

"The Greatest Walk-On in the History of College Football". That is the way Brandon Burlsworth is described in *GREATER*, a movie produced about his life and death. Brandon was a very slow and overweight freshman who had a lifelong dream of playing for the Arkansas Razorbacks, but instead he was relegated to be the proverbial tackling dummy at practices. In spite of the mocking and derision, he refused to give up. Over the course of three years he out-worked, out-studied, and out-improved all others, moving his way up the depth chart. He won a scholarship, started at offensive tackle, and gained the *total* respect of all the coaches, players, and fans.

During his senior season, he emerged as the leader of the team through his humble, never-quit attitude, and was selected first team All American and third round draft choice of the Indianapolis Colts. But, days before he was to sign his contract and report to his new team, he was driving home to go to church with his mother and their car was tragically hit head on by a semi-truck, and he died instantly.

I will never forget *many* of the things seen in Brandon's life, faith, and work ethic. One of the most notable was what this quiet, unassuming giant of a man would say in the huddle each time his team faced an impossible situation. With 80,000 opposing fans screaming their lungs out, the game on the line, behind by five points, and fourth down on the three-yard line, Brandon would look around the huddle, deep into the eyes of every man, and began yelling above the roar of the crowd, "HOW BAD DO YOU WANT IT? HOW BAD DO YOU WANT IT?" He would shout it over and over until he was *fully* satisfied every single player was as dedicated to succeed as much as he was. They would then break the huddle, run the play right behind his block, score the touchdown, and win the game. This happened over and over, as this one-man wrecking crew carried the team on his shoulders all the way through to the championship game.

Brandon's persistence reminds me of a young ministry couple I know of who also persevered through seemingly insurmountable obstacles to get to 100% funding in their support raising. In fact, the first time I read Dan and Kristin's story, I couldn't help but hear Brandon's challenge ringing in my ears, "HOW BAD DO YOU WANT IT?" Read on. See what you think...

A successful therapist and music teacher who had just purchased their first home in Austin, this upwardly mobile couple was on the fast track to the American Dream. But the Lord had other plans, calling them into campus work, and within weeks moved them to Tennessee for ministry and support training. Their leaders handed them a copy of *The God Ask* to read, and Kristin said they devoured it, admitting "Yes, we were filled with faith, but also a sober fear because of the incredible task in front of us." Setting up their support home base in El Paso, Texas, they treated every day as a full-time job, where work started at 9:00 a.m. and continued through dinner.

Two obstacles that immediately impacted them: Dan had no Christian family or home church there to draw from, and Kristin's parents were also in ministry, and she did not want to "double dip" by approaching any of their supporters. Consequently, Dan and Kristin recognized early on they would have to rely on cold-calls and labor well beyond typical work hours. Dan quickly embraced the challenge, found a copy of the local Christian business directory, and spent the next few weeks (starting with A and going through Z!) calling *every* business and church in the area asking for an appointment. They met with dozens of business owners, along with leaders of Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Pentecostal, African-American, Filipino, and Hispanic churches. Kristin shared, "We took every pastor we could find out to lunch. As a result, we were invited to preach at seven churches. Someone told us we had rapidly become the most networked Christians in all of El Paso!"

Soon, they had exhausted the Christian business directory and still had thousands of dollars per month left to raise. Dan then started visiting coffee shops because they post business cards on a bulletin board. The first day, he brought home a stack of 45 business cards. Kristin sat across from Dan at a restaurant as he cold-called 38 people straight. Some were excited and agreed to a meeting. Many times people hung up on him, but he kept calling, undaunted. Kristin prayed and watched through tears of gratitude.

The morning of their first cold-call business card appointment, they devised a plan: If the person was a Christian, they would ask them to join their support team. If they weren't a Christian, they would share the gospel. This started the wild adventure of meeting with an untold stream of strangers. They had appointments with firemen, realtors, doctors, insurance agents, nail technicians, and funeral directors. They met with Christians, atheists, lesbians, even (unbeknownst to them) strippers! She added, "Every day, we climbed in the car completely unaware of what was in front of us, but we returned each evening just as confident in the ministry we'd been assigned, knowing God had called us and would provide."

**NOTE TO READER: DO YOU UNDERSTAND THESE WERE NOT REFERRALS. NO, THESE WERE COLD CALLS TO PEOPLE THEY HAD NEVER HAD ANY CONNECTION WITH!**

Once the business cards ran out, Dan and Kristin began going door-to-door at shopping centers, but didn't have much success. As they talked and prayed about where to get more contacts, Dan thought of all the phone numbers listed on Craigslist. The night Dan made his first Craigslist call, Katie was so nervous her hands shook and sweat beaded around her forehead. Dan put it on speaker so she would know exactly what was happening. A man answered, and Dan said, "Hello, I got your number from your Craigslist ad." He replied, "Oh, you're interested in my truck?" to which Dan responded, "No, actually, I'm a 27-year-old missionary, and I was wondering if I could have a few minutes to share with you about my ministry." After a brief explanation, the Craigslist man said, "Well, I'm actually at a Bible study right now. Why don't you come over now and tell us more?" He joined their support team.

On another Craigslist call, a man said, "I'm 71 years old, but I can't retire because I have to send more missionaries into the harvest field." He joined their team for \$100 a month. Their most powerful moment was a cold-call that turned into a new full-time missionary. Dan and Kristin sat across from Marybeth, and after they shared their presentation, she said, "I'm not able to give to you, but I do want to work with you." It turns out God had called her into ministry, and she had already started rearranging her life accordingly, just waiting for the right opportunity. Marybeth was accepted on staff with the same campus ministry and currently raising her own support!

Now fully funded, and reported to their ministry assignment, Kristin reflects: "Looking back on this year, I realize raising finances wasn't just a stepping-stone to *begin* ministry; it *was* our ministry. It gave us opportunity for faith and dependence on a God who provides all good things." It led to a Bible study with Dan's unsaved cousins. It gave them the chance to share the gospel with the parents of their best friends back in high school. They were able to stir the faith of churches who had given up on reaching millennials. Dan concludes, "Fundraising gave us the honor of giving people who had never invested in God's kingdom the chance to send us as missionaries to the harvest field." And he knows God has used this to prepare them for effective personal ministry: "We're now ready to face any challenge, knowing there's no excuse, no roadblock, and no person we can't approach." Amazingly, through the whole process, they not only remained debt-free, they actually increased their savings *and* paid off their cars. The biggest lesson they learned? If they would really trust God and *fully* commit to the task the Lord assigned them—He provides.

Now, after reading Dan and Kristin's inconceivable support raising journey to full funding, can you see why Brandon's challenge, "HOW BAD DO YOU WANT IT?" reverberates in my soul? This couple wanted it *really* bad, and were willing to do anything and everything to get to full support. No exceptions! These may not be the places you choose to stir up new names, but Dan and Kristin have modeled to us the courage and tenacity to go to five unusual (and rather intimidating!) sources to move them across the goal line:

1. Calling through local business directories
2. Calling every pastor in the city for a meal and presentation
3. Calling numbers on business cards posted at coffee shops
4. Going door-to-door to businesses at shopping centers
5. Calling numbers on Craigslist ads

Like me, you may have been able to raise your support without having to ask for many referrals, but I must look deep within my soul: Would I be willing to go to those lengths to fulfill my calling? I'm not so sure. How about you? How radical are you prepared to get to acquire 100% funding in order to report to your ministry assignment? For my part, I've never felt success in support raising was mainly due to personality, gifting, skills, or even quantity or quality of contacts. No, I have always believed it is primarily an issue of character bolstered by the overwhelming grace of God. In other words, "HOW BAD DO YOU WANT IT?"