users can *talk* like a tough guy without ever having the consequence of getting punched really hard in the face because of it. That's unfortunate. It leads to a lack of respectful behavior.

Treat people with respect.



Second, I have had the great opportunity in my life to attend both the United States Naval Academy, one of the great leadership institutions in our country, and The University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, consistently one of the top five business schools in the world. I certainly learned a lot at both (although my GPA at Navy would lead you to believe otherwise). The lesson that I am most grateful for, however, came not from any particular book, but rather from my professors.

I was eighteen years old when I entered the Naval Academy. I was a lacrosse player. Not only had I never served in our military prior to attending, I had never really been exposed to it. Leadership classes at the Naval Academy were taught by active duty Navy and Marine Corps officers and some senior enlisted personnel. If I didn't agree with their point of view on an issue, I said so: "Sir/Ma'am, I disagree."

Any idea what the response of an active duty Navy or Marine Corps officer is when an eighteen-year-old freshman lacrosse player who has never been in the military disagrees with them? Or the response from my professors at The University of Chicago Graduate School of Business when I, a "dumb grunt," with zero business experience, disagreed with them, a few of whom were Nobel Laureates and many of whom had founded multimillion-dollar companies prior to teaching? Any idea what those military officers and Nobel Laureates response was when I disagreed with them?

Thankful.

The first thing they would say is, "great!" They welcomed the disagreement and appreciated the courage it takes to do so with someone in a position of authority like themselves or the courage it takes to disagree with the rest of the class, the popular opinion. They knew that "*everyone* is a hero when it is seventy degrees and sunny." Unfortunately, that is not when we need them. We need great teammates and great team leaders when it's not. Regardless of the type of battlefield on which we may compete, during times of adversity are when we need great teammates and great team leaders. Courage is a necessity to be both.

Treat people with respect.
Demonstrate Courage.

After recognizing the courage it takes to disagree, my teachers would immediately question why I did so. They didn't yell and scream. They communicated. Respectfully. Further, they would often share various articles written by "experts" that held differing viewpoints about the issue we were discussing (with which I disagreed) and asked, "does this make sense?" Not is this "right"



or “wrong”; just does this make *sense*? We were taught to check “facts,” and question figures. They illustrated this lesson by providing me with articles that held differing points of view - not just those that they or I already held. Many people present their personal *beliefs* as “facts” and quote figures with little context, thereby causing us to draw conclusions that may support the author’s opinion, but may, in fact, be inaccurate. They constantly highlighted the need to read all points of view on an issue and not just those that may already align with our own. Although we may continue to disagree, this led to an awareness that just because I may be *right*, it doesn’t necessarily mean that you are *wrong*. Critically thinking about an issue or problem provides us with an opportunity to arrive at the *best* solution possible for it, rather than simply satisfy our immature and childish desire to prove ourselves *right*.

Treat people with respect.
Demonstrate Courage.
Think Critically.

Unfortunately, I don’t believe we, as a nation, are doing so.

This past weekend, the great journalist, Dan Rather reminded us on Twitter to “listen to the experts.” He was one of many. Twitter is full of the same advice from millions of others. It is the popular opinion. *We should* listen to experts. It does not, however, absolve us from the responsibility of thinking critically.

Never forget that a nation that only *listened* to a leader’s “expert” opinion, an opinion that the Jews were the cause of all that country’s social and economic problems, led to the extermination of six million of them (and a total of 11 million people) during the Holocaust. In more recent memory, during the 2016 Presidential election, many of the experts (interestingly, not Mr. Rather who disagreed with them), told us who was going to win that election. If one is upset about the outcome, it is not the expert’s fault that their opinion (or the facts and figures they presented) of a huge victory for Secretary Clinton caused many to choose a course of action that included not voting.

In the same respect, I believe we all have a social responsibility to critically think about this virus. I believe we must listen to those medical experts who believe in a course of action that includes a quarantine for months and those who believe in a course of action that includes one of a shorter duration. I believe that critical thinking includes asking if a medical professional responsible for eradicating viruses might champion courses of action that do so best rather than support courses of action that don’t, but that also cause less collateral damage to our children, our education and our economy - all things for which they are **not** responsible.



The Program believes that the best leaders consistently meet and exceed two standards: accomplish the mission and take care of the team. Many years ago, I was taught that by General Al Grey, 29th Commandant of the United States Marine Corps. Based on my experiences as a Marine Corps Infantry and Special Operations Officer, as a business owner working with hundreds of athletic teams and corporations annually, as a high-altitude mountaineer, and most importantly, as a father and husband, I believe those standards to be true. In addition, in today's modern world, leaders must not only accomplish the mission, but also limit collateral damage while doing so. However, against a powerful and determined enemy, a leader knows that any course of action *will* produce collateral damage. We must all do everything we can to limit it, but a leader must have the courage to admit the expected collateral damage from their chosen course of action and then demonstrate courage by assuming the responsibility for inflicting it.

Further, a leader gets more credit than they deserve when things go well. They get more blame than they deserve when they don't. A leader humbly accepts the credit for the former and assumes 100% responsibility (and all the blame) for the latter. This is called the Responsibility of Command. As a leader, you don't necessarily have to like it, but if you are unwilling to assume this responsibility, then you are no leader even if you may hold a position of authority.

I believe that critical thinking includes asking if our President and other governmental officials in positions of authority are leaders. Leaders who are mature enough to be able to disagree *with* each other, but still be respectful *to* each other. Leaders who are able to set aside their childish desire to prove themselves *right*, and instead critically think in order to arrive at the best course of action to fight and ultimately, overcome this virus. I believe that critical thinking includes asking if we have leaders who are able to do so and then courageous enough to assume the Responsibility of Command over whatever their chosen course of action (as well as the collateral damage it will surely produce).

Finally, I believe that an uncensored, open, transparent media is a cornerstone of democracy and one of the great institutions of our country and society. I appreciate that the media is a business and like any other business, for it to be successful, people must buy what they are selling. In the case of the media, people must consume their content. In an age of unlimited content, whatever that content is, it must grab people's attention. Therefore, I believe that critical thinking includes questioning how the media presents its content and their reason for doing so. Is it being presented to us in a manner and context that ensures we best understand an issue or is it presented to us in a manner to ensure the maximum number of us *consume* it? I believe that for many media outlets it is the latter and it is imperative that we critically think about it.



A recent headline from Business Insider (March 19th, 2020) reads, “Nearly 30% of US coronavirus cases have been among people 20-44 years old, the CDC says- showing that young people are getting sick, too.” To be clear, the CDC is only saying that 30% of coronavirus cases have been among people 20-44 years old. Business Insider is saying that that “shows young people are getting sick too.” 20-44 year- old people *are* getting sick from this virus; people of every age get sick from a virus-*any* virus. According to the CDC, 30% of cases in the U.S. are people aged 20-44 years old, but also according to the CDC (and if you read the entire article, Business Insider too), 93% of deaths are people aged 55 years and older.

“Young people are getting sick,” grabs my attention. “This virus, like all viruses, is making people of all ages sick-with the highest death rate coming from people aged 55 years or older,” ensures that we understand the issue in a broader context. Critical thinking requires we read the article and not just the headlines. We must also critically think about the author (or media outlet) and what their personal beliefs and experiences may be that are leading them to their *opinion* - which they may or may not be presenting as “fact.”

Further, context matters. A recent LA Times article states that “the pleas (to shutdown) came as the number of California coronavirus cases reached 1,793 with 35 deaths.” I don’t believe that the media intentionally produces or creates “fake news,” but as my teachers instilled in me, I will still check and critically think about their facts and figures. This includes putting these figures into context: “California has 39.56 million people. It has 1,793 cases of Covid 19 (.0045% of its population) with 35 deaths (.000093%).”

The United States has a population of 327,200,000. As of March 25th, 2020, we have had 804 deaths from Covid 19.

I appreciate however that it is not the current total number of cases or deaths that are truly scary about Covid 19, but rather the rate of transmission and death rate (in some age groups and/or those with pre-existing health conditions). Therefore, instead of providing us with headlines that use terms like “apocalyptic,” provide us with facts and figures in context and in relation to our whole population while also highlighting those issues that the American public must be reminded of in order to ensure we comply with the appropriate safety guidelines.

As an example, according to the CDC, as of March 25th, there were 55,350 cases of Covid 19. On March 26th, we had 82,177 cases- a 51% increase. That is an increase of 28,383 cases in one day. As stated earlier, the United States has a population of 327,200,000. As of March 25th, 2020, we had 804 deaths from Covid 19. As of March 29th, we had over 2,000.



That grabs my attention and provides context so I can better critically think and understand the entire issue. Further, I understand that there *may* be reasons why the media may or may not release additional information about a Covid 19 death, but their age and any underlying health issues (factors that I believe every medical professional agrees are affecting the death rate up to this point) provides further context to us about its severity to different age groups in our society (and economy). I believe this information would more easily afford us the ability to critically think about not only our best course of action to combat this virus, but also the collateral damage it will cause-and to whom. Instead, the media provides us with that information haphazardly, at best.

Unbiased and transparent information allows us to think critically about the virus and our best course of action to address it. I do not believe the media is currently providing it. Consumption is more important than helping to explain the entire issue. We must remember that and think critically about any information we consume-that with which we may agree and that with which we may disagree. Check “facts.” Question figures.

Neither my wife nor I grew up in “The 1%,” but we are fortunate enough to be in it now. Despite the effect the virus and our response to it up to this point has had on our economy, we can still afford our mortgage, send our children to private school and buy whatever clothes and groceries we need for them. That is not the case for many Americans. Like all social and economic upheavals, the poor have been hurt the most and that will continue the longer the upheaval lasts.

In a country of 327.2 million people, more than three million of them filed for unemployment last week. Another three million are expected do so before the end of this one. Six million in two weeks. I don’t *know*, but if I critically think about them, I don’t *think* any are “The 1%.”

Mark Cuban once said to never take advice from those who don’t have to live with the consequences of it. My family and I *could* just listen to the experts and stay inside-so too many of those who constantly advise us to do the same on social media. For now, we are good. We are not going to lose our homes or be unable to feed and clothe our children. What about those six million?

Great team leaders and great teammates are needed now as much as they have ever been. Can our medical experts and government officials not discuss all courses of action respectfully? Can our President and other leaders demonstrate the courage required to assume the Responsibility of Command regardless of the course of action and the collateral damage it will produce? As an American society are we willing and able to do the same?



More importantly, are we willing and able to do so whenever we are in disagreement? This virus will pass.

Black Lives Matter. Blue Lives Matter. #MeToo. Democrat. Republican. Liberal. Conservative. Christian. Jew. Muslim. Economic Inequality. Immigration. LGBTQ. Etc. Etc. Etc. Team America, can we care more about getting to the best place possible than proving ourselves *right*? As an American society are we willing and able to treat each other with respect, act courageously and think critically?

The best teammates and the best team leaders do.

Attack!
And Team America, WASH YOUR HANDS!

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Founder and CEO

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