

Why So Many Failed to Recognize the Real Winner at the 2017 Academy Awards

I was in the 10th grade and learning life from those who had gone ahead.

A sophomore watches the seniors. From them, he gains both good and bad. As a newcomer on the basketball team, I was eager to learn from the “big boys.” How to stand, how to dress, how to swagger as an athlete ought; these were the important lessons I sought. One day an older boy, not intentionally, by the way, taught me an unforgettable lesson about positive focus versus negative fixation.

Now I do not for one moment suggest that Butch (not his real name) saw what happened as an example of that leadership principle. Likewise, even today, were ol’ Butch and I to reminisce about that memorable moment, I doubt he would see, as I do, that it afforded me a splendid teaching moment. I also want to state for the record that my understanding of the meaning of the incident did not come to me until years later. In the moment, I just thought it was sweet poetic justice, the kind that involved a smallish sophomore’s delight to see an older and frightening idiot get his comeuppance.

For what reason I never discovered, Butch, afoot, was chasing an eighth grader attempting to flee on a bicycle. Unable to get the bike up to speed, the terrified boy dismounted and fled on foot, leaving the bike by the road. Unable to catch and damage the little guy himself, Butch decided to damage his bicycle instead. I watched as Butch stomped on the boy’s spokes. Unable to inflict the desired damage that way, Butch stepped back into the roadway to take a running leap, intending obviously to land with both feet on the offending

bike.

This plan went wonderfully awry, however, when Butch stepped directly into the path of an oncoming motorcycle, the driver of which was a dangerous hulk named Darrel, one of the very few boys of whom Butch himself was afraid. Really afraid. The motorcycle veered wildly, avoiding Butch and coming to a screeching halt. Darrel dismounted, walked coolly over to Butch and, without a word of warning, knocked him flat on his back. It was magnificent. It was a scene of glorious karmic retribution and one which I never forgot.

Reflecting on the disastrous final presentation at the 2017 Academy Awards, I immediately remembered Butch, semi-conscious in the dust while I, a prudently hiding tenth-grader, laughed my head off. To this day I can remember the salacious thrill of watching Darrel, that unlikeliest instrument of God, administer punishment so well-deserved.

Now from the vantage point of a half-century of leadership I can see the real point.

Beyond the issue of poetic justice, there is a wonderful lesson for life and leadership.

Here, then, are some observations on the 2017 Academy Awards, compliments of Butch the bully.

1. The desire to attack another is a distraction from one's greater purpose.

I don't know what Butch was doing before he left it to chase an eighth-grader, but it was abandoned and, given the headache with which he staggered away, I suspect it was forgotten. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences apparently forgot what it was about and made the decision to kick President Trump's spokes. When one forgets one's primary purpose, stupid mistakes happen.

What caused the catastrophic moment where Faye Dunaway awarded the Best Picture Oscar to the wrong movie? How embarrassing! First Warren Beatty was willing to take the blame. Then the Price Waterhouse accounting firm threw themselves on the grenade. The real cause: hubris. A distracted, unfocused Academy, hell-bent on damaging Donald Trump, marred the entire evening with the most unprofessional moment in Academy Award history.

Stay focused. It's as simple as that. Chase off after something that is not your real deal and you may step right in front of an on-coming motorcycle, or Mack truck, for that matter.

2. Don't make your great moment about someone else.

Neither of the two takeaways from the 2017 Academy Awards are about who won what. I'm not sure how much anyone even cares anymore about the awards. Those who win them do, I'm sure, but the headlines the day after the fiasco in Hollywood were not really about the winners. Two things dominated the headlines: the inexcusable blunder at its conclusion, which made the Academy look bad, and their attacks on the president of the United States, which made no dent on his spokes at all. What it did accomplish was, once more, Donald Trump was declared by those who hate him to be more important than any or all of them.

It is astonishing that the most self-absorbed people in Hollywood cannot see themselves. They made the object of their hatred greater than their own awards, greater than their own accomplishments and more to be remembered than the winners who, in the next morning's newspapers, took a back seat to a man who was not there, won nothing and was not even nominated.

Look, here's the lesson. If you get mad and punch your brother-in-law at your own wedding, he wins. You louse up your own wedding and make it about him. How is that a victory? Stay focused, and you are more likely to avoid humiliating

mistakes. Do what you do, and don't give the show away. That may not be entertainment, but it is leadership. {eoa}

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