

?Commentary . . . How did we get to this point?

Written by

Wednesday, 10 December 2008 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 10 December 2008 11:10

?? As I have stated in previous commentaries several times, my dad and my wife are the two wisest people I ever met. That being said, they have both helped me to learn that if you expect to get better in the future you must be honest about the past and understand how that history has brought you to this point in time. There are numerous anecdotal examples of their wisdom when it comes to the subject of learning from the past, but the Clift's Notes version can be digested into two simple statements:

- Learn from the past, live in the present, and plan for the future.
- You do not learn from failure; you learn from success after failure.

Some people will argue that rehashing past mistakes only focuses on negatives. However, the counter to that argument is that confession is good for the soul. In other words, the catharsis that comes from facing one's past sins/mistakes and then moving on cannot be overemphasized. I need to make it clear that there is a distinction between acknowledging/learning from the past and holding a grudge.

The reason for all this folksy babble is to share with you where I am coming from as I watch, observe and write about difficult situations facing our nation, our community, and my beloved Indiana Hoosiers. All three of these entities must learn lessons from their past in order to get better in the future.

In reverse order, the lesson to be learned from the Bloomington debacle that was Kelvin Sampson is you will more than likely get burned if you try to do something on the cheap. The going rate for a proven men's basketball coach who plays by the rules, has a high graduation rate, and wins upwards of 70 percent of games is somewhere in the \$2 million per year range. Sampson's contract called for about half that amount. Yes, he could win games but fell shamefully short when it came to following the rules and insisting that his players be students first and athletes second. Lesson learned—enter Tom Crean.

Second on the list, Washington County. After decades of too much power being concentrated in the hands of two few people, it is now time to pay the piper. Issues ranging from the long term downward spiral of economic conditions to the perennial overspending by some local government agencies to the conditions necessitating a shotgun wedding between Washington County Memorial Hospital and Saint Vincent's Hospital of Indianapolis are but symptoms of not identifying, admitting, and learning from past mistakes. For too long, the approach to solving problems in Washington County has involved some sort of a mind set best described as a cross between two famous screen heroines, Polyanna and Scarlett O'Hara. Until an honest and realistic dialogue about how we got to this point takes place, any efforts to improve will be nothing more than political window dressing.

That can also be said about the economic situation we find ourselves in as a nation. As I listened to the Chief Executive Officers of the Big 3 automakers testify before a Congressional committee last week, I heard several times that milk toast mea culpa, "Yes, we've made mistakes in the past." By definition, a mistake is an error in judgement and action resulting in a negative outcome. Calling something a mistake is not an excuse for a free pass.

We are accountable for our mistakes. If I make a mistake and dent a car next to me as I pull into a parking spot at the JayC store, I am still responsible to take care of the damage. Poor judgement by large corporations and banks should be looked at in the same way we look at individuals who make bad financial decisions. Oh, wait a minute! I forgot—those with maxed out credit cards, high interest pay day loans, and subprime mortgages are victims of predatory lending practices. They made a mistake but should be given a free pass, right? Where have I heard that argument before? (See previous paragraph.)

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I realized that my rant will probably be seen by some as just another example of me being a heartless, uncaring S.O.B. at Christmas time. I cannot do anything about what people think of me when I speak my mind. But, I can do something about calling to the attention of those who have nothing better to do than read my ramblings that the core problem plaguing our nation and our community is an inability and/or unwillingness to face up to past mistakes one-by-one in public, learn from those mistakes, accept the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune ”and use those experiences to become better.

Much like my Hoosiers, we all need to acknowledge our errors in judgement and take our lumps for our past mistakes before we can move on.