

## **LEADERS, CHECK YOUR MIRRORS!**

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### ***WHEN YOU'RE RIDING LEAD, DON'T SPIT!***

One of the best things about riding motorcycles is the time you get "inside your head." I often use those moments reflecting on where I've been on my "professional ride," and remembering all the leaders and mentors who thought me worthy of investing their time, talent and treasure along the way.

No matter where you going, on a bike or in business, each one of needs on the road to success. None of gets anywhere worthwhile by ourselves, and anyone who says different is just arrogantly wrong. So, of course, I completely reject the *"been there, done that, got here on my own"* attitude we experience all the time in so-called leadership. If you've been "there" someone pointed the way. And if you've done "that" someone taught you how.

One of my early career mentors was Col. Edwin C. "Ned" Humphreys, JR. USAF, Retired (1938-1969)\* who I met in 1978 when he was publisher and editor of a small weekly newspaper in Mobile, Alabama. He gave me my first journalism job, knowing I had a lot to learn. Col. Ned was patient, but insistent that I push myself every day. Failure was expected, but you owned your mistakes, learned the hard lesson and made yourself and others better in the process. If not, you didn't stay around very long.

He had three simple rules for success:

1. "Don't ever show up unprepared."
2. "If you don't know how to do something, ask for help."
3. "Remember the first two rules when it's your turn to be in charge."

Col. Ned Humphreys was the definition of a "Full-Throttle Leader." He was always looking for any opportunity to encourage his staff; to help us get where we wanted to go. He was preparing us to lead and made sure we would arrive humble, grateful and always prepared. That's become my leadership mantra.

Today, whenever I hear someone in a leadership position spout their own achievements without acknowledging the contributions of others; I know that person doesn't understand the first rule of motorcycling or leadership; Check your Mirrors!

Mirrors are one of the most important parts of a motorcycle. They reflect a thing as it really is in a very clear and accurate way. Developing "mirror awareness" focuses leadership attention on the elements of a successful ride outside your immediate field of vision; namely everyone who helped get you to the front of the pod and those currently following your lead. In a very real sense, the team are the mirrors that reflect the leader.

When riding, constantly scanning back and checking to make sure the pod is moving safely TOGETHER toward the destination is critical to the success of the ride.

Leadership expert John Maxwell says it this way, *"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."*

One of my favorite movies is "Remember the Titans". It's based on the true story of Herman Boone, an African-American high school football coach and his first season at T. C. Williams High School in Alexandria, VA. Coach Boone arrived in 1971 just as the city consolidated all local students into one integrated high school. The entire community was forced to confront racism against the backdrop of the coming football season.

In one powerful scene, Julius, a talented African-American defensive player, and Gerry, a Caucasian defensive player who also is team captain; face off after a grueling series of three-a-day practices. They argue about leadership, unity, trust and attitude:

*Julius: Why should I give a hoot about you, huh? Or anybody else out there? Nobody plays! Yourself included! I'm supposed to wear myself out for the team? What team?! No, No. What I'm gonna do is, I'm gonna look out for myself, and I'm gonna get mine.*

*Gerry: See, man? That's the worst attitude I ever heard.*

*Julius: Attitude reflects leadership, Captain.*

That scene is all about understanding how you got where you are and who helped get you there. Checking your mirrors answers the question, what is the team reflecting back to me? If you really want to measure your effectiveness as a leader, look at the attitude of those on the ride with you.

Your focus matters, especially in leadership.

*\*In 1947, Col. Ned Humphreys founded Bombardiers, Inc., an organization dedicated to collecting, recording and preserving the heritage and tradition of preserving the military profession of*

*bombardiering. That collection now resides in the Office of Air Force History at Maxwell Air Force Base. Col. Humphreys died on April 22, 1996 and was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. An honorary plaque in his name is displayed at the National Museum of the US Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, near Dayton, Ohio.*

Steven G. Foster, CMP, is Managing Partner of Foster+Fathom, a Leadership Training and TRIBE-Building Group in Dallas, TX. An award-winning speaker and writer; and an advocate for giving back to the communities where we live, work and meet; Steven helps individuals and organizations fuel their personal and professional lives with Passion, Power and Purpose; creates what Steven calls “Full-Throttle Leadership.” That’s not surprising, as the Harley-Davidson LIFE Member completed a 15,000-mile solo motorcycle ride around the perimeter of the United States in 2013 in support of the Boot Campaign, a national veteran’s organization where he serves as an Ambassador and Advisory Board Member.

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