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# Focus

## A publication of Wagner Consulting Group



September 2016

Managing Problems

Freddy the Flamingo had been arrested and was being held in the City of Madison police department with an evidence tag around his neck. When I heard about this circumstance, my wife was sobbing and wondering how to break the tragic news to our eight-year-old son Mike, who was using a flock of Freddies to raise money for the American Cancer Society. This incarcerated plastic bird had been relocated by a friend of ours, who had made a donation, from his front yard to a neighbor's yard, expecting that person to likewise make a donation. Instead, the neighbor called the police about this egregious property violation. Ever vigilant, the Madison PD had captured the errant bird and contacted the local American Cancer Society office to ascertain the validity of the donation instructions included a plastic bag around Freddy's neck. My sweet wife was crushed by this turn of events. I, not so much . . .

This article is about how we respond to adversity. Most readers have heard some variation of the saying, "When life hands you lemons, make lemonade!" As I write this story, I am in receipt of a fresh "lemon," and that's what prompted this topic. Charles R. Swindoll, an American clergyman, famously said, "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how

you react to it.” So keep this thought in mind as I continue the story of Freddy the Flamingo.

My immediate reaction to hearing about Freddy’s arrest was a joyful sense of opportunity, in stark contrast to my wife’s sorrowful concern for her baby, 8-year-old Mike. There was, shall we say, a brief moment of emotional dissonance between us. But Janet’s mood shifted as I explained the publicity opportunities Freddy’s arrest presented. Even in the pre-Facebook world of 1996, local print and broadcast media reached large segments of people. This story has a happy ending.

Freddy was released to the custody of Mike from the police department evidence room, without damage, bail, or a fine. Then the Jackson, Mississippi Clarion Ledger ran articles with pictures of Mike and Freddy. The local ABC television affiliate, WAPT, featured Mike as its Person of the Week. Mike raised \$6,400 with his flamingo flock that year, and was subsequently honored as the only child to speak at the American Cancer Society annual convention in Denver. The next year our flock of Freddies raised more than \$12,000 to fight cancer. In 1998 Freddy’s keeper, Mike, was honored with the first ever Youth in Philanthropy Award from the National Society of Fundraising Executives, Mississippi Chapter. Not bad for a jailbird, not bad at all.

Tom



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