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Pivoting Your Way to Success
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If you are at all into sports, and if you are particularly a fan of basketball, there is a good chance you watched some college basketball over the last month. And my guess is that along the way you were impressed by certain skills you saw on display. Perhaps you were impressed by a three-pointer made while falling out of bounds, or a high-flying alley-oop, or even an out-of-nowhere blocked shot. But it is likely there was one skill that really didn't catch your eye. It took place thousands of times during the tournament, and no team was able to find any success without it. It is the move known as the pivot.

If you are at all familiar with basketball, you know you are not allowed to take steps with the ball without dribbling, with the exception of a couple of steps before you shoot the ball. That means if you have the ball in your possession and you have already exhausted your right to dribble, you can't go walking around with the ball. You must either shoot or pass it off. But that does not mean you have to keep both feet frozen to the floor. You are allowed to keep one foot stationary—it is called your pivot foot—while the other foot is able to swing around in every direction. The pivot is an extremely important move in basketball. Let's suppose you dribble towards the basket with the hope of putting up your own shot, but along the way you find there is a 7-footer in your lane and someone else is grabbing for the ball. Going forward with your shot is likely not going to do you any good, so you stop. But stopping is not necessarily a whole lot better if you can't pivot, because without it you are stuck facing the very obstacles that made you stop in the first place. This is where the genius of the pivot comes in. Because of the pivot, you now have the opportunity to face another direction and to thwart the defender. You might say the pivot step is precisely what turns a precarious situation, even a disastrous situation, into one that can bring about success.

Pivoting, however, is not just important in basketball, it is important in just about every arena of life. Most of us have goals. We have professional goals like leading a division or launching a new business. We have personal goals like owning a second home on the beach or seeing our kids develop their gifts. We have goals regarding certain

hobbies we might enjoy, like completing in so many marathons or climbing so many 14,000 foot peaks, or traveling the world. But I think all of us would admit that for just about any kind of significant goal we seek obstacles show up. Market demand changes, leaders whom we trust are caught in illegal activity, our health or that of family members fails, or we discover we aren't as gifted at something as we thought we were. And when these things happen, we have only a few choices. We can plod on forward without changing course, making failure almost a certainty. We can quit, and just give into the opposition or obstacle. Or we can pivot, and seek a new pathway from wherever we find ourselves at the moment.

In 2006, Andrew Mason, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, was building databases for an entrepreneur named Eric Lefkofsky. In 2007, with the financial backing of Lefkofsky, Mason launched a company called The Point. It was what you might call a socially conscious enterprise dedicated to using social media to get people to come together around a specific cause and make the world a better place in which to live.

But the start-up didn't take off. And when the recession hit in 2008 and people were looking to survive financially more than to make the world a better place, The Point was in trouble. It was then that Lefkofsky offered an idea. He suggested that The Point consider making their cause saving people money. Certainly businesses would be willing to offer a discount if they were presented with twenty customers who wanted to buy their product. This idea was certainly not what Andrew Mason and others at the small start-up originally envisioned when they began The Point, but given the financial climate of the day helping people save money and helping businesses stay in business seemed like a cause worth pursuing. And so was born Groupon—a company that would have to hire 10,000 people in sixteen months to keep up with growth that spread to forty-five countries, and a company that would have an IPO valued at nearly \$13 billion in 2011. You might say that The Point made the all-important pivot to become Groupon. Now to be sure, Groupon has had to make pivots since then and will continue to have to make pivots in a highly competitive social media world, but that is what successful ventures must always do.

During the time Coach K has been at Duke, they have been the most successful men's college basketball team in the country. They have reached twelve final fours and have now won five national championships. At least two of those championships required significant pivots. One of those pivots occurred this year. Coach K has always been about developing relationships with his players. He admits to not being the best Xs and Os coach. He wins by knowing his players and knowing how to get them to perform. But what if times change and players only want to stay in college for a year or two before heading to the NBA. Relationships have much less time to be formed. So Coach K had to pivot. He had to recognize he cannot slow cook relationships. He had to spend more time with his players not just when they arrive on campus but before they arrive on campus. In other words, he had to pivot, and the results speak for themselves.

And this pivot was nowhere near as dramatic as the pivot he had to make in 2001 when Carlos Boozer, Duke's big center, broke his foot with one game left in the regular season. All year long Duke had run its offense through Boozer, and most figured that with his loss Duke was done. So what did Coach K do? He pivoted. Overnight he turned his team into full-court press, fast break, three-point shooting team. And they didn't lose another game as they won their third national championship. Coach K's example is one that says winning requires pivoting.

In fact, not to be willing to pivot might be the most certain way to fail. When I was growing up the name Kodak was one you most certainly knew if you had any interest in photography. In 1976, it had a 90% market share of photographic film in the United States. If you wanted to buy film for your camera, you basically had one choice: Kodak. They were a company with 140,000 employees and a market value of \$25 billion, when billion was still a huge number. But my guess is that if you are under perhaps twenty-five years old, you have never seen one of their main products. You have never seen the little black canister of film that you would pop into their Kodak Instamatic Camera. And you haven't seen it because photographic film is hardly used anymore. Kodak itself is a shell of what it used to be, having filed for bankruptcy protection in 2011.

But it didn't have to be that way. Kodak could have entered as the leader in the digital camera age. Indeed it was one of their own engineers, Steve Sasson, who invented the first digital camera back in 1975. Kodak, however, passed it off as a "cute" idea and stuck to a film only identity. That might have been okay for a decade or so, but soon it became evident that the digital age was upon us. If Kodak was to remain an industry leader it needed to pivot and see itself not just as a film products company but as a memory sharing company that helped people share memories regardless of the medium. But they refused to do so, and today they are largely an irrelevant company.

The importance of pivoting is not just at an institutional level, it exists at a personal level as well. Last year I visited the spot where Patrick Henry delivered his impassioned plea, "Give me liberty, or give me death" and roused members of the First Continental Congress to approve military action against the British Crown. Later Henry would become a two-time governor of Virginia. His beginnings, however, did not suggest such influence. His initial venture involved 300 acres of tobacco, but not only did his crops fail his, house burned down too. Then he sought to operate a mercantile store; it too failed requiring him to move into the tavern that his father-in-law owned. It was then he realized he was not made for business and began to study law. Public defense and oration were his gifts, and had he not pivoted into the new profession our country's founders may not have had the moxie to pull off the construction of our nation.

Or consider the Apostle Paul, the eventual leader of the first century Christian church and author of much of the New Testament. In the early days of the church, his zealousness for God led him to persecute the early Christians. He thought they were all wrong for claiming Jesus was the Messiah. Then he came face to face with the resurrected Jesus, and he had a choice to make. He could stay entrenched in his opposition or he could pivot and use his zealousness to promote the living Messiah whom God had sent to earth.

Sometimes we think if we adjust from well thought out plans or an established position we are admitting failure. But I don't think that is always the proper assessment. Oh sure, there are times we must pivot because we've discovered we took a wrong turn, but pivoting is not just about admitting a mistake. Pivoting is about recognizing the old way of

doing things just isn't going to work even if there is nothing horribly wrong about the old way. Times change, markets create new challenges and opportunities, family responsibilities come and go, greater clarity about our own giftings is gained, and our own health does not remain the same. And when this happens, more often than not a pivot is necessary. This does not mean we must change our goal of taking the ball to the hoop but it does mean our route there might be different than we ever imagined.

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