DISTRICT MANAGER SPEECH

FOR

DAVE ANGELLO

Hello everyone! I want to thank you all for giving me the opportunity to meet you and for the chance to give you some insight into who I am, my history and skills, my enthusiasm for Cracker Barrel, and why I am confident that as a district manager, this company can achieve and hopefully exceed, its goals and previous successes. I also want to share with you that as I have progressed throughout my life and career, I have been inspired by the parallels that can be drawn between life and sport, and in particular, the game of golf. Hale Irwin once said, “Golf is the loneliest sport. You’re completely alone with every conceivable opportunity to defeat yourself. Golf brings out your assets and liabilities as a person. The longer you play, the more certain you are that a man’s performance is the outward manifestation of who, in his heart, he really thinks he is.” I would like to add that as a game, golf provides the metaphor for life and one’s career as sport, and as sport, we have the opportunity to emphasize teamwork, approach the challenges at hand, and work on training and learning about the ability to concentrate, focus, practice and achieve excellence. As I take you along on our “golf cart” through my career and accomplishments, remember the words of Muhammad Ali who taught us, “The man who has no imagination has no wings.”

So. You may be wondering, where and when did the tee off occur? I was born in Rochester, NY in 1971 and had my first experience with a team-that is with my ready-made team, namely my brother and two sisters. From an early age, I learned project management (yes we had to share), team building (sometimes we all unanimously disagreed with our parents), and focus (it’s hard to concentrate with so many kids running around!). Although at the time, it may have felt like this was the “tee-off” point in my life, as I look back I realize this was actually the driving range-the place where I practiced to get me to the course of life and career.

Although I attended business school at Bryant and Stratton College in Buffalo (?), I think the real moment when I stepped up to the tee and entered the game was when I began working in the retail arena for JC Penney in 1988. Something clicked and a spark within me was ignited. I felt that this was a field in which I could make a difference. I had found the **course** to take and quickly sourced the **drive** to succeed. I moved on to Sears Roebuck in 1989 and it was there that I would discover my tools, or clubs, as I learned to focus, concentrate and advance for the next seventeen years. While at Sears, I was fueled by the challenges we all face in the retail sector, and I was inspired by my managers and colleagues as I watched them handle all aspects of the business, to learn all phases of the retail phenomenon. I was confident that I possessed what was essential in an effective leader-I knew I had to have a thorough knowledge of our product, our systems, and our most important asset, our teammates. I also knew that in order to be an effective leader, I had to hone my skills as a listener and communicator. I studied what worked in the managers that I found most inspiring, and as it was, back on the driving range, I became continually aware that practice may not always make perfect, but it definitely improves one’s odds for success!

I spent the next seventeen years observing, practicing and perfecting my “swing.” I was fortunate enough to have several vantage points on the course, and from starting in the visual department to selling water heaters and lawn mowers, I had the great opportunity to learn and listen from a diverse group of managers. I saw how they motivated their players, each one with a slightly different technique to coax success from his or her team. I realized that I had my own important point of view to share in order to improve performance, and the more I realized that, the more hungry I became for advancement on my career course. We all know that it’s been said that responsibility is taken, not given, and I was ready to go on to the next hole of this fascinating course.

By the summer of 1994, I continued walking my course and thanks to the vision of our store manager, Carol, I was chosen to be project coordinator on a remodel we were undergoing at the time; my focus was to oversee the remodeling of the children’s and men’s departments. I will always be grateful to Carol. She was a manager and mentor with vision. She saw the potential in me and almost as though I were receiving a new set of clubs, I learned other essential aspects of a management or coordinator position. If I could have labeled those new clubs, they would be called, “Planning, Organization, Scheduling, Listening and Leading.” I felt as though I now had what was needed to really advance on this career course! (**If you want to make a little joke, you can say**) it may have been a little premature, but I felt confident enough that I could have given my measurements so that my green Master’s Jacket might be ready for me! The remodel project was completed in three months and at that point, I really knew that my mission in life was to be a leader. I knew I could inspire a team to success.

The next opportunity to set my sights and tee off presented itself shortly after the remodel project had been completed, when I was moved into a supervisory role overseeing the men’s department. As with any course in life or sport, the climb or challenge can seem deceptively simple, however all lessons are valuable and essential to one’s personal and professional growth and mastery of whatever course one chooses to take. I was faced with a staff that had concerns and they were not shy about expressing them. I soon learned what it felt like to be stuck in a sand trap. No matter the challenge, I was determined to find my way out of that sand trap and lead my team, and find the effective actions that would drive sales and profit for the company that year (**Do you want to highlight any of the techniques or methods you used in accomplishing that success? If so, mention that here with a quantifiable statement**). Ultimately, we achieved our sales goals of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I learned that the most effective route out of the rough is determination-to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, which is what I eventually did. After all, responsibility to meet projections is the mandate of the manager, and I pledged to take responsibility and be accountable.

Although the expression, “That which doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” might be a little exaggerated for that time in the rough, I realized that in reality, it really became one of my greatest career accomplishments and possibly my first viable attempt at a “hole in one.” We really do learn and grow from adversity, and I am certainly no exception. All of the challenges I faced at that time served to inform me, teach me, and make me stronger in my position as manager. Those challenges provided me with the opportunity to focus, as I had never done before. I kept my eye on the ball and hands properly placed on the club as I practiced the swing that would carry me through to the next holes on this course.

My hole in one turned out to be a real blessing and brought me a salaried position and my hard work paid off in April of 1996; I became the men’s and footwear manager. About a year later, I was given the additional opportunity to become women’s and accessories manager, and I cannot say enough how thankful I am to all of the managers who saw the potential in me. I eventually was offered the chance to move to another Sears unit in order to manage and lead a team of commissioned sales people. Although this was a different role for me that provided a different vantage point, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to view the course at new angles, and to learn even more about the business I had been working in for most of my growing career. I realized that my movement around the Sears portion of the course was all part of a master plan; in speaking with the DM, he continually encouraged me to move around, learn all aspects of the business, and in turn, as I learned, I would be come more marketable, more mobile, and more valuable as a Sears employee and as a professional in the retail industry.

By the time we arrived at the middle of my career course, I realized that times were changing, and so was life itself. A wonderful opportunity at the Sears in Rochester was presented to me, and I became the ASM of apparel, which, at the time, including home fashions, was a soft lines business doing about $10 million in sales. I oversaw about fifty employees and had two leads under my golf umbrella. Thank goodness those umbrellas are notoriously big and can cover a lot, because at the same time my career was burgeoning, so was my family! I had recently gotten married and our two sons, Christopher and Matthew, were born in 2001 and 2002, respectively.

Due to personal reasons, we relocated back to Buffalo and I continued in the same position at the Sears in that city. I maintained those responsibilities for three more years, at which point I realized that I needed a change of scenery. Seventeen years in one company is admirable, but I needed to shift to a different course. As with the twists and turns of life and sport, I received a call from a former Sears colleague who was then working at Cracker Barrel, who asked me if I might be interested in interviewing…

And so my Mulligan presented itself on September 6, 2006! Some may say, “Be careful what you wish for,” but I say, “The universe provides.” I was looking for a company that was growing; one that I could grow with. I am thankful for all that I learned throughout the years at Sears, but it was time to move on. I had great coaches and wonderful teammates. I learned from and was encouraged by the best. I was about to bring my clubs to a new course. I didn’t quite understand the concept of dining combined with retail, but I relished the challenge. I was impressed with Cracker Barrel’s mission and its devotion to the guest and his or her experience. I was ready for the challenge to fine tune my skills and expand my knowledge and experience base for the sake of my career.

The first year was tough as there were many divots and I had to reacclimate myself to a new course with new characteristics, rules and challenges. I had no employees to speak of, the store I was placed in was doing less than a million dollars, and my greatest trial at the time was learning to deal with the restaurant managers-which to me, felt like I needed to learn a foreign language. No matter what was placed in my path, I knew every trial I faced was making me stronger, more experienced, and more capable to handle the unpredictable conditions on this new course. In my heart I knew this was a gift-I was becoming a stronger leader for the future.

Honestly speaking, it took a couple of years for me to settle in and build a successful team. I staffed the store, hired a shift leader, and by 2008, the store was back to making its plan at around $1 million. As I observed how my teammates handled the course at Cracker Barrel, I realized the company was undergoing changes and that meant I had to adapt with the times and environment. As always, my quest to become a better listener and more effective communicator was key to my evolution. With new and diverse challenges emerging, my management style had to evolve and support the tasks at hand. I took what I’d learned on the golf course and visualized that the focus needed on the putting green can be applied to the pinpoint management techniques essential for store success, and I realized I had to slow down in order to be more universally effective. I paid attention to my methods of interaction. I empathized, placed myself in the other person’s shoes, and concentrated on what effective communication and time management would look like. I began to focus on completing very specific goals and tasks while adhering more vigilantly to timelines and daily time and action calendars.

It appeared that my practice, observation, hard work and concentration were working well for all. As we continued to drive forward to fiscal 2010, at 298, the systems in place were functioning. I was named RM of the Year for the district, all based on rankings report for driving :/: TT (?) and retail transactions along with conversion. I felt incredibly fortunate to be assisting and accompanying my DM on many area projects and I was emerging as a mentor for store employees in the district. I was very proud of my staff at 298. They began really connecting with our guests and the numbers demonstrated our increased success. I believe that my team relied on me as a leader and the results were manifested in performance. They looked to me for guidance in handling the day-to-day challenges and opportunities in this “sport” we call retail.

As I had learned earlier in my career on the Sears “course,” moving around the links and observing the playing field from many vantage points has its benefits. In fiscal 2011, I was named retail manager of the region; the team was focused to an even greater degree on customer satisfaction. As team leader I encouraged focus to be on others, as my intention was that the team focus on the guests and not themselves. I believe that every day provides an opportunity to learn and serve and grow, and given our positive results, I’d like to believe that the team was motivated by my determination and support.

As both leader and coach, I was inspired to inspire, and I always emphasized my availability to be there to sort out challenges, rough spots, and long drives each one might be facing on their own professional courses. I am proud of the strong team we’ve built, but once again, I am your man when it comes to wanting to solve a bigger problem. As I make my way from tee to fairway, I keep my eye poised on the ultimate prize to be found at the putting green. I learn my lessons. I set my sights. I practice. I focus.

In fiscal 2012, the opportunity to join the Top Talent Program was presented to me. With this program, Cracker Barrel acknowledged that the company was willing to invest in me for the future. Although this was not a guarantee for me to drive the ball straight to a DM position, it would give me an unprecedented opportunity to travel with other DM’s, see how various other districts were run, and it would also afford the chance to work on projects for the region and the district. Even though I would still maintain staff and sales and drive all the controllables in my unit, I was thrilled for this exciting new challenge.

Life and career were great and they were about to get even better! If I thought I had my Mulligan earlier, it was only because I had not yet lived and learned what was needed to accept and appreciate my “True Mulligan.” In 2013, my wonderful third son, Aiden was born, and he has brought new life and meaning to me as a father and as a man. I will also be marrying my beautiful fiancée, Holly towards the end of the year.

A game of golf usually consists of eighteen holes, but as compared to career and life, the game is endless and ever-changing. Each approach to each new tee brings excitement, apprehension, and the determination to win, all the while learning to see, practicing to focus, and working with the elements and the course to find success. I think you can see that throughout my career, I have demonstrated enthusiasm, curiosity, determination, accountability, consideration and respect, all of which, to me, are essential qualities in an effective leader. There is nothing more valuable than to really be able to communicate with, and manage people to encourage them to bring out the best in themselves. We all work, not only for the challenge of the task, but to educate ourselves, support our colleagues, and satisfy and encourage our guests. Without satisfied customers, we really don’t have much.

So you can see how I’ve teed off at the beginning of my career. I’ve hit some long drives, I’ve gotten stuck in some sand traps, and I’ve had to chop my way out of a few adventures as well, but all the while, I was paying attention. I was focusing. I was practicing my skills. Those long drives took me right here to Cracker Barrel and to you, right here in this room. At Cracker Barrel, I have refined my strokes for leadership, coaching and follow through. I have listened and learned and led successful teams. Our employees are motivated and believe in Cracker Barrel for their principles and sales initiative. I’ve initiated succession plans, all with the intention of being a District Manager for this fine company. Remember Hale Irwin’s words that I shared at the beginning. “The longer you play, the more certain you are that a man’s performance is the outward manifestation of who, in his heart, he really thinks he is.” I stand before you on the putting green, the place where precision counts for all. And now, as I take the ultimate swing for this hole, I invite you to raise the flag and allow me to sink the ball! (**Please correct if this is not acceptable golf terminology**).

I want to thank all of you again for the opportunity to meet with you and I look forward to many successful rounds on the Cracker Barrel course! Thank you!