

PAMPHLET 65

MISSION, TEAMS, & LOYALTY

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@January 2003

I joined the Secret Service as a special agent right after I graduated from the University of Minnesota. I spent a year in Minneapolis and during that first year, I attended two lengthy training programs in Washington D.C., worked at the White House, and traveled around the world in July of 1969 as part of President Richard Nixon's protective detail.

One day in the summer of 1969 my Special Agent In charge, Myron Weinstein, told me of my transfer to Chicago. He said, "If you want to play cops and robbers, go where the robbers are." He was right. I learned more in two years in Chicago than I would have learned in 25 years in a smaller city. I started out on the check forgery squad but soon there was an open position on the counterfeit squad. I asked for the position and was selected. The counterfeit squad had eight agents.

Richard Sheridan was my hero. In his early 30s, tall, crew cut, chain smoker, a former steelworker; Dick was cynical beyond his years. He was also smart and a terrific strategist when it came to investigations and preparing a case for trial. He would hold a pencil up, lean over his desk, shake the pencil, and say, "I get them with this." I liked his attitude. He hated protective assignments and refused to transfer from Chicago. He was the office anti-hero. I imitated his style. He reminded me of a part of myself that I liked—the rebel.

Don Tucker: black, handsome, smooth talker, sharp dresser, a former football player at the University of Iowa, and a phenomenal undercover agent. Don would later become the U.S. Marshal in Phoenix, Arizona.

Axle Franzon: a Swede from Chicago, short, stocky, crew cut, physically strong, and a kind and gentle heart. Axle was the investigator of the group and could dig out facts others did not have the patience to find.

Gordon Kendall: my friend from the White House assignment, black, tall and skinny. A former agent in the IRS, I called Gordon “highpockets” because of his long legs. Gordon was funny, said he preferred a knife over a revolver, and talked fast and often.

Joe Sheehy: a burly and disheveled Irishman. At 8:00am he looked like he had worked all day. When things were slow, Joe would come into the office, take some files out of his file cabinet, spread them around his desk, put his feet up on the desk and sit back and talk, drink coffee, and smoke cigarettes. Joe was an excellent undercover agent and funny. He enjoyed a long career in the Secret Service.

Leroy Dal Porto: a young good-looking Italian from San Francisco. A former sheriff’s deputy in the San Francisco jail, he shook with laughter as he told stories about prisoner’s behavior. His daddy told Leroy, “If you want to drive a truck, drive a big one.” I’ve always remembered that. Leroy was an up and coming undercover agent who enjoyed a long career in the Secret Service.

Jimmy Antonelli: another young handsome Italian from Detroit, Leroy’s roommate, and a solid investigator. Jimmy left the Secret Service shortly after I did and had a career in the security industry.

I felt like I belonged with these men. Unlike teams today, we were not trained in group process, and we were not told we had to be a team. We didn’t have a charter or verbalized team norms. We never worked with a consultant or needed a facilitator. We didn’t talk about our feelings. We read one another’s feelings and moods and adapted accordingly. We were connected.

We shared a simple and powerful mission that allowed much to be unspoken. We protected our nation’s currency: we caught, arrested, and convicted counterfeiters. We carried guns, were after the bad guys, and often faced danger. We put ourselves at risk. We felt our work mattered, we took responsibility, and we worked hard. Our primary loyalty was to our mission. Later I carried that commitment, absent the .357 magnum, into the corporate world.

At times we worked alone. On other occasions we worked like one team or in smaller groups as the situation required. Those with experience and wisdom led when required. Novices led when things were easier. Our structure and leadership emerged from the circumstances of the moment. We were a team because the situation required us to be a team not because someone told us we

had to be because teams were the most recent organizational fad. A strong sense of purpose and core values fostered the relationships necessary for innovation and high levels of achievement.

We were principled and followed the rules (most of the time). We always told the truth even when it hurt our case. We didn't suffer fools gladly, something that would get me in trouble in the corporate world. We respected and helped each other. We minded our own business. We partied together. We protected one another. We valued and respected each other. Our relationships felt right. When we had conflicts, we worked them out ourselves--privately. We trusted each other. We had a supervisor. We didn't trust him and wouldn't let him in the group. He stayed away from us. No hollow men were on this team (see Pamphlet 64).

We gave our time and talents to one another and utilized our skills and knowledge effectively. All were more than competent. Tucker, Kendall, Sheehy, and Dal Porto worked undercover; the rest of us handled surveillance. Axle was an investigator who enjoyed laborious fact-finding. Sheridan and I were good report writers. Sheridan excelled at giving testimony and courtroom strategy. Each of us did everything and, at the same time, we played to our strengths and compensated for our weaknesses. Our diversity gave us the capabilities to handle any situation. We were fast, flexible, and innovative and found what worked in any situation. We had no formulas for success. We created plans as we carried out our mission and trusted our intuition. We worked hard and we had fun.

I liked to investigate counterfeiting cases. A good case utilized many investigative tools: investigation, interviewing, surveillance, working with informants, report writing, testifying, undercover buys, and strategizing how to manage a case. We had many cases that involved multiple defendants and millions of dollars of counterfeit money. We were loyal to our mission and to one another. If you asked one of us if another member of the squad was a good team player, we would look at you like you were crazy. The counterfeit squad was the best team I've ever been a member of. Mike Weinstein had it right: I liked playing cops and robbers in Chicago. I felt alive.

In the corporate world I was once told that I was not a good team player—I wasn't in that situation—at least not from the perspective of others on this team. My team-mates were either incompetent or unethical or both. In such a situation, my loyalty is to the purpose of the team, the values of the organization, or, lacking those, to my

own values. No one has an obligation to be loyal to the immoral, unethical, or incompetent—unless they want to collude with and become like the immoral, unethical, and incompetent—the corporate villains. Great teams have authentic members and a powerful sense of purpose. Absent that authenticity and/or sense of purpose, all the tools, tricks, and quick-fixes in the organizational development tool-kit won't make a team great and it will slip quickly into pettiness and mediocrity.

FBI agent and *Time* magazine person of the year for 2002, Coleen Rowley didn't conform or collude. She wrote a 13-page memo that told the truth about the culture of the FBI she loves. She felt threatened enough to ask for federal whistleblower protection. I read her memo. Nothing in it shocked me—either about the FBI or about any entitled, mechanical, and bureaucratic organization.

Coleen Rowley lives from her values. Many of those who attack her do not live from values; they live from power, and they generally have the power. I don't think the FBI will change much, and they will find ways to demonize and marginalize Coleen Rowley and she will quietly leave like so many before her across the organizational world—unless the silent and cowardly majority takes responsibility and stand up to the hollow men within the FBI.

Those who question agent Rowley's loyalty are wrong. She has more loyalty to the ideals of the FBI than those who criticize her. Her critics need to look in the mirror. Loyalty to our worst aspects brings about cover-ups, mediocre teams, and botched investigations. Great teams, great organizations, and a great FBI come from authentic and courageous people connected by a powerful sense of purpose.