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College-Era Lessons in Values That Lasted a Lifetime

— RITCH K. EICH, THOUSAND OAKS, CALIFORNIA, USA

Austrian born and German educated Peter Drucker astutely grasped that principled leaders have a responsibility to mentor and develop future leaders, to “be a teacher,” not necessarily in a classroom setting but rather by articulating their vision, mission and goals; by being visible within the organization; revealing their humanity; freely acknowledging they don’t have all the answers; listening attentively; and inspiring their associates to be creative risk takers.¹ The late U. S. Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana was one who took the work of the internationally renowned Drucker, whom many referred to as “the father of management,” to heart.

Lugar was not only a successful and highly respected politician but also a global leader who saw it as part of his mission to help youth better understand their future and to make our world a safer place. For example, he ensured that his student interns in Washington D.C. were able to observe important Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings in person. He took them jogging around D.C. at noon so the interns could see and learn more about the many iconic landmarks and monuments in our nation’s capital. Lugar established an academy for high school juniors so they would be exposed to, and learn from, experts in national and international affairs. Lugar understood that actions speak louder than words and for college students, learning is enhanced by hands-on experience.

These notions crossed my mind on Monday morning, June 20, 2022, as I began to watch live coverage of the parade on Market Street in San Francisco celebrating the Golden State Warriors fourth National Basketball Association (NBA) championship in eight years. I found my mind wandering back some 60 years to my college years when one of my mentors named Bob Dean was my Richard Lugar.

As a college sophomore, I had pledged the Cal Theta chapter of the Sigma Phi Epsilon national fraternity, a decision that had a major impact on my life. Our fraternity was a campus leader in practically every way imaginable at that time. Ours was a “team” with a moral center where brothers often unselfishly helped one another and the older members served as positive role models.

My fraternity brothers and I frequently had the highest collective grade point average of any fraternity house. Several of us played varsity sports and we dominated key student government leadership positions. Most importantly, we behaved and did not cause trouble.

But I digress. Bob Dean was one of our SigEp brothers and he proposed to the San Francisco Warriors front office that our fraternity sponsor a San Francisco Warriors regular season NBA game at Sacramento High School’s gym in December 1963. The Warriors agreed, and due to

¹ Tichy, N. M., & Cohen, E. B. (1997). *The leadership engine: how winning companies build leaders at every level*. New York, HarperBusiness.

Dean's vision, passion and inspiration and the hard work of a group of brothers mentioned later in this article, there was standing room only on game night. Media coverage of the game was so positive and widespread that the Warriors' management hired Dean to work in their publicity office. Our fraternity sponsored two more games in December of 1964 and 1965 which were also highly successful. Bob Dean eventually was named publicity director for the NBA team and he worked seven years creatively promoting them. He took another job across the Bay in 1971.

The Warriors franchise, founded in Philadelphia in 1946, moved to San Francisco in 1962, the year I went away to college. The former Philadelphia Warriors then became the San Francisco Warriors and maintained that name until 1971, when their name was changed to the Golden State Warriors and they played most of their games in Oakland. Interestingly, the Warriors are the only NBA team that does not have the name of their city or state in their name.² But for me, having been born in San Francisco during World War II, and my family, we always called San Francisco "The City" and never "Frisco."



Sacramento High School, Courtesy, Center for Sacramento History and author, circa 1960s

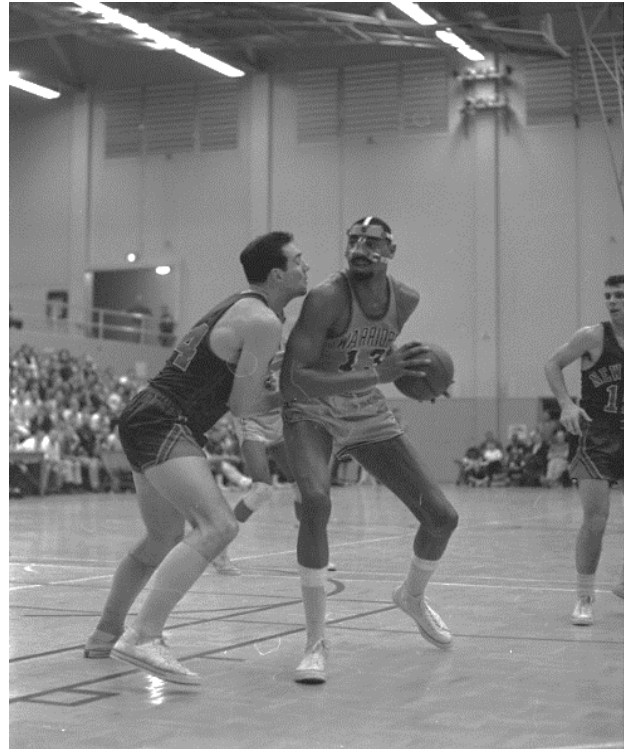
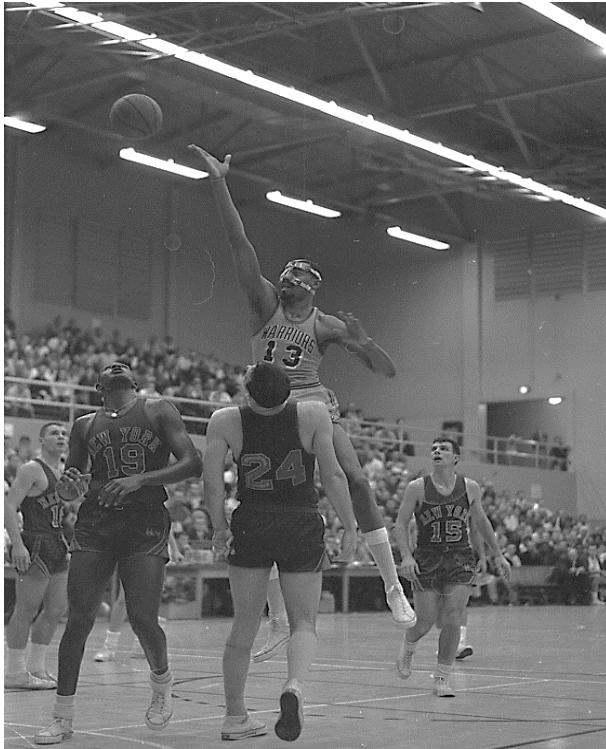
In 2010, the Warriors' management authorized the redesign of an earlier version of "The City" logo highlighting the eastern span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. They also simplified their royal blue and gold colors at the same time.³

The SigEp fraternity's sponsorship of three regular season NBA games in Sacramento in 1963, 1964, and 1965 helped the professional basketball franchise raise its profile in Northern California. Attendance at each game was high – nearly 3,000 fans or more packed into the

² History of the Golden State Warriors. (2022, July 15). In Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_State_Warriors

³ *Ibid.*

confining high school gym. Bear in mind that the NBA's Sacramento Kings first season in Sacramento was not until 1985.



Wilt Chamberlain's famous "finger roll" caught by Sacramento Bee photographer Harlin Smith during San Francisco Warriors' regular season NBA game played at Sacramento High School against the New York Knicks, Dec. 22, 1964. (Center for Sacramento History, Smith 12-22-64 A) (above, left)

San Francisco Warriors' center Wilt Chamberlain, with his protective mask, shown in losing effort against the NY Knicks at Sacramento High School's gym, Dec. 22, 1964. (Center for Sacramento History, Smith 12-22-64 B) (above, right)

San Francisco Warriors best the Detroit Pistons in final game of three annual, regular season NBA games played each December in 1963, 1964, and 1965 at Sacramento High School. Sacramento Bee photographer Dick Gilmore captured this action before a sell-out crowd. (Center for Sacramento History, Gilmore 12-22-65 A) (left)

Sacramento High School's gym was the site of three annual, regular-season NBA games from 1963 - 1965 featuring the San Francisco Warriors. The Warriors (now the Golden State Warriors) played the St. Louis Hawks, the New York Knicks, and the Detroit Pistons in the

series. The contests were sponsored by the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity at Sacramento State College (now California State University, Sacramento).

As the *Sacramento Bee's* sports reporter Marco Smolich wrote in his December 18, 1963 newspaper account of the San Francisco Warriors' victory over the St. Louis Hawks, "It was the first NBA contest played in Sacramento. And, after last night's standing room only turnout for the Sigma Phi Epsilon sponsored contest, don't be surprised to see the Warriors back next season."

Most of the San Francisco Warriors "home games" were played at the Cow Palace in Daly City just south of San Francisco although they also played some games in Oakland, San Jose, Bakersfield, Fresno, Richmond and, of course, Sacramento, and elsewhere.

The SigEp game sponsorship initiative launched in coordination with Bob Dean was led by Brother Mike Zirkle and included Brothers Jeff Raimundo, Ken Stuart, Dave White, Reggie Page, Wayne Stokes, Terry Filliman, and others.

The group of mostly 18 to 20-year-old college students learned many valuable real-world lessons including how to manage and sell tickets as well as gaining an early primer on corporate sponsorships. Fraternity brothers were exposed to the nitty-gritty of grass roots community relations, merchandising, marketing, and basketball operations. Many of us enjoyed a rare opportunity to spend some time with NBA stars like Warriors Wilt Chamberlain, Nate Thurmond, Al Attles, Tom Meshery, Rick Barry, and Guy Rogers; Hawks stars Bob Pettit and Cliff Hagan; and Pistons' greats Dave Debusschere and Tom Van Arsdale.

The 7'1" Chamberlain was a nearly unstoppable offensive force that led the league to make many rule changes as he set numerous NBA records including, scoring 4,000 points in a single season, 100 points in a single game, and other offensive feats during his 14 seasons of play. But, Chamberlain's nemesis, the late Boston Celtics center Bill Russell, is among my favorite leaders.

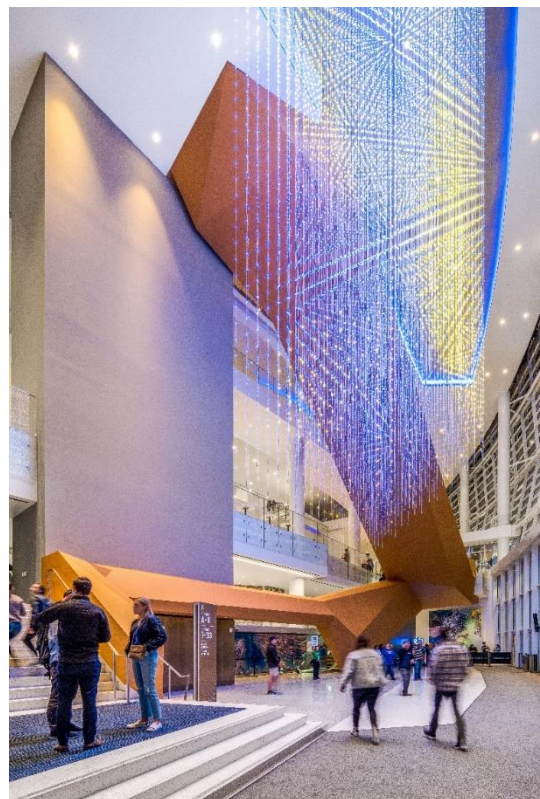
The five-time NBA MVP and 12-time All-Star was the cornerstone of the Celtics' dynasty in the 60s. In his 13 seasons, he and his teammates won 11 NBA championships. I had the opportunity to see Bill Russell and his teammate K.C. Jones play earlier when they were in college at the University of San Francisco. The Dons were in the first round of the NCAA Tournament in March, 1955 at the Cow Palace where they destroyed West Texas A & M. Russell was the USF captain – one of three Black starters on the team – all of whom had to deal with racism when on the road and sometimes at home in San Francisco. But beyond his enormous basketball feats (which included winning the U.S. Olympic Gold Medal in the 1956 Melbourne, Australia Games), Russell, the fast-footed defensive magician who frustrated many an opponent by blocking their shots and then quickly passing the ball to initiate a fast break, was an early, outspoken advocate for social justice.

Russell was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011 by President Barack Obama who said, *"When Bill Russell was in junior high, he was cut from his basketball team. (Laughter.) He got better after that. (Laughter.) He led the University of San Francisco to two championships. In 13 seasons with the Boston Celtics, he won 11 championships – a record unmatched in any sport. Won two while also serving as the team's coach. And so happens, he also was the first African American ever to hold such a position as a coach in a Major*

League sports team of any sort. More than any athlete of his era, Bill Russell came to define the word ‘winner.’”

And yet, whenever someone looks up at all 6’9” of Bill Russell – I just did – (laughter) – I always feel small next to him – and asks, “Are you a basketball player?” – surprisingly, he gets this more than you think, this question – (laughter) – he says, “No.” He says, “That’s what I do, that’s not what I am. I’m not a basketball player. I am a man who plays basketball.”

Bill Russell, the man, is someone who stood up for the rights and dignity of all men. He marched with King; he stood by Ali. When a restaurant refused to serve the black Celtics, he refused to play in the scheduled game. He endured insults and vandalism, but he kept on focusing on making the teammates who he loved better players, and made possible the success of so many who would follow. And I hope that one day, in the streets of Boston, children will look up at a statue built not only to Bill Russell the player, but Bill Russell the man.”⁴



As one might expect, after graduation, my fraternity brothers and I all went in many different directions. Some became journalists, others became healthcare administrators, several practiced law, while others became

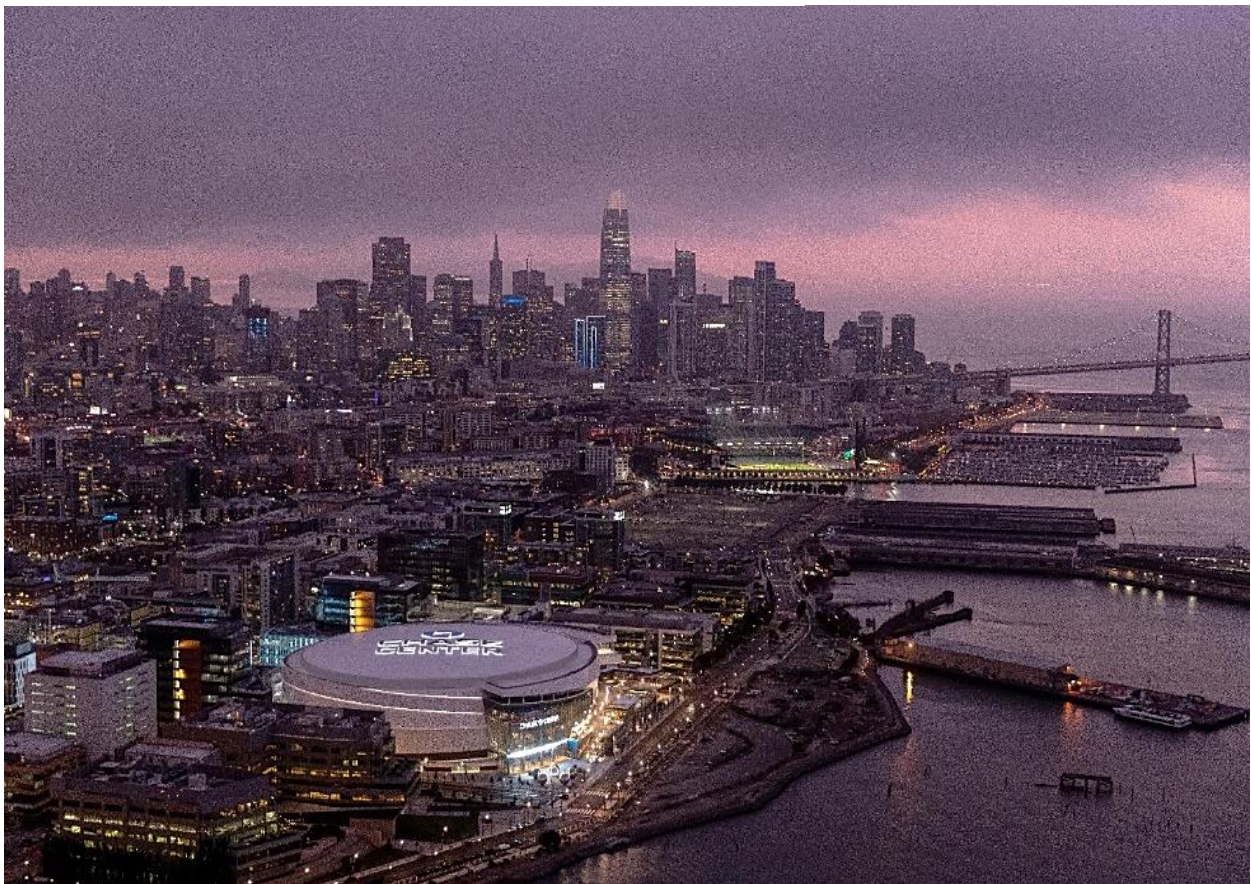
⁴ Barack Obama’s White House Remarks at the 2011 Presidential Medal of Freedom Ceremony honoring Bill Russell and other recipients.



*Warriors' San Francisco arena, the Chase Center, near the city's waterfront.
Courtesy, Jason O'Rear/Golden State Warriors; All Warriors' photos courtesy of
Yoyo Murphy, Senior VP, Government & Community Relations, GSW*

engineers, teachers, principals, or business professionals. A number of us served in the military. I firmly believe what drew us together and motivated us to strive for excellence was a clear sense of values and good-natured fellowship. Community service was an important part of those values.

We are grateful that the Warriors management allowed our fraternity to help promote the franchise early in its San Francisco-headquartered days. But make no mistake it was SigEp and Sac State alumnus



Bob Dean's multiple skills and enthusiasm that made this trilogy of games possible. In her August 15, 2000 Sacramento Bee NewsBank column, Paula Thorpe wrote that Bob Dean was

“the man responsible for bringing the first NBA game to Sacramento.” Bob was an energetic, industrious, values-driven, and easily liked man who loved sports.

The Warriors team is in good hands with the principled leadership of Head Coach Steve Kerr, who Etan Thomas of the Guardian called “the moral compass at the heart of the Golden State Warriors.” As anyone who has worked in principled organizations knows, in the relationship between supervisor and associate, pastor and congregant or between coach and player, trust forms the bedrock of the union. Coach Steve Kerr’s stands on gun violence and other important national issues is as admirable as it is genuine. Kerr’s inspired, candid and values-driven leadership is all too rare in sports, politics and business today. His humility, courage and outspokenness are a beacon of light and hope in today’s world.

From the 1960s to the 1990s

Little did I know at the time that my fraternity involvement would help prepare me for larger leadership roles to follow.

When I was being courted for the position of vice president of public relations at Blue Shield of California in San Francisco, I realized the company would face some significant challenges and major changes. Why? Large numbers of Californians did not have health insurance. There were more state regulations of healthcare organizations, particularly HMOs, and there were more lawsuits, too, due to growing consumer anger at managed care plans. Also, the industry was growing more complex.

Despite being the largest not-for-profit healthcare company headquartered in San Francisco and its 100+ year history, Blue Shield needed to accomplish several new goals. It needed to enhance the company’s brand by being recognized as delivering superior value to customers. It needed to heighten community outreach through domestic violence prevention programs (the company’s core cause). Blue Shield needed to leverage a progressive image of the new leadership team in building a personalized consumer experience, and actively support governmental initiatives.

Shortly after assuming my new role as chief of public affairs, I was invited to a memorable community gathering at Pacific Bell Park (now Oracle Park), home of the San Francisco Giants. While sitting behind the Giants’ dugout, I scanned the stadium, observing which corporations had signs on the scoreboard, outfield fence and the upper deck. Noticeably absent was Blue Shield of California. At the conclusion of the ballpark event sponsored by the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau, I was heading to the exit through a tunnel under the ballpark and I quickly noticed a gentleman walking toward me. No one else was around as he approached and my heart raced when I realized it was baseball Hall of Famer Willie Mays, the “Say Hey Kid,” a ball player I had long idolized! He stopped, said hello, we shook hands, and exchanged a few words. When I left the stadium and walked back to my office at Blue Shield headquarters, I think I floated all the way there.

Back at the office, I asked the community relations leader on my staff, a wonderful person named Cleopatra Vaughns, why our company was not represented in the ballpark. She explained that she had broached this opportunity with the C-suite but they declined to participate which she, too, thought was shortsighted. We saw many potential benefits by being associated with the Giants in their beautiful new ballpark, a hallmark of private-public partnerships and one enormously popular with Bay Area businesses and sports fans. The fact

that the company's core cause was domestic violence prevention, a problem obviously present in college and professional sports, seemed like a good fit (and a highly visible one at that) to draw additional resources to the challenge of combating domestic abuse. I asked Cleopatra to help me put this issue back on the table by arranging for the two of us to meet with Giants' front office executives at Pac Bell Park. Little did I know at that time how much I would come to know, respect, and appreciate Giants Vice President for Sales and Marketing (now Executive Vice President, Business Operations) Mario Alioto.

I was aware of many of the ball club's splendid community outreach activities, including its generous support of the city's chamber of commerce program for identifying and growing new leaders, a vibrant program called *Leadership San Francisco* (my wife, Joan, who worked in the



Photos of Oracle Park and immediate surroundings, home of the San Francisco Giants Baseball Club (Courtesy, Chris Christensen, Creator, Amateur Traveler blog and podcast; and Visitors Guide to Oracle Park); Blue Shield of California signage beyond left field (Courtesy, Jason Pearl, Senior Vice President, Partnerships and Business Development, San Francisco Giants Baseball Club); Courtesy, Mario Alioto



USF School of Law, and I would graduate from that program in different classes a few years later). Established in 1985, *Leadership San Francisco* operates under the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Foundation. *Leadership San Francisco* is an organization dedicated to educating and developing community trustees who will help to strengthen and transform their community. The signature program is a unique opportunity for participants to increase their understanding of San Francisco's complex social and economic issues. Participants are exposed to the challenges facing San Francisco's leaders and learn how they may respond to those community concerns. Dianne Easton, a highly skilled fourth-generation San Franciscan, has managed *Leadership San Francisco* for the past 34 years. She is passionate about the organization and deeply committed to the community.

Shuttle diplomacy is an apt name for what occurred next, as I would meet with Mario at the ballpark and then return with a proposal to be discussed in the C-suite at Blue Shield. Sometimes, he would come to Blue Shield headquarters. This process ensued for several weeks before the leadership of Blue Shield finally agreed to a five-year sponsorship. Together, Mario and I mapped out a co-branding strategy that would enable Blue Shield and the Giants to make a positive impact on domestic violence prevention throughout California and bring us new business.

Today, I am proud that this partnership launched in 1999 has been renewed many times over and that women – so often hurt by domestic violence – were initially at the heart of this enduring partnership.

The sponsorship with the San Francisco Giants enabled Blue Shield's leadership to "play in the big leagues" with other corporate leaders throughout the Bay Area and beyond. It provided the company with top billing signage in an extremely popular venue and enabled Blue Shield's board members, employees, brokers, and others to attend various functions at 24 Willie Mays Plaza. Most importantly, we worked together to raise awareness of domestic violence by hosting domestic violence prevention programs in the ballpark and elsewhere. We conducted employer training throughout California, showcasing the company's principal outreach initiative, Blue Shield Against Violence. It was an initiative that has had an impact.

The seeds for my work at Blue Shield on this initiative with the Giants were planted during my high school and college years when I learned the value of hard work, teamwork, helping others, and the importance of having goals larger than my personal wants or needs. My fraternity's sponsorship of the three San Francisco Warriors NBA regular season games, my experiences as a student government leader and a college athlete, and my annual summer work in the peach orchards of Northern California all contributed to making me a better person later in life.

Three decades later, these earlier lessons came back to me full circle and despite the passage of time, their importance has not diminished.

Acknowledgement

For those of us who are authors, we are often blessed with friends who will help us tell a story accurately. I believe it was Frederick R. Barnard (Printer's Ink, December, 1921) who said "a picture is worth a thousand words." Mario Alioto, Chris Christensen, Yoyo Murphy and Jason Pearl (both graduates of *Leadership San Francisco*), Dianne Easton, Noel Harris, Nicholas Piontek, and James Scott were instrumental in helping me secure several photographs for this article. To them I extend my sincerest thanks.

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