



On Business and Burning Boats!

-by Bob Salvas

There are many things that alter the direction of our lives: marriage, divorce, getting fired, getting hired, losing a loved one, graduating college, and many more. Some of these things happen to us and some of these things are decisions that we make.

While there are certainly more than three life events that have shaped me and determined my destiny, I'd like to mention three big ones today that were decisions I made that ultimately impacted me in the most positive of ways:

1. **JOINING THE MILITARY**- When I first arrived at boot camp, I thought I had made the wrong decision. I cannot tell you how many times I thought "What did I get myself into?".

That situation reminded me of a well-known story told about Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes. The story goes that when Cortes and his armies arrived in Mexico to conquer the Aztec Empire in 1519, Cortes ordered his men to **BURN THE BOATS**. The idea of burning his own boats was to remove the opportunity for his men to retreat. That made it a situation where failure was no longer an option. Cortes and his armies successfully conquered Mexico two years later.

At some point during basic training, perhaps like Cortes' soldiers, I realized that there was no retreat, and failure was no longer an option. So, I pushed myself in ways I had never done before, and I made it through.

The result? My 4 years in the US Air Force included some of the best experiences of my life. Making life-long friends, seeing the world, and doing the important work of protecting our country is something that I now look back on fondly, but I also know that the military gave me a self-confidence and a self-discipline that I may not have ever known otherwise. And I am grateful for that.

2. **BECOMING A DAD**- When my wife (then girlfriend) told me she was pregnant, there was a tremendous sense of happiness and joy. But over the time of the pregnancy, I started to think “What do I know about being a father?” and “Am I ready for this?”.

Once again, I was reminded of the **BURN THE BOATS** story. The baby was on its way whether I was ready for it or not. There was no option but to move forward and do the best that I could. Like basic military training, I found I was capable of more than I thought I was and while it was never perfect, I embraced fatherhood with 100% of my being and I loved every minute of it.

The result? My wife and I have two AMAZING (now adult) children. Both are finding success in life in different ways and more importantly, they are two of the most compassionate, caring, and fun human beings you would ever want to meet.

3. **STARTING A BUSINESS**- When my kids were both still young, I was getting disenchanted with my employment situation. I had sort of hit the ceiling of what I was going to be able to accomplish and I wanted more out of my life. I wanted to help more people. My wife had a good job (with benefits) so we decided that we would roll the dice and I would start my own consulting business.

It did not take me long to realize that being in business for yourself is a little bit like being a new father. I started to think “What do I know about being in business anyway?”.

I tried hard and had some successes but ultimately, I was having more failures than successes. I did learn a lot from those failures but that did not stop me from having even more failures! After years of this roller coaster ride, I realized I had forgotten that important lesson that I learned both in the military and again in my role as a dad.... I needed to “**BURN THE BOATS**”! My mindset going into business had always been to ‘TRY IT’ but in the immortal words of YODA: “Do or do not. There is no try.” Once I committed to not retreating, I started to turn things around.

The result? My ten years or so of success in business got me noticed by a lot of people and resulted in the opportunity for me to partner with and work for some amazing organizations. This allowed me to help more people than I ever could as a solopreneur. Today I still do some of that work, but more because I enjoy it rather than because I need it to make a living. Life is good.

The lesson here is this: you are never REALLY ready to do some big things in life (like joining the military, becoming a parent, or starting a business), but if you decide to do these types of things, the bottom line is you must DO them. You must COMMIT and make failure not an option. You must **BURN THE BOATS**! Let’s go!

“I hope this is the year you finally trust yourself enough to “burn the ships”. No backup plan, no looking back, just forward.”

-Paul Avellino

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