

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1800 Three Friends and a Bigtime Job Swap

I caught wind of a story over the weekend that involved three old friends who saw their respective jobs change at the same time, following the 1994 Guam elections. We talk about succession and planning for it, but this is a very different look. I knew of the changes, but I never knew the story about how it came about. We'll go back 30 years today, and Guam oldtimers will remember the names. For those who weren't born, or were too young to remember, or weren't yet living here, I think you'll appreciate the general process. I'm Jerry Roberts and we enter the time machine, next on The Extra Point.

Three old friends. People I liked and respected. All in positions of considerable responsibility. All would be impacted by the results of the 1994 election. Here we go.

In late 1994, Republican Governor Joe Ada's second term was ending. Also coming to an end were the jobs of GovGuam agency directors, also Republicans. It has always been the practice that heads of agencies in the government lost their positions when the opposing party took the governor's office.

Democrat Carl Gutierrez was elected governor in November, beating Republican Tommy Tanaka. Those directorships would have new faces in January.

One such person was the late Joey Cepeda, a charming and positive-minded guy who was liked by everybody. If you ever talked with Joey, you came away better for the time spent.

The next character in our story was a tall Texan named Don Breeding, who was the CEO of Continental Micronesia (now United Airlines). Breeding was a high-energy man with a powerful personality.

He was on the cover and the major interview for the first official issue of Directions magazine in 1996, and spending a couple of hours with him I got a feel for that. He meshed

that power with a wealth of knowledge and business savvy.

Don had a man named James Nelson on his payroll, his director of sales in Micronesia and Hawaii, whom he felt could fit the lead role at GVB and serve the island tourism machine well. Also a son of Guam and — like Joey — James was someone who was widely liked and respected.

That would leave a hole to fill at Continental. Don had his eye on a young Hawaiian import by the name of Richard Mau, who was the director of marketing at the Hyatt Regency Guam. Mau had previous airline experience as well as years working in the hospitality industry.

Breeding presented his idea to Governor Gutierrez, and it was approved. James Nelson went to GVB as its director, and Richard Mau moved over to Continental as director of sales for the Asia Pacific region.

Oh, what became of Joey Cepeda? Richard had gone to Hyatt's senior leaders and pitched Joey as his potential replacement, even though he had no prior work in the hospitality industry. Mau offered to mentor Joey and to help him over the tough spots. Cepeda got the job.

The high-level job swap was complete. Three important positions were filled without employers having to scramble to find replacements.

Of the three, Richard Mau's part brought something into focus that everyone in the workplace should embrace. It's simply this: Before you leave to accept a new job, do all you can to make sure there's somebody you know and trust who can step into your role.

James and Joey didn't have this particular burden in this instance, but Richard did. By being proactive, he did his friend Joey a favor, as well as his employer who was spared the potential struggle of filling a vacant position. (Con't.)

In addition, Richard left a team behind and he wanted them to have a good leader. It was a total win all the way around.

This is an example we all can learn from. It's a major league move, speaks volumes about your character, and I think it's just the right thing to do.

One more element to this. Every year, countless qualified people are denied or delayed getting a promotion because there is no obvious replacement ready to step up.

Companies that understand the critical nature of succession have contingency plans to replace talent. This is not an "if" proposition, it's a "when". Sooner or later, every job on the payroll is going to have a different social security number attached to it. Whether or not you're caught ill-prepared to handle such a change will depend on your planning or lack of same.

Question. For whatever reason, if your name was removed from the ranks of the employed, who would replace you? And who would replace them in their slot? The further up the org chart you go, this question gains greater relevance and importance.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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