

The *Real* Goal: TAKE THE BEST PHOTO

Professor Powell announced the assignment with a sly smile. Read an Ops textbook over spring break? But there were slopes to ski, beaches to lounge on, internship interviews to bomb. I pictured myself sipping a fizzy tropical drink, drawing flow charts in the sand with a little paper umbrella (a visualization made all the more painful when I realized my road trip through Delaware and New Jersey would not likely include a Caribbean detour).

“Take a picture reading *The Goal*,” the second-years said, filling us in on the real assignment. “It’ll be funny. Not as funny as last year, of course...it’s *tradition*.” I was still new to this whole Ivy League thing, but I knew you didn’t argue with “the *T* word.”

The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement by Eliyahu Goldratt turned out to be no ordinary Ops textbook. It had drama, it had passion, it had a *scout troop*. Even the author’s name was playful. (“Yahoo!”) I was quickly drawn in to the novelized account of the high-stakes world of assembly-line optimization. And unlike the moralistic narrators of our marketing cases (“I had learned my lesson—chickens and contact lenses just don’t mix”), I could identify with *The Goal*’s protagonist. Who among us hasn’t suffered the pains of marital discord because of manufacturing inefficiencies down at the plant?

The more I read, the farther I got from the real goal: taking the perfect *Goal* picture. How could I live up to the unattainable expectations of the second-years and not look like a total idiot? (I was failing that second part just fine already.) Goldratt stared out from the book cover with sunken, heavy-lidded eyes. What was he trying to tell me? His arms rested comfortably on the table, shirt open at the neck, facial moles balanced in perfect symmetry, that rugged five o’clock shadow tinting his face. (I looked away before I began asking myself bigger questions.) Then I saw it: There, in the bottom of the picture, was a copy of *The Goal*! In all his ironic self-conscious glory, Eli G. had posed for the first *Goal* photo!

I figured I had three options: Find a famous person (say, Snow White), pose in a famous location, or do something funny. I wouldn’t be visiting Disney World or Europe on my mid-Atlantic drive, so I focused on #3. Classmates should laugh at my *Goal* photo, but in a respectful, tasteful sort of way. (“Toph, are you wearing anything in that picture? And is that a donut?”) Subtle was good, but not too subtle. (“Yes, I know it’s Kotler. See, it’s *ironic*.”)

I tried posing a friend’s cat. But “Muffin” preferred licking her own genitalia to analyzing bottlenecks, and (much



T'05s Jeff Emig and Tim Grein reaching their summit *Goal*



T'05s David Hoverman and Abigail Smith's *Goal* in Costa Rica



T'01 Eric Grorud's air *Goal* in Alta, Utah



C. Tora Phan T'02 bungee-jumping for *The Goal* in Bali



Debbie Atuk T'04 and Brett Rose wreck-diving for *The Goal* in Maui



T'00 Alastair M. Bor and *Goal* friends in Cape Town, South Africa

like my experience managing engineers) all I got out of the afternoon was a scratched arm and shredded book. A best-in-world *Goal* photo might require outsourcing. Desperate, I purchased Photoshop. (“Yes, that’s right, Stalin read *The Goal* at Yalta. Kind of *ironic*, don’t you think?”)

My week’s “vacation” over, I returned to Hanover with a roll of pictures and very little confidence. (Less than normal, even, which is saying something.) False hopes propelled me to *The Goal* wall of fame, where to my chagrin I quickly discovered that my work did not merit inclusion. A roller coaster! Why hadn’t I thought of that? The Eiffel Tower? The Great Wall of China? I wondered aloud how a sky-diving classmate had held on during freefall. (“Local Man Killed Efficiently by Best-Selling Manufacturing Book Dropped from the Sky.”) I glumly crumpled the picture of me on a pony. This would not be my year.

So what did I learn from my *Goal* experience? Deep inside each and every one of us lives our own little Herbie. The goal is to find him...and kill him. Let’s face it, if anyone on that scout trip had read *Lord of the Flies*, Herbie’s head would have been on a stake by mile two. (Then, for the sake of continuous improvement, identify the next bottleneck, head on a stake, lather, rinse, repeat.)

I also learned that the best *Goal* photos require no explanation. (“See, I’m in front of a Jackson Pollack, but I don’t notice it because I’m reading *The Goal*.”) I was disappointed, but I took solace in knowing that next year I would politely mock the first-years’ efforts. (“Yeah, that one on the tank is pretty cool. Of course, I posed in a helicopter. Naked. With the president of, um, France. Totally *ironic*.”) I mean, I had to. It’s *tradition*.



Toph Whitmore T'94 and Pollack'd *Goal*