



Don't Go It Alone

By:
Joe Tye

Paul's elation barely lasted till he got out of the parking lot. His father had bailed him out, but even so, within a few months he'd be back in the same boat. Worse, he would be living with a sense of obligation that he might never be able to pay off.

Franco's was a cozy Italian place near the college. It was a popular spot for business lunches because the food was good, and it was one of the few places downtown that was quiet enough for you to have a serious conversation. Phyllis was already there at a window table.

They both ordered iced tea and the daily special. Phyllis spoke first. "Marty Weatherford tells me you play

racquetball. We should play sometime."

"I play, but I'm not very good at it."

"That's not what Marty says."

"How do you know Marty?"

"Before he joined First National, he was my banker at Bank-Star. Nice guy, isn't he?"

What else did he tell you about me, or my school? Paul wanted to ask. "We're both on tight schedules, so we should probably get down to business."

Phyllis cleared her throat and twisted her wedding ring. It was the first time he'd noticed it, but he was certain that Phyllis, the master networker, knew *his* wife's birthday, and probably even her shoe size.

"You might already know that our recent fund-raising campaign was very successful."
"That hurts." Paul smiled.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it to be invidious. The truth is, sometimes having too much money can bring even bigger problems than not having enough."

“I’d sure like to experience that myself. Do you suppose the Community Foundation would give me a grant to study the problem of having too much money?”

Phyllis smiled. “Why not?”

Paul returned the smile. “What shall we call it? How about ‘A Proposal to Study the Effects of Unearned Affluence on Middle-Aged Males’?”

Phyllis shook her head, still smiling. “Just because you don’t have it doesn’t mean you haven’t earned it. Life’s not always fair that way.” The waiter laid out their spaghetti, and Paul ate while Phyllis talked.

“Part of the reason we’ve been so successful with our fund-raising is that we’ve got some new people on our board, real movers and shakers. They want a new vision, big plans for the future. They’re really pushing me on it. You know, I’m a pretty good manager, and I really love what I do. But I also know my limits. I’m not a visionary leader. I leave that for people like you.”

SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE BY DOING WHAT YOU’RE GOOD AT AND GETTING HELP FOR WHAT YOU’RE NOT GOOD AT.

Paul twirled his spaghetti. “Well, I’m not sure if I’m a visionary leader, but lately I’ve also been learning a lot about my limitations. For example, I’m a damn lousy manager.”

“You want my honest opinion, Paul? Watching you try to manage that school is like watching someone buy a Ferrari and then use it to drive to the corner market. I know you love those kids, but for you to be balancing the checkbook is a waste of God-given talent. You inspire people, Paul, and you have vision. The world’s got plenty of managers. We need more leaders. There are plenty of troubled kids to go around. We ought to be working together, not fighting all the time.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“Well, it’s just an idea, but if we created a new corporation to oversee both schools, perhaps we could complement each other. I can run the business side, and you can go back to being a visionary and an activist. I think my board would go for it if you agree.”

Paul stabbed at the lemon in his iced tea with a straw. “So what do you want to tell your board tonight?”

“Only that you and I talked and, if you agree, that you’re open to exploring the possibilities.”

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Paul thought about what Rafe had told him, how ignorance breeds fear and fear creates enemies. “Tell your board that I’m not only open to exploring the possibilities, I’m excited about it.”