

## What If An 8th-Grader Walked Into Your Credit Union?

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By Ron Schmidt

A few weeks ago I was sitting with three 8<sup>th</sup> graders who I mentor in an inner city charter school. One of the kids had recently shadowed at an all-boys Catholic high school. He instantly decided it was the school for him.

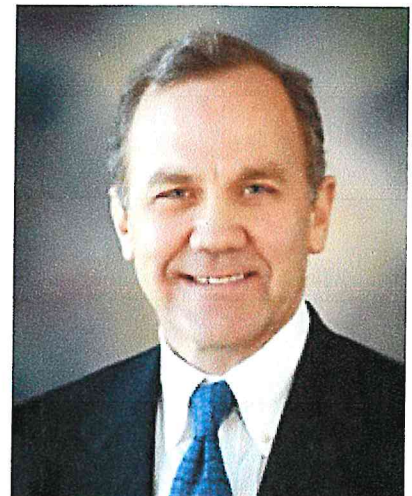
When I asked him why he liked the school, he explained that he was acknowledged by the first person he saw upon entering the building and again by the first teacher he encountered. In the classroom he saw classmates helping each other learn and a teacher who was engaged with every kid in the classroom, not just the smartest. He was convinced that he had to attend this school.

Let me back up, this is an inner city African-American kid from an all-African-American middle school wanting to be a part of a school that probably is only 5-6% black. The school is headed by a former Harvard University football coach and their football team won the big school state title in Ohio last year. Oh, and its academic ranking is near the top. So does it surprise you that a successful school like this can focus its attention on some inner city kid walking in the door? This question comes back to the basics the school's culture and focus.

Are there teachable moments we can learn from this school that can shed some light on how you do business? With this in mind, it's worth considering recent newsworthy events that relate to the culture and focus of business.

### **Is it Really a Win if They Cheated?**

VW rigged their engines to hide carbon emissions. Reported in *The New York Times*, "the company's manipulation of pollution control systems on 11-million cars enabled them to pass emissions control tests in laboratory settings, but allowed



the cars on the road to emit up to 40 times the allowable limits on nitrogen oxides, a pollutant that can damage lungs.” Martin Winterkorn, their chief executive who resigned, was known for setting ambitious goals. “Employees were afraid to admit to Mr. Winterkorn that they could not meet the goals, and decided to cheat.” VW cheated the environment.

Next Honda is dropping the airbag maker Takata who misrepresented and manipulated test data. “Eight deaths and over 100 injuries have been linked to the defective airbags, whose metal casings, called an inflator, can rupture violently, sending shards flying into the passenger cabin,” as reported in *The New York Times*, which can affect more than 19 million cars in the U.S. and millions more abroad. “Delay, misdirection and refusal to acknowledge the truth allowed a serious problem to become a massive crisis,” stated Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. “When we first brought this issue to light, there was a lot of denial on the part of Takata.” Takata cheated Honda and its customers.

And late last year a fund manager at BlackRock in London, Jonathan Burrows, cheated on his train fares to the tune of \$67,240 and his 20-year career in finance is ended. Burrows cheated the commuter train service.

At Amazon “a woman who had breast cancer was told that she was put on a ‘performance improvement plan’ – Amazon code for ‘you’re in danger of being fired’ – because ‘difficulties’ in her ‘personal life’ had interfered with fulfilling her work goals,” as reported in *The New York Times* last summer. And “the mother of a stillborn child soon left Amazon, ‘I had just experienced the most devastating event in my life’ only to be told her performance would be monitored ‘to make sure my focus stayed on my job.’” Amazon cheated the humanity of its employees.

### **What about Your Organization?**

So if an 8<sup>th</sup> grader walked into your business today, what stories would she hear from your members and employees? What’s the collaboration amongst your employees? Do they really play as a team or do they “manage up” to protect themselves? What actions does your culture reward and how are they represented on the scoreboard? Are you winning today – at the expense of your employees and members? Is your championship built on character or cheating?

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