

Who's Operating Your Ferris Wheel?

The People Behind the View

The View From the Top

Good morning, Coffee Cup Family!

Grab your favorite cup of coffee, find yourself a comfortable place, and let's have a conversation.

This week's message comes from a place you might not expect: standing in front of a Ferris wheel at the 71st DeKalb County VFW Agricultural Fair in Fort Payne, Alabama.

As I stood there with my coffee, looking at that enormous wheel stretching into the sky, I started thinking about something.

Everybody loves the view from the top.

There's something special about riding a Ferris wheel. You climb aboard, the wheel begins to turn, and slowly the ground gets farther away. The people below become smaller. The buildings, lights, and activity of the fairgrounds take on an entirely different appearance.

For a few moments, you see the world from a perspective you couldn't experience standing on the ground.

But here's what caught my attention.

While everyone is enjoying that beautiful view, how many people stop to think about those who made the experience possible?

The people who assembled the ride. The individuals who inspect the equipment. The operators who help passengers board and exit safely. The crews responsible for maintenance and keeping everything running.

Most visitors will never know their names.

They probably won't receive a standing ovation.

But without their dedication, there wouldn't be a ride to enjoy.

And that got me thinking about life.

We spend so much time celebrating the people who reach the top that we sometimes forget the people who helped them get there.

So today, Coffee Cup Family, I have a question.

Who's operating your Ferris wheel?

1. Nobody Reaches the Top Alone

We live in a world that celebrates individual achievement.

We recognize promotions, awards, championships, business success, and personal accomplishments.

And there's nothing wrong with celebrating those achievements. Hard work deserves recognition.

But behind nearly every meaningful accomplishment is a story involving other people.

Think about the successful business owner.

Someone probably encouraged that person when the business was little more than an idea.

Think about the athlete standing on the podium.

There were coaches, family members, teammates, and supporters who helped make that moment possible.

Think about a community leader receiving an award.

Somewhere behind that accomplishment are volunteers who gave their time, individuals who offered advice, and people who believed in the mission.

Even when we work incredibly hard, we rarely accomplish everything entirely on our own.

During my years of military service, I learned that no successful mission depends on just one individual.

There are always people behind the scenes.

Some plan. Some coordinate. Some maintain equipment. Others provide support that might never be visible to the public.

Every responsibility matters.

The person standing in front of the formation may receive the recognition, but the mission succeeds because people work together.

The same principle applies to our families, communities, workplaces, and personal relationships.

Success may have a face, but it usually has many helping hands.

Take a moment and think about your own journey.

Who encouraged you when things became difficult?

Who made sacrifices so you could pursue an opportunity?

Who believed in you before the rest of the world noticed what you were capable of accomplishing?

Those people are part of your story.

Don't leave them out when you tell it.

2. The People Nobody Sees

One of the things I appreciate about our local VFW fair is the opportunity to witness the work that happens before the gates ever open.

People see the rides, entertainment, food, agricultural exhibits, and smiling families.

What they don't always see are the countless hours of preparation.

They don't see every volunteer setting up tables, preparing buildings, coordinating activities, cleaning facilities, or working through unexpected challenges.

They don't see every conversation, every late evening, or every small act of service that makes the experience possible.

And that's okay.

Most of those individuals aren't doing the work because they want recognition.

They're doing it because they care.

They care about the community.

They care about the mission.

They care about creating something meaningful for someone else.

The same thing happens in everyday life.

There's a parent who gets up early to prepare a child for school.

A spouse who quietly manages responsibilities while their partner pursues a dream.

A friend who checks in when someone is struggling.

A volunteer who arrives before everyone else and stays until the work is finished.

These people may never make the headlines.

But their contributions are enormous.

Sometimes the greatest acts of leadership happen when nobody is watching.

And sometimes the person making the biggest difference is the one who never asks for credit.

Never confuse being unseen with being unimportant.

The people behind the scenes often provide the foundation that allows everyone else to succeed.

3. Gratitude Changes Our Perspective

There's something interesting about gratitude.

It doesn't necessarily change our circumstances.

But it can change the way we see those circumstances.

When we focus only on what we haven't accomplished, we can become frustrated.

We start comparing ourselves with others.

We begin measuring our lives by the next promotion, the next achievement, or the next opportunity.

And before long, we're so busy looking ahead that we forget to appreciate what is already around us.

Gratitude invites us to look in another direction.

Instead of asking, “Why haven’t I reached the top yet?” we begin asking, “Who has helped me get this far?”

Instead of focusing only on what we need, we recognize what others have already given.

And sometimes that realization can be humbling.

Maybe someone sacrificed time with you so you could fulfill a responsibility.

Maybe someone offered encouragement during a season when you were ready to quit.

Maybe someone gave you an opportunity when others weren’t willing to take a chance.

Or perhaps someone simply listened when you needed to talk.

We sometimes underestimate the importance of those moments.

But encouragement can change the direction of a person’s life.

A conversation can restore someone’s confidence.

And a simple act of kindness can remind someone that they aren’t facing their challenges alone.

Here’s something I want you to remember.

Gratitude isn’t just something we feel. It’s something we demonstrate.

It’s easy to appreciate someone silently.

But have you told them?

Have you picked up the phone?

Have you written a message?

Have you looked someone in the eyes and said, “I wouldn’t be where I am today without your support”?

Those words matter.

And sometimes they matter more than we realize.

4. Leadership Isn’t Always About Being at the Top

When people hear the word leadership, they often picture someone in charge.

A commander. A supervisor. A business owner. A team captain. An elected official.

But leadership is much bigger than a position or title.

Leadership is about influence, responsibility, and service.

Some of the strongest leaders I’ve encountered weren’t the loudest people in the room.

They weren’t necessarily the ones standing behind a microphone.

They were the individuals who showed up, accepted responsibility, and helped others succeed.

They understood something important.

Leadership isn’t measured only by how high you climb. It’s also measured by how many people you help along the way.

Think again about that Ferris wheel.

Everybody notices the passengers enjoying the view.

But the people making the experience possible are just as important.

They aren't standing at the top waving to the crowd.

They're doing the work that allows others to experience something special.

That's servant leadership.

It's choosing to contribute rather than simply receive.

It's recognizing that another person's success doesn't diminish your own.

It's understanding that sometimes your greatest contribution is helping someone else reach a place you may never personally experience.

We need more of that kind of leadership.

In our communities.

In our organizations.

In our workplaces.

And especially in our families.

Because leadership without service can become little more than a title.

But leadership grounded in service can create a lasting impact.

5. When the Wheel Stops Turning

Now, here's another thought.

What happens when the people keeping everything moving become exhausted?

What happens when the same individuals are always asked to carry the responsibility?

What happens when the people behind the scenes begin to feel forgotten?

Eventually, even the most dedicated people can become discouraged.

They may still care deeply about the mission, but their energy isn't unlimited.

That's something we need to remember.

People who serve others need encouragement, too.

People who lead need support.

People who spend their lives helping others also need someone willing to help them.

And sometimes the strongest thing a person can do is acknowledge that they can't carry every responsibility alone.

This is especially important for those of us who have spent much of our lives serving.

We become accustomed to stepping forward.

When something needs to be done, we volunteer.

When a problem appears, we try to solve it.

When someone needs assistance, we want to help.

Those instincts can be admirable.

But service shouldn't require us to neglect our health, our families, or the relationships that matter most.

Sometimes keeping the wheel turning means sharing responsibility.

Sometimes it means training someone else.

Sometimes it means asking for help.

And sometimes it means giving a dedicated volunteer permission to take a break.

A strong community doesn't depend on one person doing everything. It grows when people learn to support one another.

That's how we create something sustainable.

That's how we build stronger teams.

And that's how we make sure the mission continues long after any one individual steps away.

6. Are You Holding Someone Else's Ladder?

We've spent a lot of time talking about the people who support us.

But now I want to turn the question around.

Who are you supporting?

Whose dreams are you encouraging?

Whose burdens are you helping carry?

Whose success are you celebrating?

Sometimes we're quick to recognize the people who have helped us, but we forget that someone else may need the same encouragement from us.

Maybe there's a young person who needs a mentor.

Maybe there's a coworker who could benefit from your experience.

Maybe there's a veteran who needs someone willing to listen.

Maybe there's a family member who needs reassurance that their efforts matter.

Or maybe there's a volunteer who's quietly doing the work and wondering whether anyone notices.

You don't need a special title to make a difference.

You don't need a large audience.

And you certainly don't need permission to be kind.
Sometimes all it takes is showing up.
Offering encouragement.
Sharing your knowledge.
Providing an opportunity.
Or simply reminding someone that they matter.
We often think making a difference requires something extraordinary.
But some of the most meaningful contributions begin with ordinary conversations.
A cup of coffee.
A few minutes of listening.
A sincere expression of appreciation.
That's the heart of the Coffee Cup Family.
One person. One conversation. One cup.
Never underestimate what can happen when you invest a little time in another human being.

7. Don't Forget the People at the Bottom

There's a lesson I want to share about reaching the top.
The higher we climb, the easier it can become to lose sight of the people who helped us begin.
Success can bring new responsibilities, opportunities, and relationships.
Our schedules become busier.
Our circles become larger.
And sometimes the people who supported us during the early days quietly fade into the background.
Not necessarily because we stop caring.
Sometimes we simply stop paying attention.
But those relationships deserve more than occasional memories.
They deserve continued appreciation.
Think about the people who believed in you before you had a title.
The friends who stood beside you when things weren't going well.
The family members who supported you when your dreams required sacrifice.
The mentors who invested their time without expecting anything in return.
Don't wait until a retirement ceremony, a farewell gathering, or a funeral to tell someone how much they meant to you.

Tell them while you have the opportunity.

And remember that appreciation doesn't always require a grand gesture.

Sometimes a phone call is enough.

Sometimes an unexpected visit means everything.

Sometimes sharing a cup of coffee and saying, "Thank you for being there," creates a memory that lasts for years.

The people who helped build your foundation shouldn't become strangers once you've reached another level.

Stay connected.

Stay humble.

And never become so focused on the view that you forget the people who helped you get there.

8. The Wheel Keeps Turning

There's another beautiful thing about a Ferris wheel.

It doesn't stay at the top.

It continues moving.

The people enjoying the highest view eventually return to the ground.

And others get their opportunity to rise.

What a powerful picture of life.

There will be seasons when you're climbing.

There will be seasons when you're enjoying the view.

There will be seasons when you're facing challenges and wondering whether you'll ever reach the top again.

And there will be seasons when your greatest purpose is helping someone else move forward.

Every season has value.

You don't have to be at the top to make a difference.

You don't have to be the center of attention to contribute.

And you don't have to receive recognition to know that your work matters.

Sometimes the most important thing you can do is help keep the wheel turning for someone else.

Because when we support one another, we create opportunities that wouldn't exist otherwise.

We strengthen relationships.

We build communities.

We develop future leaders.

And we leave something meaningful behind.

Not simply a list of accomplishments.

But a legacy of people whose lives are better because we were part of their journey.

9. This Week's Coffee Cup Challenge

Now, Coffee Cup Family, I don't want this to be another message that sounds good for a few minutes and then gets forgotten.

I want us to do something with it.

So here's this week's Coffee Cup Challenge.

First, identify someone who's helped keep your wheel turning.

Think about someone who encouraged you, supported you, sacrificed for you, or believed in you when you needed it most.

It could be someone from your past.

It could be someone standing beside you today.

Second, reach out and thank that person.

Don't wait for a special occasion.

Call them.

Send them a message.

Write a handwritten note.

Or better yet, invite them to sit down and share a cup of coffee.

Be specific about what their support meant to you.

Let them know that their efforts weren't forgotten.

Third, find an opportunity to help someone else.

Look around your family, workplace, organization, or community.

Who could use encouragement?

Who needs an extra set of hands?

Who might benefit from your experience?

You don't have to solve every problem.

Just find one meaningful way to help.

Because the goal isn't simply to recognize the people operating our Ferris wheels.

The goal is to become the kind of people who help keep someone else's wheel turning.

Final Thoughts: Remember the People Behind the View

As I stood in front of that Ferris wheel at our local fair, I was reminded that some of life's most important lessons come from the simplest observations.

We see a ride.

We see people smiling.

We see the beautiful view from the top.

But when we look a little closer, we begin to recognize the people whose efforts make the entire experience possible.

Life is no different.

Behind our accomplishments are people who encouraged us.

Behind our opportunities are people who believed in us.

Behind our success are people who gave something of themselves so we could move forward.

And behind every strong community are individuals who quietly serve without expecting applause.

So the next time you find yourself celebrating an accomplishment, take a moment.

Look around.

Remember the people who helped you get there.

And then ask yourself one more question.

Whose wheel am I helping turn?

Because success isn't just about reaching the top.

It's about remembering who helped you get there and being willing to do the same for someone else.

Until next time, Coffee Cup Family, keep encouraging one another, keep serving with purpose, and never underestimate the difference you can make.

One person. One conversation. One cup.

God bless!

Remember the people behind the view.

One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.

COFFEE CUP WORKBOOK

Episode 19

WHO'S OPERATING YOUR FERRIS WHEEL?

The People Behind the View

**Recognizing the people behind your success and becoming someone who helps others
succeed.**

Name: _____

Date: _____

Welcome, Coffee Cup Family!

This week's message asks us to consider two important questions:

Who's keeping your wheel turning?

And whose wheel are YOU helping turn?

Every one of us has benefited from someone else's encouragement, sacrifice, guidance, or support.

Sometimes those contributions are obvious. Other times, the people making the greatest difference are quietly working behind the scenes.

This workbook is an opportunity to recognize those individuals, examine our own approach to leadership, and turn gratitude into meaningful action.

Grab your coffee, find a quiet place, and give yourself permission to reflect.

There are no perfect answers.

The goal is personal growth, stronger relationships, and a greater willingness to serve others.

Exercise 1: Your Ferris Wheel of Life

Imagine your life as a Ferris wheel.

There have been times when you felt on top of the world.

There have been moments when you were moving upward.

And there have been seasons when you found yourself near the bottom, uncertain about what came next.

Reflection Questions

1. What accomplishment or milestone are you most grateful for?

2. Who helped make that accomplishment possible?

3. What sacrifices might those individuals have made?

4. Did you recognize their contributions at the time?

5. If you could return to that moment, what would you say to them?

Coffee Cup Reflection

"Sometimes we remember the accomplishment but forget the helping hands."

What does that statement mean in your own life?

Exercise 2: Identify Your Behind-the-Scenes Heroes

Not everyone who makes a difference in our lives receives recognition.

Think about the people who have supported you in different seasons.

For each area of life, write the person who helped and how they made a difference.

Family — person who helped, and how they made a difference:

Friendship — person who helped, and how they made a difference:

Career or Service — person who helped, and how they made a difference:

Personal Growth — person who helped, and how they made a difference:

Difficult Times — person who helped, and how they made a difference:

Faith or Encouragement — person who helped, and how they made a difference:

Digging Deeper

6. Which of these individuals may not realize how much their support meant to you?

7. When was the last time you thanked them?

8. What is one meaningful way you could express your appreciation?

Exercise 3: The View From the Top

Success can change our perspective.

Sometimes we become so focused on our responsibilities and goals that we overlook the people who helped us along the way.

Consider the following statements. Mark the response that best reflects your current habits.

I recognize the people who support me. ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

I express appreciation without being prompted. ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

I share credit for accomplishments. ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

I listen to people working behind the scenes. ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

I notice when someone needs encouragement. ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

I offer help without expecting recognition. ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

I make time for the relationships that matter. ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

Reflection

9. Which statement reveals your greatest opportunity for improvement?

10. What specific action could help you grow in that area?

Exercise 4: Leadership From the Ground Up

Leadership isn't always about standing at the top.

Sometimes it's about helping someone else reach higher.

Think about your own leadership experiences.

11. When have you helped someone succeed without receiving recognition?

12. How did that experience make you feel?

13. Do you find it easy or difficult to share credit? Why?

14. Who is someone you could mentor or encourage today?

15. What does servant leadership look like in your family, workplace, or community?

Leadership Thought

"A title may give someone authority, but service gives leadership meaning."

Write your personal definition of servant leadership.

Exercise 5: When the Wheel Needs Support

Even the most dedicated individuals need encouragement and assistance.

People who constantly give their time and energy can become exhausted when responsibilities are not shared.

Think about the responsibilities in your own life.

16. Are there areas where you are carrying too much alone?

17. Have you allowed others the opportunity to help?

18. Is there someone in your life who may be overwhelmed?

19. How could you help without taking over their responsibilities?

20. What is one responsibility you could share, delegate, or approach differently?

Personal Reminder

"Asking for help doesn't diminish your commitment. Sometimes it strengthens your ability to continue serving."

Exercise 6: Write Your Thank-You Message

Choose one person who has helped keep your wheel turning.

Write a sincere message of appreciation.

It doesn't need to be lengthy.

It just needs to be genuine.

My Thank-You Message

Dear _____ ,

I wanted to take a moment to thank you for something that may not have seemed important at the time.

Your support made a difference because:

I want you to know that your kindness, encouragement, or sacrifice has not been forgotten.

Thank you for being part of my journey.

Sincerely,

My Commitment

- ☐ I will call this person.
- ☐ I will send a message.
- ☐ I will write a handwritten note.
- ☐ I will invite them for coffee.
- ☐ I will thank them in person.

Date I plan to follow through:

Exercise 7: Whose Wheel Are You Helping Turn?

Now it's time to move from appreciation to service.

Identify three people who might benefit from your encouragement or assistance.

1. Person — what they may need — how I can help:

2. Person — what they may need — how I can help:

3. Person — what they may need — how I can help:

Choose One Action

This week, I will help:

Name:

My specific action:

When I will do it:

How I will know I followed through:

Remember, helping someone doesn't always require money, special skills, or a major commitment.

Sometimes your time and attention are the greatest gifts you can offer.

The Seven-Day Coffee Cup Challenge

Use this simple challenge to put the episode's message into practice.

Monday: Identify someone who helped you succeed. ☐ Completed

Tuesday: Send a sincere thank-you message. ☐ Completed

Wednesday: Recognize someone working behind the scenes. ☐ Completed

Thursday: Encourage someone facing a challenge. ☐ Completed

Friday: Offer help without expecting recognition. ☐ Completed

Saturday: Spend meaningful time with someone who supports you. ☐ Completed

Sunday: Reflect on what you learned and who you helped. ☐ Completed

End-of-Week Reflection

21. What was the most meaningful conversation you had this week?

22. Did someone respond unexpectedly to your appreciation?

23. How did helping someone else affect your perspective?

24. What habit would you like to continue beyond this week?

Coffee Cup Family Discussion Questions

These questions are designed for family conversations, small groups, leadership teams, or community organizations.

Why do we sometimes overlook people who quietly support others?

Is recognition necessary for meaningful service? Why or why not?

How can leaders create an environment where everyone feels valued?

What happens to a family, team, or organization when the same people always carry the responsibilities?

How can we teach younger generations to appreciate the people behind their accomplishments?

What is one practical way your family or organization could recognize its quiet contributors?

Group Challenge

Before your next meeting or family gathering, identify someone whose contributions may have gone unnoticed.

Take a moment to recognize that person sincerely.

Don't make it about a title or award.

Make it about appreciation.

My Personal Leadership Commitment

After completing this workbook, I recognize that:

One person I need to appreciate more is:

One relationship I want to strengthen is:

One person I want to encourage is:

One responsibility I need to share is:

One leadership habit I want to improve is:

My Commitment Statement

I will make a conscious effort to recognize the people who support me, share credit for accomplishments, and help others succeed.

I understand that meaningful leadership isn't measured only by personal achievements, but also by the positive difference I make in the lives of others.

Signature:

Date:

Final Coffee Cup Reflection

Think about the Ferris wheel one more time.

The people enjoying the view may receive most of the attention.

But the ride depends on individuals working behind the scenes.

Our lives are much the same.

Some people help us rise.

Some help us through difficult moments.

And others quietly provide the support that allows us to keep moving forward.

The challenge is not simply to recognize those individuals.

It's to become someone who offers that same support to others.

Don't get so caught up enjoying the view from the top that you forget the people who helped you get there.

And remember:

Success isn't just about how high you climb. It's about who helped you get there and who you're willing to help along the way.

Thank you for being part of the Coffee Cup Family.

Keep encouraging.

Keep serving.

Keep making a difference.

One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.

God bless!