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UH 208

3/30/2022

Informational Interview Report

For my informational interview, I chose to interview my wife's uncle, Chris Pace, who is a public accountant. I had met him twice before, once at our wedding and once at Thanksgiving, but I had not had the chance to really get to know him. However, I heard many stories from my wife and my mother-in-law about his wild nature, as well as his intelligence and his time spent serving in the marines. My curiosity was piqued, and when I had the opportunity to pick someone to interview, I immediately thought of him.

As I spoke to Chris, I got to know a distinct person from the one I had heard stories about. His family members tended to exaggerate his accomplishments, or perhaps he tended to downplay them. Maybe both of those things are true! Either way, it was apparent that Chris is a humble man, who sees his accomplishments as the natural consequences of his work, rather than a measure of his worth. On the other side of the coin, he sees his past failures as the consequences of inaction and does not let them affect him negatively. I was particularly impressed by this quality, and how it seemed to allow him to be at peace with what he has achieved.

Chris grew up in Mississippi and was one of those kids who never really had to try too hard in school. He consistently got A's but admitted that he never really learned how to learn. As he began attending Ole Miss, majoring in math and economics, he saw this become a

problem, and his study habits began to take a toll. His grades suffered, but it served as a wake-up call, and he began to focus on organizing himself.

Throughout the several years before this point in his life, Chris had considered military service several times. After witnessing events like the September 11th attacks and the commencement of the war in Iraq, he strongly considered enlisting, but for various reasons, he put it off. However, after his freshman year of college, he was inspired by Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis McComber," a story about what happens to someone who never finds the courage to truly become a man. He decided to join the marines, and decided to not tell his parents, until he stopped by his home on the way to enlist, and let his parents know once it was too late to stop him. Although it may have seemed like an impulsive move to his family, it was one of the most thought-out and deliberate decisions of his life.

Chris shares few specific details about his military service. He told me that he feels he has lived 3 or 4 different lives, and it seems he tends to keep those lives separated to a degree. He was able to share, however, some of the ways that he made the most out of his return to college after his 4 and a half years of active duty. While it is true that he learned a great amount of discipline and work ethic in that time, the lesson he emphasized the most was "learning how to learn." During his time studying in the military, anybody failing in their studies was seen as the consequence of a lack of effort. It was considered that anybody would have success if they invested the necessary time and work to learn the material. I think this is where he gained that valuable perspective that I mentioned in the beginning of this essay.

As I mentioned before, college became much easier for Chris after his time in the military, but that was not the only reason that he gave for that occurrence. The other major

motivation for him was the responsibility he had for his family, as he had gotten married in the time following his return from active duty. As he told me, it was a lot easier to hold himself accountable for his effort because he was not just responsible for himself anymore, but for the wellbeing of his family. This responsibility was ultimately what led him to get his second bachelor's degree, as well as his master's in accounting, which had a very high job-placement rate at Ole Miss.

Chris told me during our interview about the 4 most important steps that led him to succeed in college. Although they may seem basic, they have roots in very important principles that truly can guarantee a more successful experience for anyone. They are as follows:

1. Never miss a class (If you never miss anything, you will never miss anything!)
2. Sit on the front row (The people on the front row are the ones who want to learn the most. Putting those people around you will help you accomplish more.)
3. Talk to your professors (You want them to recognize you when you ask for help.)
4. Do all your homework, every time (Chris did each homework assignment twice.)

The most impressive thing about his 3 degrees is that he earned them all in a timeframe of 36 months after returning from duty, to have the tuition covered by the G.I. bill. It took an unbelievable amount of perseverance and hard work to do so, and he had to beg his university to let him take more classes than they normally would have allowed. His ambition, fed by his love for learning and an immense devotion to his family, allowed him to accomplish great things in his education.

Despite all his hard work to graduate within that short window, Chris is bored. Public accounting can change quickly, but he has felt a stark contrast between the progress he felt

while he was in school and the relative stillness of his professional career. He still strives to learn, however. He has been applying for jobs as a consultant, which would shake things up significantly, and he would like to someday go to law school. Even with the boredom he sometimes feels as an accountant, he recognizes its importance, and thinks that everybody should try to understand it. For now, he remains dedicated in his current job, dedicated to providing for his family, made up of his wife and two little girls. And although his job is not an exciting or glamorous one, he is still very inspirational to me in many ways. Academically, professionally, and personally, he is the kind of person you cannot help but look up to.

That is a major part of what inspired me to interview him for this assignment. Although his field is not one that I ever pursue, the things I heard about him and the little I learned about him from our two brief meetings told me that he had wisdom that could help me. I now know that I was right, and the small lessons that he shared with me can apply to any student, and any professional who wants to stop living an easy life, and truly become the man or woman that they have always wanted to be.