

CaIU

I can tell I'm at a school because I was given an assignment for today's Mission Day XI. By the way, I just love roman numerals. I have a bunch of them on a few rings I won.

Part of my assignment is to express what Philanthropy means to me.

First of all, the word is too long, and too hard to pronounce.

Raising money is hard enough without using a big word for it. May I suggest you adopt the Jerry McGuire mantra and just shout "Show me the Money"!!!

Now, that may have been my answer when I was an unprepared student, but I did a little research for this assignment and I'll share the definition that I like.

I believe that Philanthropy is an idea, --an event, -- or an action, that is done to better humanity, and usually involves some sacrifice, as opposed to being done for a profit motive. Seems pretty simple to understand but it has a lot of connotations.

The words “an event or action that is done to better humanity and usually involves some sacrifice” cause me to think of heroes, -- and not sports heroes.

I ask you all to be mindful of -- and to honor those ultimate heroes who have sacrificed -- are sacrificing -- and will sacrifice -- by putting themselves in harm’s way:

- So that we are able to enjoy our freedoms and rights,
- So that we are able to make humanity better, and
- So that we are allowed to gather at events like this to develop relationships, to donate our time, to develop plans, to seek contributions, and to fund endowments for the benefit of CalU.

I love heroes; I’ll bet there are several here today. Heroes must have courage and conviction.

John F. Kennedy said, “...without belittling the courage with which men have died, we should not forget those acts of courage with which men...have lived... A man does what he must – in spite of personal consequences and pressures – and that is the basis of all human morality.” (JFK, Profiles in Courage)

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandies said, *“Those who won our independence believed that the final goal was to make men free to develop their dreams.... They valued liberty both as an end and a means. They believed liberty to be the secret of happiness and courage to be the secret of liberty.*

** Philanthropy also means you can be a hero when you make the effort or act on the inclination to increase the well-being, and dreams of humankind; as by charitable aid or donations.

It is also involves the love of mankind in general.

Here today, it applies to an event or actions that betters California University of Pennsylvania, and will involve some sacrifice, and maybe courage.

And you in the audience, you are being, -- or readying to be -- Philanthropic just by your attendance and efforts today.

Another part of my assignment today is to share experiences as a former player for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Well, I have been given a short amount of time today, and the experiences are many and great, and telling could be quite

lengthy, -- and likely - since you have been here all day - my stories would be better endured if we were all at a local pub.

But let me see if I can tie a few things together within the Mission Day XI context.

As a former player, I am:

- Proud to have been a Pittsburgh Steeler,
- Proud of my teammates, my coaches and my accomplishments,
- Thankful that there is a Steeler Nation that puts us all on a pedestal,
- Glad that I have made Pittsburgh my home, and
- Thankful for all that the Pittsburgh Steelers, the fans and the community have done and do for me.

Because of these things, I am more willing to help my former teammates, current players, the Steelers organization, their extended families and the surrounding communities however I can. And they are willing to help me.

I have contributed funds to my alma maters, although I do not have a foundation funded from my football salary like many of today's multi-millionaire players.

And I think I should note it is harder for me to not participate or not contribute when asked in person or by phone by someone I know.

The Steelers make great efforts to keep former Steelers in touch with the team, their teammates, their fans and their legacy.

Steeler alumni are frequently asked to support charities and community events sponsored by the team.

Steeler alumni readily and frequently participate in philanthropic events on behalf of the team and also for the benefit of the community.

The team has hosted reunion events where players from near and far are brought to Pittsburgh and are able to share old stories and new; and also reunite with the fans.

There is one particular annual event that I think provides a tremendous fulcrum in developing strong Steeler organizational

bonds, the highest standards, and the willingness to help out when needed.

Each year, the week after the NFL draft, the Steelers bring their draft picks and free agents into Pittsburgh.

The rookies are given their first taste of the coaches, staff, organization, playbook, workouts and practices.

On Friday night there is a private dinner that all rookies attend, along with the coaches, a couple senior staff members and Dan and Art Rooney.

Additionally, about 20 former players are in attendance, usually two or three at each table of rookies. The rookies are typically very quiet, and I would say somewhat in awe because many of the former players have multiple super bowl rings, hall of fame and all-pro credentials.

And many alumni are in awe of the rookies because several of them will soon be signing contracts with many more zeroes than any of us could have imagined decades ago.

After dinner, each former player is introduced with a short summary of each player's contribution to the team and their current role in the community.

Coach Tomlin finishes the evening with a short speech. A portion of his speech addresses the strength of the franchise, its history of success over the last four decades, its tremendous fan base, and its well-run front office.

He then tells the rookies that the current players and coaches stand on the shoulders of the former players and coaches. And without the alumni's contributions, the opportunity they are being given might never have occurred.

He challenges the rookies to add to the six super bowl trophies that they walk by every time they enter the practice facility. Coach Tomlin acknowledges that some of the bedrock and building blocks of a great team are sitting amongst them, and he challenges each rookie to be a building block, and shoulder the responsibility that may be passed on to them.

So where does that leave each of you. Whose shoulders will you stand on, and whom will you shoulder?

There is one last thing I would like to share with you.

I am from the flatlands of Illinois and my family and friends out there ask me how I am treated as a former Steeler; they want to know what the fans are like.

Here's how it works.

For the most part, I am not readily recognized as a former Steeler with four Super Bowl rings. Maybe I should have grown my hair like Palamalu.

But it is always a treat for me when someone I have met and am speaking with realizes that I was one of those Steelers.

And then a sparkle appears in this person's eyes, and this person stands a little taller, looks at me a little closer, and a smile comes to his or her face.

It's not about meeting me.

It's about this person remembering that era of Steeler football, when the City of Pittsburgh shed itself of its Same Old Steelers Losers' image amid the collapse of Pittsburgh's steel industry and overall economy.

He or she is not remembering the tough times.

This person is remembering the attention, pride and excitement that the Pittsburgh Steelers brought into his or her life -- and he or she owns it with us forever.

It is the memory of the ascent and crowning of Pittsburgh as the City of Champions and the beginnings of the Steeler Nation.

And that sparkle in that person's eyes tells me that in the treasure chest of this Steeler fan's heart, I am one of the gems; and I am treated like royalty.

So, you Jerry McGuires out there, it's time - time to make the effort -- time to stand a little taller -- time to broaden those shoulders, -- and time to see what you can do today and tomorrow -- to someday find that sparkle in someone's eyes -- and also to be proud and thankful of your efforts for California University of Pennsylvania.