

Follow Worthy Mentors

ED EYESTONE

Several weeks ago I came home from work and announced at the dinner table to my wife and two of my daughters that I would be speaking at the BYU devotional on September 29. My wife, Lynn, immediately said, “Honey, what an amazing opportunity, and it will still be early enough in the semester that people will actually be there!”

Lynn, I am happy to say that you were right—there actually are a lot of people here—and it is my prayer that over the next half hour I can share a few thoughts that will encourage you to have perfect attendance for the rest of the year.

Find and Become a Worthy Mentor

Thirty-five years ago—can it be that long?—I was a freshman at BYU. As great and exciting as BYU athletics are today, those were some of the golden years of BYU sports. Jim McMahon threw long touchdown passes to Danny Plater, and in basketball Danny Ainge and Devin Durrant were ruling the court. The track team was also bursting at the seams with greatness. Many of my teammates were already All-Americans, and Mormon distance running would soon lead to a *Runner’s World* article titled “Stormin’ Mormons” (see John Brant, “Stormin’ Mormons,” *Runner’s World* 23, no. 5

[May 1988]: 70–76). It was into this athletically charged environment that I found myself as an unproven freshman, a recent graduate of Ogden’s Bonneville High School.

Each day as a team we would pound out ten-mile runs, tempo workouts, or mile repeats. On occasion we would run to the top of Squaw Peak. At the end of such days we would usually end up in the athletic training room, where a whirlpool bath or steam room awaited.

Some of my older, more decorated teammates also enjoyed a weekly ritual that I envied. Ollie Julkunen was our cross-country and track athletic trainer. He had grown up in Finland, where he had been an accomplished national-class boxer. Later in life he learned the art of healing aching muscles and speeding recovery by putting those strong boxing hands and shoulders to use, giving deep athletic muscle massages. I would watch as Doug Padilla, a decorated All-American, would jump on Ollie’s padded table. Ollie would soon have Doug squirming as he worked first his quadriceps

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and then his calf muscles, always ending with the hamstrings. At the end of each twenty-minute massage, Doug was usually much more relaxed, and as Ollie finished up and shook out Doug's hamstrings, he would say with his thick Finnish accent, "Soup in a sack, soup in a sack—that is what your muscles should feel like. Soup in a sack." After this final Ollie blessing, Doug would usually slide gently off the table, a picture of relaxation and recovery.

After witnessing this procedure for a number of weeks, I decided it was time for me to enjoy some of Ollie's special treatment. So as Doug slid off the table, I jumped on and casually said to Ollie, "Yeah, Ollie, I want what he just had."

Ollie looked at me somewhat disdainfully as he squinted through his glasses. "What is your name?" he asked.

"Uh, Ed Eyestone."

"Hmm, StoneEye," he said (and StoneEye would be his name for me for the next ten years), "there is a saying in Finland. It goes: 'Älä tuhlaamustaruuti pikku linnut.' Do you know what that means?"

"No, Ollie, I'm a little rusty on my Finnish."

"It means 'Do not waste the black powder on the little birds.' Do you know what that means?"

"Yes," I said, "it means I won't be getting a massage today."

As I slunk off his table he said, "StoneEye, get back on the table." And then for the next twenty minutes I enjoyed that exquisite pain as he first worked on my quads, then on my calf muscles, and finally on my hamstrings. As he finished he said, "Soup in a sack, soup in a sack—that's how your muscles should feel, like soup in a sack."

Ollie Julkunen knew the proper technique for a deep Finnish sports massage, which I am sure is one of the reasons I stayed relatively healthy over the course of my running career. More important, Ollie knew that in serving others it was impossible to waste the black

powder on the little birds, for the Lord loves His little birds and knows when even one sparrow falls: "Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31).

I am grateful for all those who wasted their black powder on this little bird over the years. One of our great challenges as students and faculty is to find great role models and mentors like Ollie Julkunen and to learn from their accumulated wisdom. May we have the courage to ask for help from all the Ollie Julkunens that the Lord puts in our path. Similarly, we should pray daily for opportunities to share our knowledge, wisdom, and time with the little birds that flutter into our lives. As we do so, we express our love for our Savior, for He has said, "Lovest thou me? [Then] feed my sheep" (John 21:16).

Take Direction Well

As the father of six daughters, I have always looked for ways to better connect with my girls. For example, each knows that she is my favorite, and I take advantage of every opportunity to express that to them both privately and publicly.

It was easy with Erica, favorite daughter number one, as she got a three-year head start on her next closest sister, and she was always interested in sports, so there were many days spent hitting fly balls, hiking, kicking a soccer ball, or even playing basketball—a game that she excelled at enough to walk on at BYU for a year, despite my ineptness at the game.

Andrea and Ellie, favorite daughters two and three, enjoyed cross country and track, which made attending their races all the more fun because, in addition to watching and cheering at their races, I could do a little recruiting of other athletes on the side. My cheer of "Make their lungs bleed!" to Andrea, although initially intended as a joke, became a standard battle cry at all her races, and to this day it is code for good luck between us. In fact, this morning I received a text from

Washington, DC. It ended with “Make their lungs bleed!” You’ve been forewarned.

With Ellie, the importance of a good attitude early in the race led to the cheesy but memorable cheer of “Happy face, happy race!”

But Claire, favorite daughter number four, gravitated more to the music and drama side of the continuum. I was perfectly content to attend recitals, music programs, and elementary and junior high productions, but in the summer before her ninth-grade year, I decided to step it up a notch. Despite the fact that I had last been onstage thirty-five years earlier in the ward roadshow as a wolf who developed a conscience, we both ended up in a summer community-theater play of *Annie Get Your Gun* at the SCERA Center for the Arts in Orem, Utah. Two words: *beard card*.

As a result of that experience in fall 2011, I was invited to audition for a production of the musical *White Christmas*, performed by the BYU Department of Theatre and Media Arts. *White Christmas* would play the month of December, leading into Christmas, and would feature mostly music dance theatre majors. These guys were pros. They had been in productions for most of their young lives, and many, if not all, would go on to professional careers in the performing arts, some on Broadway. I am sure the only reason they had opened up the role of General Waverly—the stern army general with a heart of gold—to the outside was that they wanted someone older for the role. And although it might be a stretch for such a young-looking fifty-year-old at the time to play a retired general fifteen years his senior, I figured that was what acting was all about, and I went to the audition.

When I arrived, I was introduced to the director, George Nelson, a professor in the theatre department. He asked me to sing a few bars to make sure I wasn’t completely tone deaf and to read a brief monologue. Fortunately there was no dancing required, as the general had recently taken some shrapnel to the leg.

The monologue was of General Waverly saying good-bye to his troops. I read it through once in my mind and then proceeded to read it out loud for the director. I attempted to convey the gruffness and authority of a World War II general. Unfortunately my interpretation came out sounding more like a combination of John Wayne from *True Grit* and Arnold Schwarzenegger from *Kindergarten Cop*. When I finished and looked at the director’s table, I could tell by the sideways glance and pursed lips that I hadn’t been too convincing.

But instead of dismissing me outright with a wave of the hand and a “next,” Brother Nelson exhibited true mentorship as he flexed his directing muscles. At that point George looked me firmly in the eyes and said something to the effect of, “Ed, that was okay, but let’s try it again. You’re a coach, right? And you work with young men? I imagine that, as a coach, you form close associations with these guys. You put in a lot of time with these guys as you lead them into battle in the races, correct? Now this time I want you to put yourself in the position of this general, but imagine instead that these soldiers are the young men you coach every day. You have been serving side by side with these men for the last two years. You have risked your life and have been wounded in battle as a result of saving some of their lives. You have seen men who were part of this group make the ultimate sacrifice in fighting for their country. These are your boys, and you have to leave them now. You may never see them again, and some will be killed before the end of the war. Now take a minute and then try it again.”

During that minute I thought a couple of things: (1) I was in way over my head. (2) I thought about my father, who had been a paratrooper in World War II and was the greatest man I ever knew. (3) I did what George asked me to do and I thought about my boys—the young men I get to coach here at BYU—the championship races I had witnessed them run,

and the personal sacrifices they had made. I then attempted to read the farewell monologue. The result was a much different performance than the initial superficial reading. As I finished the reading with thoughts of my own team and of my father, my eyes filled with tears and my voice slightly broke with emotion as General Waverly said his final farewell to his men.

As I finished the reading this time, I looked to the director's table and was greeted with a smile as George said, "That was much better."

And I said to myself in all humility, "Nailed it!"

The difference, however, had been in a great director.

I was grateful for those next three months as I got to rub shoulders with real pros. It was fun to see that the same qualities of talent, hard work, dedication, sacrifice, teamwork, and coaching that make a successful sports team also come together to make a successful stage production. My goals were modest—mainly not to get in the way of the true professionals who were out on the stage.

The play was sold out for all of the performances. However, when the reviews came out, we all were anxious to see how we had been critiqued. The production received very favorable reviews, and the *Deseret News* on November 16, 2011, used such phrases as "energetic choreography" with "high-stepping, attractive performers." My fellow performers were praised by name for their onstage enthusiasm, fully formed characters, and plum performances and for singing and dancing with vigor. When I nervously read my own review it said—and I quote—"Ed Eyestone is the right age to play [General Waverly]" ("*White Christmas* and Other Irving Berlin Classics Staged with Affection at BYU," *Deseret News*, 16 November 2011, deseretnews.com/article/705394426/White-Christmas-and-other-Irving-Berlin-classics-staged-with-affection-at-BYU.html). Nailed it! Broadway, here I come!

At the end of the run of the play, I had a chance to introduce my wife, Lynn, to George Nelson, my new theatrical mentor. He paid me the biggest compliment and gave me the best review when he said, "Ed takes direction well."

Everyone loves to give direction. It is fun to tell others what to do and when and how to do it. However, taking direction is a serious challenge for most of us because pride turns direction into criticism in our minds. Despite grade inflation, not every paper we turn in at school will return with a gold star and a smiley face at the top of the page. How we handle criticism or, better said, how we handle direction ultimately is a measure of our character and will help determine how far we go in life. If we can embrace direction rather than look at it as criticism, we are much more likely to learn and improve. If we are offended by direction, we are more likely to become stagnant and wither. Ultimately, taking direction well requires us to trust in the director. When we trust in the director, we check our pride at the door and become humble. It is only then that we truly maximize our learning potential.

On those occasions when we are required to give direction, we should be like George Nelson and give good direction. Many times this simply requires taking a moment to consider the Golden Rule and "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," or direct others as you would have them direct you. At the audition George could have easily said, "Eyestone, that was the worst impression of John Wayne I've ever heard. Please never step on my stage again." But instead he made the effort to give good direction and searched for just the right words to elicit a better performance.

Fortunately, here at BYU we are blessed not only to have many worthy mentors in whom we can trust but also to worship the Divine and Perfect Mentor of us all who has said:

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. [Proverbs 3:5–6; emphasis added]

If we could spend more time trusting and taking direction well and less time giving direction and worrying about criticism, I believe we would be a happier and more productive society.

Sweat the Small Things

Kyle Perry was a track athlete recruited from Alta High School in Utah. After returning from a mission to New Jersey, Kyle began what would be a very successful track and cross-country career at BYU. However, at the beginning of his junior year he admitted to being somewhat frustrated by the fact that, despite being an All-American, he had not yet been able to break four minutes in the mile.

Fifty years ago the sub-four-minute mile was considered a nearly impossible physiological feat—although when Roger Bannister finally accomplished the task in 1952, a succession of others soon followed. However, it is still considered a landmark accomplishment, and far fewer people have run a sub-four-minute mile (about 1,400) than have climbed Mount Everest (more than 4,000). Kyle’s personal record at the time stood at 4:05—certainly a better-than-average college time but far from world class.

At the end of cross-country season that fall, Kyle came into my office with a proposal. “Coach,” he said, “I feel like in track I have kind of plateaued. I’m stuck at 4:05, and I’m not getting any faster.”

“Well,” I asked, “what are we going to do about it?”

He said, “I don’t think there is one single thing I can do to cut off five seconds, but I do think there are ten things I can do that can each cut off half a second and together

will total five seconds and get me under four minutes.”

He then pulled out his list, which read something like this:

For the next three months I will:

1. *Do my morning runs*
2. *Stretch after workout*
3. *Do core five times a week*
4. *Get to bed before 11:00 p.m.*
5. *Lift weights twice a week*
6. *Do sprint drills twice a week*

The last four changes were dietary in nature:

7. *Eat breakfast every day*
8. *No more ice cream*
9. *No more diet coke*
10. *No more candy*

We all would probably benefit from those last four. After going through the list, he added, “Coach, on February 2 the track team is going to Seattle for an indoor meet, and I’m going to break four minutes for the mile.” He then turned the list into a legally binding contract by signing it at the bottom. I signed it as well, and we posted a copy on my wall and a copy in his locker.

Over the next three months I met with him regularly for his daily workouts, and he let me know how his ten small things were coming along. As we flew to Seattle that first week of February, he was brimming with confidence. Not only had he paid the price on the big things, like running eighty miles a week and never missing a practice, but he had also made the additional sacrifices to do the small things that he felt would make the ultimate difference.

On February 2, at the University of Washington indoor track, after a slow opening three laps, Kyle ran fifty-seven seconds for his last 400 meters and became the 302nd

American to break four minutes for the mile, running 3:59.16. Contrary to popular opinion, he found that sweating the small stuff was necessary to accomplish big things and get him to a whole new level. Building on his breakthrough, Kyle won the national championships in the steeplechase that next year.

My time working with Kyle Perry helped reinforce a scripture found in the Doctrine and Covenants: “Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (D&C 64:33).

So often we find ourselves looking for that big break, the huge testimony-defining experience, the job or investment that will set us for life, or the bolt of lightning and fireworks when we find Mr. or Miss Right—some of you are waiting for that, aren’t you? While those events can occur, more often than not it is by consistent, competent effort, by the small things that we pay attention to, that ultimately and eventually lead us to excellence. Consistent competence equals eventual excellence, or $c^2 = e^2$, as I sometimes say.

The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow had this in mind when he said:

*The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.*
[*The Ladder of St. Augustine* (1858), stanza 10]

I would challenge us all to take a personal inventory of some of the small things we can work on in the coming months that will help break us from the spiritual, mental, and physical plateaus on which we might currently reside.

Value Work, Effort, and Struggle

During my freshman year there was one goal that sounded like it would etch my name into athletic immortality: being named an

All-American. The glorious thing about being named first-team All-American is that from that moment on you are no longer referred to by your name alone, at least not in college. “All-American” precedes your name like a title, almost like royalty: “Prince Charles, I would like you to meet All-American Ed Eyestone,” or so I thought it would go. Further, I decided I wanted this title my freshman year. I didn’t want to wait until I was a senior.

To become All-American meant making it to the national meet and then finishing in the top six in your event. Unfortunately, cross-country season came and went without our team making it to the national meet. So too passed the indoor season. And so it would come down to the outdoor track season to determine if my All-American dreams for my freshman year would actually come true.

I was running the most exciting event in track and field. Some people mistakenly think that is the 100-meter dash. No—sorry, Usain Bolt. The most exciting event in track and field is the 10,000 meters—6.2 miles, or 25 laps of screaming intensity. Back then the qualifying time for 10,000 meters was 29:19, and during the final qualifying meet of the year, I ran 29:18 and qualified by one second. In a race that lasts as long as an episode of *The Simpsons*, I qualified by one second; I was the slowest qualifier going into the national meet. But I was ecstatic, for now if I finished in the top six, I would be an All-American my freshman year.

That year nationals were in Austin, Texas, where there was an incredible heat wave taking place. Coach Sherald James, our beloved distance coach and mentor, tried to prepare me as well as possible for the heat and humidity. Some days it was by doing long runs in two pairs of sweats during the heat of the day; other days it was by taking a stationary bicycle into the steam room and pedaling as if being pursued by a rabid dog.

When I arrived in Austin from Provo, it was like stepping onto another planet—the planet

of liquid heat, apparently. On the day of the race the temperature trackside was more than 100 degrees—a fact made painfully obvious by a temperature gauge strategically placed trackside. Although the race was postponed until 9:00 p.m., the conditions were still dangerously oppressive. The solution was a creative but improvised effort: a garden hose was attached to a nearby sprinkler, and we were counseled that as we found ourselves overcome by the heat, we were to raise our hands high above our heads, and the man on the hose would squirt us as we ran past.

The race began, and by three laps we were all raising our hands as we ran by the man with the hose. At first the water was somewhat refreshing—you've all experienced the sensation of running through the sprinklers. It kind of takes your breath away as you go through. It feels good. But after getting squirted four, five, six, and seven times, you realize that the water is lukewarm and that due to the humidity there is little to no evaporative cooling effect. Instead the lukewarm water is running down your legs and pooling in your shoes and you are sloshing around the track. And then you don't want to be squirted anymore, but the guy next to you raises his hand.

I knew I was not going to win my freshman year, but I had hope for a top-six performance, so I stuck determinedly in sixth place, keying off of a Kenyan from UTEP (the University of Texas at El Paso). Just past the 5k mark, the UTEP runner's head began to wobble. He staggered and fell to the infield. Being a caring human, my first response was to stop and render assistance to my poor fallen comrade, but instead I spiked him, and on I went. Yes! I hadn't even had to pass him; he passed out and now I was in fifth place and could almost see the All-American certificate proudly displayed above my mantle—although I don't think I had a mantle yet.

With two laps to go, it was *my* head that felt like a cherry tomato, and though I was

fighting for all I was worth, I could tell I was losing ground. In a race, you never want to look behind you, as that is a sure sign to your chasers that you are tired, but by the sound of the sloshing shoes approaching, I could tell that two runners were gaining. If both of them passed me, I would go from All-American my freshman year to almost All-American.

One of the runners passed me and the other was now on my shoulder. I dug for all that I had. It was going to come down to a kick, and that was not my forte. And then something happened: suddenly my world was in slow motion, and instead of running in a straight line like you want to do in a race, I was running a little to the left and a little to the right as I started weaving down the track. I watched as the two runners pulled away from me and my All-American dreams for my freshman year disappeared. Things were out of focus, and I was running toward a bright light. The only clear memories I have of the moments after this were of me being dragged from the track and saying, "I need to finish!" and my coach saying, "You're finished, Ed. Believe me—you're finished." Then the man with the hose intervened for one last squirt.

I came to in the training room at the University of Texas in a metal Jacuzzi tub filled with cold water and ice. Next to me was my Kenyan friend from UTEP. The doctors monitoring our conditions explained that our body core temperature had gotten so high that we had triggered a safety switch at the base of the brain that shuts off motor activity, and hopefully at that point you fall into a cool, shady oasis and survive. After about thirty minutes in the ice tub, my body core temperature returned to normal, and I was able to get up, shower, and go back to my hotel.

But I was disappointed—really almost devastated. I had done everything right. I had set a worthy goal, committed myself, worked hard to accomplish it, and sought divine intervention. And yet I had come up a lap short

of being All-American my freshman year. It would never happen.

Coach James recognized my disappointment and attempted to cheer me up by saying, “Ed, that sure was a fun race to watch. It looked like you were going to do it, and then you started weaving.”

“Great,” I thought. “Happy to have entertained you, Coach!”

Then he went on: “Ed, today you ran like a horse!”

He could still tell I was not impressed by the simile, so he explained further: “You know, you can take a good mule up in the mountains, and the mule will do a lot of work for you. You can take it hiking or hunting. But when a mule gets tired, it will stop. You can push it, you can pull it, and you can motivate it with a stick, but until it has recovered, it will go nowhere. But,” he continued, “if you have a good horse, you can run with that horse until it drops over, completely exhausted or completely dead. Today you ran like a horse.”

And you know what? That made me feel better—the fact that he thought I had given it that kind of effort. I think what my good mentor Coach James taught me at that time was that life is structured such that many times we are going to do everything possible to accomplish our goals, but the nature of life is that

sometimes, despite doing all the right things, we are going to come up a little short. But if we have done everything in our power—if we have run like a horse—then that is all that is required. We can hold our heads high. We’re going to accomplish a lot in the process.

The other takeaway from that story is that after my mission I made All-American ten times, but the fact is, I don’t cherish or remember those ten times I had success nearly as much as the one time I came close and Coach James said I ran like a horse. We often learn more from our so-called failures than from our successes.

Trust in the Divine Mentor

May we take advantage of the many mentors who surround us this year, and may we be worthy mentors to those whom we serve. May we not just take direction but may we take direction well, without taking offense. May we see the value of gradual steps in the right direction. Despite the result, let us appreciate the value of work, effort, and struggle as we run like a horse in all that we do. And may we remember that we have a Divine Mentor who loves us unconditionally and is always there to lift us when we fall. These things I testify in His name, even Jesus Christ, amen.