

How Alan Mulally Taught Me to S.E.R.V.E.

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In 2006, like many Ford dealers across the nation, I was extremely concerned about the future of the Ford Motor Company. The Company was preparing to post a huge annual loss and was on the brink of bankruptcy. The country was facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The outlook was bleak.

Ford had been a huge part of my life for more than 30 years and I didn’t want to see them fail. My automotive career began at the age of 18, selling Fords at our local dealership. When I had the opportunity to become a dealer a few short years later, I jumped at the chance. That first Ford dealership was the beginning of building what became our family business. Our automotive group now includes additional dealerships. My wife serves as Executive Vice-President, my son as Vice President responsible for daily operations, and my second oldest daughter is our Consumer Experience Manager. My three other daughters have been “starring” in our

commercials since they were little girls. Both of my brothers are part of our team too. Our business is truly a family affair.

Needless to say, my personal success, our family's success and our business' success were rooted in the Ford Motor Company. We all had developed a great love for the company and the entire Ford family. We wanted Ford to get through the tumultuous times not only for the company, but for all of us.

From the day I learned that Bill Ford, Jr. had hired Alan Mulally to "save" Ford, I was excited and hopeful. Although I knew a little bit about our new CEO, I have to admit the first thing I did was to research Bill's selection. Yes, Alan was a great leader; but the more I found out about him personally, his management philosophy and operating style, the more excited I became.

As I reflect on that time, it is an indisputable fact that Alan Mulally led one of the most successful corporate turnarounds in history – if not the greatest! In less than four years, Ford was making record profits and continues to do so today. Stocks rose and a new corporate culture emerged changing how the Company would operate. He was truly a transformational leader. My family feels privileged to have been able to watch this man in action and be a part of the rebirth of Ford. Personally, through the years I have not only become a student of the Mulally leadership model, I have utilized the lessons learned within our own company. Here is how it all began...



No Tie, No Teleprompter, No Problem

I have been one of Alan's biggest fans since 2006 when he first addressed the Ford dealers at Ford Field. Alan came to the podium wearing his signature sport coat and slacks – no tie. This was unheard of for a CEO of Ford Motor Company! When he took the stage, the teleprompters were no longer needed. He spoke from the heart and didn't hold anything back. Alan explained how focused he was going to be on the Ford brand. He referenced the "largest home improvement loan" in the history of the

automotive industry. Ford was going to borrow money rather than take a potential infamous “bailout”. He smiled when he talked about this. Ford was going to save itself and you could tell he knew it was the right thing to do. Not only that, he believed we could do it together.

His laser-focused, yet calm and optimistic approach to rebuilding Ford was awe-inspiring and instructive at the same time. Ford was in crisis and this man had a smile on his face! His “can do” attitude was contagious. He was brimming with confidence and resolve, but not in an arrogant way. When he said he cared about us and knew what we were all going through, my first thought was, “I’ve seen this movie before”, but that thought quickly faded. This man was different and I couldn’t get the smile off of my face. He was not dictating how things were going to be, he was encouraging the dealers to be a part of a collaborative effort. We were on the same team and the team mattered. I knew in my heart that Alan meant it – you could feel his conviction. He was not lecturing us – he was one of us. We really were in this together.

When Alan concluded his speech, we were in for a surprise. He asked his entire executive team to stand up, turn around and tell us (the dealers) they loved us. The first try wasn’t good enough for Alan. He asked them to do it again - louder and mean it. I felt the love and sensed at that moment that the culture of the Ford Motor Company had begun a transformation that would be second only to the era of the legendary Henry Ford.

He truly inspired everyone that could be inspired at Ford Field that day. I believed that this was the man who would give it his all to right the ship and take Ford to levels no one could ever imagine.

Personally, Alan inspired me more than anyone ever had. Little did I know at the time just how much this man was going to change my life and the lives of my family and associates forever.

Serve

At the heart of Alan’s philosophy was something that really took me by surprise, but it is something I’ve come to respect very much and which we now emulate in our business – “to serve is to live”. The typical executive at Alan’s level has a “take no prisoners”, tough-talking style. From the first time I heard him speak, he exhibited the complete opposite of that style of leadership. As time went by, we continued to learn just how inspiring, inclusive and humble this man was. He didn’t work in an ivory tower isolated from all except his top executive staff. Alan was living his belief that it is a privilege and honor to lead people. He developed an environment where people could flourish and develop a sense of meaning and purpose in their work.

It wasn't long before stories started circulating that Alan was skipping lunch in the executive dining room for lunch in the employee cafeteria. He'd take an empty seat next to a random employee and strike up a conversation. He wanted to hear from him/her what worked and what didn't. What they needed to do their jobs better. How they thought Ford was doing. There was no judging or scoffing at ideas. Alan made it clear every employee was part of the team. They mattered and their opinions were respected.

This carried over into the way employees should treat each other – and it started at the top. His view of leadership being a privilege was infused into all aspects of Ford. One of the first things Alan instituted were weekly Business Plan Review (BPR) leadership meetings. During these meetings, Alan acted like a coach encouraging people to work together. He did not allow disparaging remarks of others or jokes at someone's expense. Managers were expected to tell the truth about problems they were facing instead of hiding them. The atmosphere that he nurtured was a safe environment where honest, open discussion was encouraged. Instead of an individual feeling pressured to fix something by themselves, the “team” could use its collaborative strength to problem solve. It broke down walls and eliminated competitiveness. It was all about moving forward as a team.

It was clear to all of us that Alan LOVED his job, LOVED Ford and LOVE the Ford family and associates – and it showed. He LIVED to serve.

Lesson Learned - Of all the things I have learned from Alan, his way of viewing leadership as “service” has impacted me the most. I liked the BPR idea so much, that we started weekly BPR meetings for our executive team. These meetings allow us to quickly address issues using the collaborative knowledge and experience of our team. We can monitor progress and immediately focus on what we are doing well and what may need tweaking. Everyone knows that we will be meeting the next week to follow up, so accountability matters.

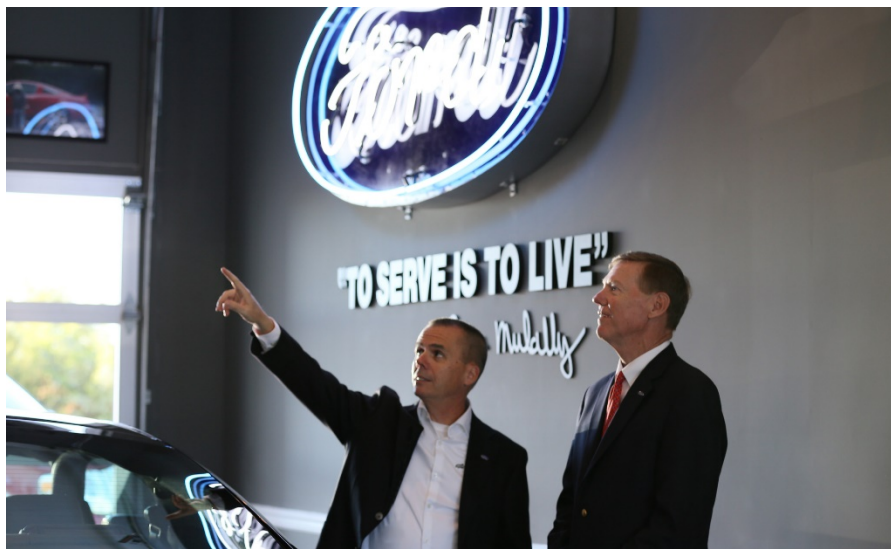
Elevate

When I returned home from Detroit after hearing Alan speak for the first time, I remember telling our team that being a Ford dealer was going to be fun again. From that day forward I became a student of Alan Mulally, paying close attention to every move he made and how he conducted himself.

Alan believed that going hand in hand with “serving”, was developing an emotional connection with all employees. He further believed to improve the overall performance of a company, the key was to involve the employees at every level. When employees feel valued, when they understand how their own work contributes to the success of the company as a whole, the better a company becomes.

This step of recognizing and utilizing the emotional and intellectual capital within Ford to help move the company forward was genius in my opinion. Engaging the employees in meaningful ways created a more open, positive work environment which carried over to all aspects of the business and ultimately the consumer. The “can do” attitude caught fire. We may not have been in Detroit, but we could feel the difference in the company out in the field.

Lesson Learned - While this was a philosophy that we had always embraced as evidenced by having many long term employees, Alan’s emphasis on being a “coach”, recognizing in-house talent and energizing employees to work as a team, helped us fine tune our execution of this philosophy. There is nothing better a leader can do than to elevate the workforce.



Resolve & Resiliency

As news broke about the changes Alan was making, I kept thinking about his address at Ford Field. He told us he was going to polish the Ford Blue Oval - and sure enough, he did. The symbol was proudly displayed again at Ford World Headquarters. There were painful cuts to the workforce. Through transparency and sincerity, he convinced the United Auto Workers to make major concessions. Brands that previous CEOs had so proudly added to Ford would soon be part of Ford’s history. He was following his plan with unwavering resolve.

One brand that was eliminated not only surprised me, but affected our company also. It was when the Mercury brand was eliminated. It was a very difficult decision for Alan to make, but it was part of his plan and it had to be done. Being a Mercury dealer, it was painful for our company too, but we had faith in what Alan said at our first meeting. He was going to look out for Ford and the dealers. I remember the day the

Mercury sign came off of our building. We knew the decision to cut the brand was more painful for Alan than it was for us, so we took it in stride and knew in our hearts it was the right thing to do - and it was.

The next time I saw Alan was at the Washington, D.C. Auto Show. I was invited by our regional manager to sit in on a press conference and then to meet with Alan at a Q & A right after the press conference. Sitting in the front row, I watched him be grilled about the demise of GM and Chrysler (as we knew them) and a recent Toyota recall. Alan would take the question and then use it as a platform to inform the press what was going on at Ford. Never once did he knock the competition. He stayed on point talking about all that mattered to him - the progress at Ford Motor Company. He shared what Ford was currently doing and what Ford would do going forward. Rightly, Alan was very proud that Ford didn't take any bailout money, yet he didn't demean the competition for doing so. He beamed when asked about it, but only responded with what was going on at Ford. His composure and positive attitude were amazing. He didn't get rattled and he stayed calm, always bringing the question back to highlight progress at Ford.

Right after the press conference Alan met with ten dealers from the region. I was lucky enough to be one of them. Like the press, we had the opportunity to ask him some tough questions. He answered them eloquently. Some of his answers were difficult to hear. The manner in which he replied was forthright always citing a positive way forward. We felt included and reassured that he had a plan, it was working and he was sticking to it.

Lesson Learned – At the press conference, Alan unwittingly taught me a valuable lesson which forever changed my leadership style. No matter how difficult the circumstance, be resilient and positive. Despite whatever pressure may come to bear, it is important not to waiver from your plan. Most important, always, always, always keep your composure ...and smile!

Value Based Leadership

In 2007, Alan introduced the ONEFORD plan. The idea was simple – we were all going to work together as ONE team to achieve automotive excellence. Ford's success was to be measured by the satisfaction of its customers, its employees and its essential business partners (dealers among others). As often happens within companies, various departments and divisions tended to work in silos – not interacting or working as a team. ONEFORD was to breakdown those barriers, placing greater value on working together as teammates across the company.

Creating a great place to work was a priority. Happy employees ultimately result in happy customers. A key component of ONEFORD was the expectation that everyone

follows a set of value-based behaviors. Treating others well was a must, including giving credit to the accomplishment of others and taking responsibility when things go wrong.

At all times, every Ford Motor Company employee was expected to carry a card that listed the basics of the ONEFORD plan. I know some of the employees hoped this was the “flavor of the month”; but in Alan’s usual fashion, he soon showed them it wasn’t going away. In fact, ONEFORD was going to permeate the Ford culture from top to bottom and change how the company operated for the better. To this day, two years after Alan retired from Ford, the ONEFORD plan is still embedded in Ford’s culture.

Mirroring Alan’s concept, we worked with our team to develop our own value-based plan, ONEPAG – One Team* One Plan* One Goal. (PAG stands for Preston Automotive Group, the name of our company.) The first part of our mission statement commits to providing a superior workplace for our associates and ties that to providing a superior customer experience. Like Alan, we strongly believe a positive workplace contributes to delivering outstanding customer service. The second part of our mission statement focuses on our daily goal to “show the love” to everyone who walks through our doors as well as to each other.

Like ONEFORD, we have established a set of Core Values, supported by our team, that are standards we expect each associate to follow each day. These values are focused on empowering our associates to believe in themselves and each other and to focus on their ability to rise up.

Lesson Learned - Have a value-based plan that engages the employees and stick to it. A positive workplace creates a positive experience for customers. Show the love daily.



Engage Everyone

For years I have sent out a daily motivational quote to our automotive group associates. As time went by, I started adding people outside of our group whom I thought would

enjoy them. One of the people I added was John Felice who works at Ford World Headquarters. Some months after he had been receiving these emails, John contacted me and asked if I would mind adding Alan to my quote distribution list. I was stunned to learn that John had been forwarding some of my daily messages to Alan. I quickly answered “yes” while smiling from ear to ear. Before long, Alan started responding to some of my quotes. I soon noticed a pattern. Any quote that had the words “serve” or “risk” normally got a response from him. The responses were usually very short - sometimes just his signature “:::)))” I loved that signature so much, I have now started signing my emails the same way!

Our correspondence soon moved beyond just quotes. Periodically Alan would send me an article about Ford or leadership. I eventually shared with him that I had a room adjacent to my garage named the Mulally Room. I had been collecting items bearing his autograph and putting them on display in the room. Most of the items I purchased on eBay. Jokingly, in an email, I asked if he had anything he could send me for “his room”. A while later I received an email from Alan asking for my home address. A few days later I received a box from him containing a lot of items to add to his room :))). I quickly had them framed and proudly hung them for all to see.

One day I was in the Mulally room with a good friend and I said “wouldn’t it be neat to have a couple of hoods with Alan’s signature on them hanging from the ceiling?”. I remember emailing Alan and inviting him to come see “his” room and asking if he would sign some hoods when he visited. He answered back that would be neat and someday he would. It was hard to believe that would ever happen, but for some reason I felt it just might...and it did!

I have to admit that for years my family has kidded me about my admiration for Alan. I have given almost everyone I know a copy of Bryce G. Hoffman’s fantastic book, *American Icon: Alan Mulally and the Fight to Save Ford Motor Company*, so they would know his inspirational story in detail. Amazon must have been wondering what I was doing with all those copies! Since my entire family is actively involved in our business, I declared the book “required” reading for them. The more my family learned about him and the more they saw the positive results of implementing his ideas, they became fans too. (They still find it fun to tease me about him, though!) Like me, they have all become students of the Mulally philosophy. My younger daughters have even written school papers about him!

So, you can imagine how excited we all were when, true to his word, Alan made plans to visit our flagship Ford dealership. When the day arrived, my wife, five children, mother, extended family and associates were all present. It was truly one of the greatest and proudest days of my career. We were able to “show the love” to him and share how we were practicing many of his principles to move our company forward. I know my youngest daughter will always remember that day – how many kids have had

the CEO of Ford Motor Company write a note to excuse them from class?! And by the way, he signed a couple of hoods for me too! What an honor and a memory!

Lesson Learned - No matter how big your job, always take the time to acknowledge people. Show appreciation to everyone. Make a personal connection with them. Never underestimate the magic of a personal touch.

To Serve Is To Live

I hope I've been able to provide a better understanding of the core principle of Alan's tenure at Ford - "to serve is to live" - and how he put it into action. This man was not about the importance of his "position", but about the privilege he was given to serve as the leader of Ford. When one looks at their role through the lens of service, it changes how you approach everything. It is almost too simplistic to say he didn't just talk the talk, but walked the walk; but in reality, that is what makes this man unique.

We've all heard speeches and slogans about team work and how to motivate people. Isn't that what they usually are - a forgettable speech or a slogan that soon fades. Not so for Alan Mulally. He is the real deal. Challenges are opportunities. There is a sincerity and authenticity of character that puts him in a league of his own.

Our family has always freely used the word "love" with each other. Thanks to lessons learned from Alan, we now express our "love" daily to our work family too. We LOVE our team and we want them to know it. In fact, we all wear red wrist bands that say, "Show the LOVE daily!" as a reminder to put those words into action.

In closing, we want to say a big thank you to Alan Mulally. We will always feel privileged to have been a part of his years at Ford, to have learned from him and most of all to call him FRIEND.