

2.1 CASE STUDY

An Emerging Leader

Tim T. portrays his life as a tension between "nature" and "nurture." He sees it this way: He has two sets of DNA, and these two very different sets of characteristics have given him what he needs to be a leader. The first set of DNA, he says, comprises those "God-given genetic talents" that came from the biological parents who abandoned him at birth. The second set comes from the religious and caring family who adopted him two years later.

Tim's nature is to be out in front of people and relating to them. These innate abilities of his have always been very public and people oriented: from his easy and eloquent speaking style and teaching skills to singing and acting. "As a baby, I was always an extrovert, and since age 2 or 3, people have told me that I would be either president of the United States, a preacher, or a comedian," he says. "I didn't intentionally work on these abilities; I have just always had them."

His "other strand of DNA" came from his adoptive family whom he describes as gentle, unassuming, and quiet. Tim admits he ran in the "middle of the crowd," while his family members were often silent bystanders standing off in a corner. They did, however, instill in him the strong values of "loving God, loving family, working hard, and giving back" that he embraces today.

Those two sets of characteristics allowed Tim to thrive early. Just out of high school, he was given an opportunity by baseball player Derek Jeter's Turn 2 Foundation to create a new after-school program for second to fifth graders called Proud to Be Me. The goal of the pilot program was to build children's self-esteem and self-concept by providing them with new and diverse

experiences. Tim developed it with the goal of giving these children a larger lens of what the world could be, so they would be empowered to see more choices than what they found in their neighborhoods.

"My core belief and approach has been to help others by giving them things that nobody can take away," he says.

When Tim went to college, he supported himself working part-time at a bank doing collections, calling people on the phone to try to convince them to make payments on their debts. It wasn't fun, but Tim excelled at it. "I would use my powers of persuasion to get people to make payments, not because it was my job, but because I wanted to help them. These weren't bad people; they just got in over their heads."

It was in this job that Tim realized his talents only worked if there was a purpose. "I tried to sell vacuum cleaners once and couldn't even sell one to my own mama," he says. "Do you know why? Because there was no purpose in it. But yet, I could talk these people who are struggling and hurting into making a payment. That's when I knew that I can't walk on the face of this earth and not help somebody. My persuasion has to have a purpose."

After finishing college, Tim went on to get a master's degree in communication and, at the age of 28, became the executive director of the Douglass Community Association, a 90-year-old private, nonprofit, inner-city agency that provides opportunities for youth development, education, healthy living, and leadership. Tim managed the center's \$1.2 million budget and 24 people. He spent much of his time out in the