



VELVET and BRASS

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Try Being a 'Hero'— It Makes You Feel Good

It's becoming a sorer and sadder world as people stop caring about other people.

We're not referring to love-ins or charitable undertakings or protests against what anti-anything consider not in their best interests.

The elusive word must be concern, or even courtesy. Unselfish caring fits the bill.

Someone with a lot more idle time than I can muster figured it requires only 17 muscles to smile and 55 to frown.

The conclusion is it's easier and more wrinkle-proof to smile.

Who would disagree it's easier and less tiring to smile. The old adage is "smile and the world smiles with you, but cry and you'll cry alone."

Therefore, fellow philosophers, we also can conclude happiness is a smile, a random kindness, a cheerful word, a nod, an act of courtesy, a thank you or any gesture showing you are concerned with someone other than yourself.

You don't have to complete a moon landing to be a hero.

Dictionaries define a hero or heroine as a human of distinguished valor or performance, admired for noble qualities, invested with noble qualities in the opinion of others.

A hero/heroine also is defined as the principal character in an epic, saga, play or story.

Life itself always is a story, made up of millions of little acts in which one can become a hero or heroine — or a jerk, grouch or sourpuss.

Without seeking pedestal status, I recounted a few ex-

periences in which I guess I became sort of a hero.

Others just ignored the opportunities, displaying the type of Why-should-I-get-involved? attitude that makes hauling our own load of bricks through life a bit tougher.

A stranger was lugging two suitcases and a garment bag to the airlines terminal from his parked car.

I was empty-handed and had been in the same predicament a couple of times.

I grabbed a bag and toted it to the check-in counter. He thanked me with a handshake and a smile. I felt good, too.

Women in cars also can be helpless and frustrated. One such perplexed lady in an SUV loaded with kids tried for four lights to restart her engine.

Other vehicles pulled around her (road rage?), zipped through the light and hurried away.

She could (1) get under the hood and repair the engine, (2) leave the small children in the vehicle and get help at the nearby service station, (3) cry and faint, or (4) try to get somebody to help her.

Two teenagers in front of me pulled to the side of the road (bless you, boys), I did likewise, and so did two other drivers.

We pushed the kid-packed SUV to that gas station, hoping others would not ram us or steal our cars. She thanked us with hugs, the kids cheered, we returned to our vehicles, and traffic flowed normally. We all felt our good deed made the day for the stranded group.

Four people walked past a

lady with a cane who was trying to get through a door at a hospital. Not just one or two, but four.

Wouldn't they want some help for their mother in the same pickle? She told me I was a credit to my parents after I gave the help needed.

Have you ever had both arms loaded with groceries, trusting your young child would hang onto your coat to avoid being crushed by unconcerned shoppers giving dirty looks?

The young mother appreciated my carrying her toddler to her car. Later, it dawned on me I should have toted the heavy bags of groceries.

Every so often there's a road game called "Swerve around that thing!" Scores of drivers will cut sharply to avoid hitting some board, brick, box or junk that has bounced or fallen from a truck or trailer.

Naturally, nobody wants to hit it. Once past it, the driver compliments himself or herself for expertise at the wheel for avoiding it.

Unless it's an expressway, I usually stop, race oncoming traffic and get the thing out of the way.

If it's raining, I usually end up with muddy shoes and often splashes of road slime. Nobody is around to say thanks, but perhaps I've prevented an accident or damage, maybe saved a life. It's worth the effort.

So mail me my Good Samaritan medal. I'm a hero. I don't mind being courteous or helpful when the occasion arises. It has its own reward: muddy shoes.

Ford Working Hard to Make Its Success a Constant

By DEE-ANN DURBIN and TOM KRISHER
AP Auto Writers

DEARBORN (AP) — In every boom cycle of its 107-year life, Ford Motor Co. became complacent, unprepared for the inevitable bust in the auto business.

From the 1920s, when Ford lost its dominant position in the U.S. because it was slow to update the Model T, to the 2000s, when it squandered billions in SUV profits and narrowly avoided bankruptcy, the company stuck with some strategies too long and didn't pay enough attention to others.

"You often hear people at Ford say we can't manage prosperity. I think it's really quite different than that. It's that we stop changing," Executive Chairman Bill Ford told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

Now, coming off a great 2010, Executive Chairman Bill Ford and Alan Mulally, the man who replaced Ford as CEO four years ago, say they are ready to break that cycle. Mulally has transformed the company into a simpler, nimbler organization that's ready to react to change more quickly. Management experts aren't so sure.

Thanks to strong new products and stumbles at rivals like General Motors and Toyota, Ford saw the industry's biggest increases in market share. It had the best-selling vehicle — the F-Series pickup — and ended 2010 with its second straight annual profit. Ford's U.S. sales rose 20 percent, almost double the industrywide increase.

Mulally laid the groundwork. He cut brands and put in place a system that encourages managers to stay on top of market changes and other issues and communicate more openly with each other. It was a radical change at a company known for vicious infighting, where managers who pointed out problems were demoted. The healthier communication in Ford's top ranks means it's much more likely the company will hire its next CEO from within the company instead of turning to another outsider like Mulally.

Mulally, 65, won't say when he plans to retire.

Management experts say it's easy to talk about a willingness to change and much harder to do it, especially af-

ter pulling off a remarkable comeback like Mulally did after coming to Ford from airplane maker Boeing Co.

"Act two is always very, very hard," said Joe Bower, a professor of business administration at Harvard Business School. "There are leaders who can do it, but it requires a tremendous willingness to imagine the need to rethink everything."

Consider Ford in 2000. Flush with profits from sport utility vehicles and pickup trucks, it earned \$3.5 billion and bought the Land Rover luxury brand from BMW. Just one year later, hammered by the faltering economy and a slow reaction to a recall of Firestone tires use on its SUVs, Ford lost \$5 billion, announced a plan to cut 35,000 jobs and fired its CEO. Bill Ford held the reins until he hired Mulally.

Even now, Ford is facing some demons, including the recent recall of 600,000 Windstar minivans whose axles can break and questions from Consumer Reports, which says its MyFordTouch dashboard touchscreen is too distracting. The company says it reacted quickly to the Windstar issue and will study Consumer Reports' findings but believes its system is safe.

Ford and Mulally say management can respond faster to such crises because of changes Mulally made. He instituted weekly meetings with the entire 18-member executive team, ensuring that all of Ford's leaders are constantly examining worldwide market conditions, future products and other issues.

He also simplified the company's mission, getting rid of excess brands like Land Rover, Volvo and Mercury so Ford could concentrate on its core Ford and Lincoln brands. The company is now consolidating Lincoln dealerships and trying to take the brand even further upscale in order to revive its flagging sales.

"Everybody now knows why they're coming to Ford. They know why they're coming in in the morning. They know what success looks like," Mulally said.

Success, though, has a natural tendency to make a company smug. Experts say management teams continue to do what made them prosperous, believing that the formula will always work. Bill Ford, 53, the great-grandson of company founder Henry Ford,

says he's seen it many times in his 31 years with the company.

"In the past, we would become static, and perhaps thought we had the secret formula and we were going to be slaves to it," he said.

James Schrage, a professor at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, said it's commendable Mulally and Ford recognize the company hasn't changed quickly in the past. Mulally's plan to save Ford was well done, but it hasn't been tested yet by an unforeseen event that throws off the strategy, such as a huge gas price uptick, Schrage said.

"There's a lot of things that happen outside of Ford's control that determine if they go from boom to bust," he said. "What I haven't seen yet is if they know how to deal with these large exogenous changes that will happen to them from time to time."

IAC Group Acquires Auto Assets of India Supplier

DEARBORN — IAC Group, a global Tier 1 supplier of vehicle interior components and systems, last week announced the acquisition of the automotive assets of New Delhi-based Multivac India Private Limited, a Tier 1 supplier of automotive interior systems and components to the rapidly growing automotive market in India.

Multivac established itself over the past two decades as a leading domestic supplier of vehicle headliners, instrument panels, interior trim and door panels to key global vehicle manufacturers, including Volkswagen, Maruti Suzuki, Volvo, Mahindra & Mahindra and others.

The manufacturing facility is located in close proximity to the region's vehicle manufacturers and provides access to an experienced automotive workforce.

The current manufacturing operation was established in 2005 and employs approximately 135 production and engineering personnel.

The acquisition further extends IAC's footprint into the fast-growing and critically important northern automotive region in the New Delhi area.

"IAC has experienced success through organic growth in India since we first established manufacturing and engineering operations in the western automotive hub of Pune, Maharashtra in 2008,"



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

The U-M Dearborn student Formula SAE race car team had their vehicle on display at Decisive Media's Urban Wheels / Green Car Show at MotorCity Casino in Detroit last week.

U-M Dearborn Students Proudly Show Their Formula SAE Vehicle at Venue

By Gerald Scott
Editor
U.S. Auto Scene

How exciting for the University of Michigan-Dearborn student Formula SAE race car team — they got to display their vehicle at a major Detroit auto show function.

The U-M-Dearborn car was on display at the Green Car show hosted by Decisive Media as part of the 15th annual Urban Wheel Awards at the MotorCity Casino in Detroit on Jan. 9.

Roland Dibra, SAE Collegiate Chapter President in Dearborn, explained the evolution of the school's hot-looking junior racer.

"This car is a Formula SAE-class car, we compete with it every year at the Michigan International Speedway — there are also other competitions around the world for the same class in Germany, Italy, Japan, and the U.K.," Dibra said.

"But basically, this is completely built by students from scratch, every year they have to build a new car, there has to be some major redesign on the vehicle.

"And it's basically just an engineering challenge that gets students the experience they need prior to moving on in their automotive field."

The student Formula SAE racer was in good company. Also participating in the Green Car show were the Chevrolet Volt and several different versions of Lincoln hybrid vehicles, much less hybrid offerings from Toyota.

So the student car sure fit into the first such Green Car show associated with the popular, annual Urban Wheel Awards.

The Green Car show ran during the daytime in the ballroom of the MotorCity Casino, while the Urban Wheel awards themselves were held that same evening in the Sound Board concert auditorium.

And the Formula SAE car proved to be a winning ticket of sorts for Dibra himself, a 24-year-old U-M Dearborn student who is now pursuing

his master's degree.

Dibra's participation in the Formula SAE competition helped him get a job as an engineer with General Motors. He will begin work at the GM Tech Center on Feb. 1, he said. Dibra's undergraduate degrees were in Mechanical Engineering and Engineering Mathematics; now he's pursuing his master's in ME.

Dibra is otherwise proud of the visibility that the vehicle gives to all of the engineering students who participate from U-M Dearborn.

"The students built this car from scratch — we do have a faculty advisor who can steer us in the right direction when we need it, but this is completely designed, tested, validated and built by U-M students. We seek sponsors throughout the year and without them we wouldn't be able to do what you see here," Dibra said.

"It doesn't have a top speed, but the current gear ratio probably allows us to go 110 mph. The 0 to 60 time is about three seconds and the cornering G's is 1.5 Gs.

"We test it at the parking lot of our university and then take it to a competition, that's where it's really proven out.

"We brought this car here just to show the chassis that our Formula electric car will be built on. This chassis has proven to be very simple and reliable at the same time — very lightweight and we're looking forward to taking the basic chassis design for this and implementing it in a whole new electric (student car)."

said James Kamsickas, president and CEO, IAC North America and Asia.

"This acquisition builds on that momentum by extending our footprint into the growing north India automotive region, further expanding our product portfolio and supporting our global customers' needs for experienced interiors manufacturing and engineering in the region."

The New Delhi plant will complement IAC's existing Regional Engineering Center in Pune and the company's manufacturing facility in nearby Chakan. IAC is presently constructing a second state-of-the-art manufacturing operation in Chakan, which will be

located in the Mahindra Supplier Park.

According to Senior Vice President of IAC Asia Operations Gajanan Gandhe, the New Delhi location provides a strategic foothold for IAC in India.

"We expect that this location will provide us the ability to expand our design and engineering capabilities to support the new product development activities by major OEMs," said Gandhe.

"This acquisition underscores IAC leadership's commitment to selectively expand its global footprint to take advantage of growing vehicle demand in emerging markets such as India," said Wilbur

Ross, Chairman of IAC Group.

"Our leadership team at IAC continues to deliver on its commitment to be a global supplier of choice within each region where we operate and has been successful in growing both organically and through acquisitions."

The Multivac acquisition follows a host of acquisitions by IAC from 2006 to 2010. In November 2010, IAC announced the acquisition of vehicle interiors supplier, AM-PRO Molding LLC, located in Anniston, Ala. In February 2010, the company acquired flooring & acoustics supplier Stankiewicz International Corp., located in Spartanburg, S.C.

DTE Energy Supports PEVs with Charging Stations

DETROIT — DTE Energy wants to jump-start the adoption of electric vehicles in Southeastern Michigan by providing free charging stations — a \$2,500 value — to the first such 2,500 Plug-in Electric Vehicle (PEV) owners who apply.

"The question isn't, 'Where can I recharge my PEV?' because it's now right there in your garage," said Trevor Lauer, DTE Energy vice president, Marketing & Renewables. "Our customers just need to decide what charging option meets their lifestyle needs and budget."

The first 2,500 PEV owners who sign up for a charging plan between now and December, 2013, will receive up to \$2,500 of the cost to purchase and install a 240-volt charging station. In most cases, that will cover the entire cost. A separate meter will track electricity use to charge PEVs.

Drivers can charge vehicles quickly and economically using DTE Energy's special pricing options, which enable off-peak charging at the lowest cost rates.

The EV rate is a separately metered time-of-day rate that

offers lower prices for energy used between 11 p.m. and 9 a.m. Monday through Friday — and all day Saturday and Sunday. Customers will save 40 percent off the regular residential rate and can expect to drive their vehicles for the equivalent of about \$1 / gallon.

A pilot program that allows PEV drivers to charge their vehicles at any time for a flat rate aof \$40 per month is also available from DTE Energy for up to 250 customers. DTE has an exhibit that the public can view at the North American International Auto Show.