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Stories of NFL Players doing good

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BY CHRISSY CAREW

I believe that from the time we are very young children, everyone who holds influence over our lives, for better or worse, contributes to the core of who we are – that unique spirit within each of us made up of our ideas, perceptions, motivation and sense of faith.

On the positive side are my parents. A favorite childhood memory: I am five years old, at a parade with my dad. Always a tomboy and always wanting to emulate my war-veteran father, I wore my new Army uniform. When the Army band approached, I ran into the street and marched along with them. The band-leader called me over and put me into position as leader of the parade. I was thrilled and overjoyed.

On the negative side, a small number of nuns in parochial school left me with long-lasting feelings of fear and self-doubt. In first grade, a nun convinced my classmates and me that we were all destined to go to hell. That gave me nightmares. A third-grade teacher was returning a test when she announced to the class that I had earned a zero because I wrote my nickname, Chrissy, rather than my Christian name, Christine, on the test. In defiance, I haven't used Christine since.

Two decades later came a catalyst. At the age of 23, I was watching the evening news when a report of a horrific car crash flashed on the screen. The reporter gestured to the badly mangled

car behind him, its body an accordion. He announced that although there were fatalities, he could not say the victims' names because their families hadn't yet been notified. I watched, incredulous. Suppose those same families who had not yet been notified – or who perhaps just minutes ago heard about the deaths of their loved ones – were watching this same newscast?

It was a chilling thought to me, one that kept me from falling asleep that night. At 4 AM, I got out of bed and called the station manager to ask how the network could have done something so unconscionable as to run that footage. The network representative told me that while he understood my perspective that the event represented someone's personal tragedy, this kind of footage is why people turn on the local news. Horror sells.

His answer touched off a surge of soul-searching for me. Could he be right? Was the media so insensitive to the families of those people killed in the accident simply because it's what people want to see when they turn on the news? Why couldn't there be more positive stories – stories that would inspire people and encourage them that the world is at times a good and uplifting place? Wouldn't that sell, too?

I undertook a personal campaign back then, asking everyone whose paths crossed mine whether they agreed that viewers wanted the media to cover horrible stories – or whether they would watch news broadcasts that featured upbeat accounts instead. Most people admitted they didn't know whether those stories would capture their attention in the same way. I felt crushed at what I believed to be society's overall sense of inhumanity. Unsure how I could change such a prevalent sentiment, I tried to bury my discouragement. Discouragement turned to a restlessness that took many years to resolve.

About five years ago, I reached a point in my career where I felt compelled to pause and reassess. At that time, I had worked successfully as a personal coach for ten years. I loved the work, but something was missing. In my job, I could reach out and help one person at a time, but given what a vast place the world is and how damaging it can be to so many people, that didn't seem sufficient. I wanted to touch the masses.

And yet the negative voice inside my head kept pushing me back, telling me I was an idiot for thinking I could have any kind of lasting effect on society. My heart, speaking with the pure and simple voice of my soul, said I needed to do it; my head, resounding with self-inflicted negativity, said there was no way I was capable or even worthy of making such an effort.

All my life, I've been an NFL fan. My dad was a football player and coach, my four brothers all played football, and from the time I was born, there were always football players in the house. With NFL games as a constant backdrop, I couldn't stop thinking about the idea of using NFL players as role models. I was convinced that children growing up today have a daunting lack of role models to look to as good examples of how to live a life governed by ethics and values. I

believe that we adults need to embrace and comfort our children. We need to coach them and let them see for themselves how important they are. We need to help them find their passion. We need to create opportunities for children to recognize, experience, respect and honor their talents. We need to instill in our kids the importance of serving others. Only if we do this can we expect them to follow a compelling vision of what's possible.

So I pushed past my fears and self-doubts. With the unquestioning brashness of the little girl who once led the Army band, I traveled to NFL corporate headquarters to share my vision with officials there.

And the NFL leaders listened. They heard my vision; they agreed in its merit. They suggested I approach each of the NFL's 32 teams individually and talk to their player development directors. Easy, I thought. With a 2" binder in which I'd created a sheet for each of the 32 teams, I began calling. All I had to do was communicate my excitement about using my personal coaching skills to evoke from the players their ability to be magnificent role models on and off the field.

And then I ran into a roadblock. It wasn't that the player development directors hated my idea; it was just that they didn't buy into it with the passion I believed was needed in order for me to see it through. Though some were marginally interested, as a body they were committed to sticking with the NFL's internal programs, which emphasize personal growth and development against a backdrop of professional football. They didn't think their players had time alongside that program to help me with what I wanted to do.

I felt as if my glorious vision had been quashed. It was discouraging. I indulged in some self-pity and a sense of defeat.

But then I stopped feeling sorry for myself and took a more positive tack. Brainstorming with a colleague, I decided to itemize the points I'd distilled thus far from the project, and together we came up with this list:

1. There are a lot of magnificent role models in the NFL, but few know about their successes.
2. The NFL may have the biggest stage in the world.
3. If these wonderful players were on that stage, they could make this world a better place, especially for kids.
4. This is the work that has been waiting for me all along – get these wonderful players on their worldwide stage. Focus on being the catalyst and the coaching will follow.

Taking a step back from that initial wave of idealistic passion, reorganizing my thoughts and marshalling my energy gave the project the boost it needed get finally get under way. This is how Insightful Player was born. I reached out to all the teams again, but this time I went through

their PR departments. I proposed writing feature stories about their high-integrity players for the sole purpose of lifting the spirit of their worldwide audience, especially kids. A lot of teams were excited by this vision. A few insisted I have placement for these stories before they would allow me access to their players. And a few teams never responded to my attempts at contact.

At this point, I've profiled twenty-two players as part of the Insightful Player project. Each of those men is a remarkable human being and a magnificent role model. Many of them believe firmly in the value of telling their stories, especially those that involve overcoming hardships, in hopes of helping today's youth see their way to a clearer path to success. Several of them are now using the same skills of perseverance and commitment developed as football players to commit their lives to a greater purpose by starting a charitable foundation or community outreach program.

Already, I myself have learned so much from these players. The farther I get into the Insightful Player campaign, the more I believe my original vision has tremendous potential: to get this message to a much wider audience. It's that belief that carries me onward as I promote what I now believe to be my life's work. I still think back to that night thirty years ago when I watched the evening news and thought that surely we can prosper as a society from being exposed to more positive messages, and this is how I hope to make that happen.

Chrissy Carew is Founder and Head Coach of Insightful Player, LLC. The Insightful Player™ campaign is an uplifting series of stories, interviews and programs featuring high integrity people such as current and former NFL players. Each player shares their personal message of hope to inspire all, especially kids.

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