

LOSING FOCUS

When I took the job as head football coach at the University of Colorado in 1982, I made a solemn promise: I told everybody that with me, God was first, family second, and football third.

But I didn't keep that promise for long. The thrill and the challenge of resurrecting a football program in disarray simply took too much time and attention. As my teams kept winning year after year, I kept losing focus of my priorities.

When we won the national championship in 1990, many people said I had reached the pinnacle of my profession. But for me, there was an emptiness about it. I had everything a man could want, and yet something was missing. I was so busy pursuing my career goals that I was missing out on the Spirit-filled life that God wanted me to have.

All because I had broken my promise to put God first and foremost in my life.—Bill McCartney, founder of Promise Keepers. *Men of Integrity*, Vol. 1, no. 1.

DON'T FORGET WHO YOU ARE REPRESENTING

George Shultz, when he was Secretary of State during the Reagan administration, kept a large globe in his office. When newly appointed ambassadors had an interview with him and when ambassadors returning from their posts for their first visit with him were leaving his office, Shultz would test them. He would say, "You have to go over the globe and prove to me that you can identify your country." They would go over, spin the globe, and put their finger on the country to which sent—unerringly.

When Shultz's old friend and former Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield was appointed ambassador to Japan, even he was put to the test. This time, however, Ambassador Mansfield spun the globe and put his hand on the United States. He said: "That's my country."

On June 27, 1993, Shultz related this to Brian Lamb on C-Span's "Booknotes." Said the secretary: "I've told that story, subsequently, to all the ambassadors going out. 'Never forget you're over there in that country, but your country is the United States. You're there to represent us. Take care of our interests and never forget it, and you're representing the best country in the world.' "

BRING OFFENDERS TO AN ACCOUNTING

Ask yourself what you would have done if you had inherited New York City five or ten years ago. Crime was out of control and more than half of the citizens admitted in a survey that they would move out if they could afford to. The city was a depressing place, and it must have been a somewhat daunting job to be elected mayor.

Where do you start?

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani started by going after the little things. "I am a firm believer in the theory that 'minor' crimes and 'quality of life' offenses are all part of the larger picture," he explains. Among the first elements to go were the "Squeegee Men," drug-addicted and shady-looking riffraff who personified New York's rough edge. Armed with a soiled rag and a dirty bottle of watered-down Windex, these men would bully and badger motorists for money.

Giuliani said, "We're not going to put up with this anymore," and he brought this intimidation to an end. He then declared war on graffiti, subway panhandlers, loitering, broken windows, and petty vandalism—minor offenses that would have gone unnoticed in days past while the police force was overwhelmed with homicides and violent crime. But Giuliani had a hunch: if you send out a signal that you won't tolerate these minor offenses, people will get the idea that the major offenses will be treated even more seriously.

"One graffiti defacement or one loud radio may not seem like much of a problem, but criminals thrive in chaotic environments," Giuliani explained. "Small problems can be the first step to big trouble. Neighborhoods scarred by graffiti or blasted day and night by boom-box radios will become besieged, vulnerable, and ultimately dangerous places. If police departments surrender on the small issues—using the excuse that they are too busy dealing with 'serious' crime—they soon will find themselves surrendering to the latter as well."

It worked. Giuliani has been successful in reducing crime beyond all expectations. Between 1993 and 1996, the murder rate came down almost 50 percent. Robberies plummeted by 42 percent while auto thefts dropped by 46 percent. The streets of New York City became safe in a way that was unimaginable just a few years earlier.

Oftentimes as parents we get "stuck" or lost in the big challenges of life. What can I do to really get through to my kids? we wonder, but the truth is if you take care of the little things, the big things will fall into place.

In a family, in a business, in a school—yes, even in big cities—it's all the same: the importance of the little things outweighs their size.—John Ashcroft. From the files of Leadership.

