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TIM SCOTT ON HOW MENTORING CHANGED HIS LIFE

Growing up in a single-parent home left me a bit disillusioned about life. My parents divorced when I was around the age of 7. By the time I entered high school, I was completely off track. My mother was working hard, trying to help me to realize that there was a brighter future, but I really couldn't see it.

So by the time I entered the ninth grade, I was flunking out of high school. I failed world geography, civics, Spanish and English.

When you fail Spanish and English, they do not consider you bilingual. They consider you bi-ignorant because you can't speak in any language.

And that's where I found myself. I found myself in a position where I felt like the future was nonexistent. The only way I could find my way out of poverty was through entertainment, whether it be a football player, cutting up in school or something like that.

I had the good fortune the next year to meet a mentor, a guy named John Moniz. John was an interesting man. He was a conservative, he was an entrepreneur; he ran the Chick-fil-A that was right next door to the movie theater where I was working, and he took a special liking to me.

I remember I used to go down to the Chick-fil-A and get french fries all the time. One day, he asked why I always bought just the french fries and not the Chick-fil-A sandwich. I told him that the fries were cheaper.

One day he came down to the movie theater and slid a Chick-fil-A sandwich across the desk. John was smart enough to know that food is a good way to start a conversation with a kid who likes to eat ... which probably means all kids. What a guy!

Over the course of three or four years, John transformed my way of thinking, which changed my life. It was interesting because the lessons that John was teaching me were maybe simple lessons, but they were profound lessons.

Mentoring page 2

He taught me that if you want to receive, you have to first give. Embedded in that conversation, I came to realize, was the concept that my mother was teaching me about individual responsibility.

John was simply saying that enlightened self-interest requires you to give first, and then the receiving part takes care of itself. John taught me that the difference between my paycheck and his paycheck was a couple of zeros. He taught me how to be more valuable in my own eyes so that later I could be more valuable at work, which would add zeros to my paycheck. He made me feel more valuable!

I learned later that the placement of the decimal with those zeros would be very important. He was teaching me the process or the concept of multiplication, that if in fact the zero was on the left hand side of the decimal a dollar became 10, 10 became 100, and so on.

Years later as an entrepreneur and as a conservative, I see that the lessons John Moniz was teaching me still ring true today. Perhaps more so.

As I venture through life, business and politics, what I realize is that our greatest future is somehow connected to the folks who mentor us, who engage us in conversations that are in our enlightened best interest, but the manifestation of which might not occur for decades. I'd like to encourage all mentors to not only be a mentor but to know that the difference they are making may not actually manifest itself for a decade or two. In my life, not only did John Moniz transform my thinking, but he changed my life.

Many of the lessons he taught me never manifested themselves until after he sadly passed away. He will never know how thankful I am that he never gave up on me; that he was wise enough to know that growth takes time, especially for a teenager.

He didn't need to do what he did. He didn't need to feed me sandwiches or words. But he took the time to change the life of a youngster who had the good fortune to work close by.

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