chapter three

rookie moves

As a very young man, I went to work for a local golf course, cutting greens, raking sand traps, watering grass, and trimming the roughs—yard work, in other words. On my first day, the head greens keeper asked me to start the jeep near the maintenance building and dump its contents in a make-shift garbage area behind the course. When I stepped into the old, faded army-looking green vehicle, I realized it was a clutch-driven jeep (most were back then). This was something I had never been taught in driving school, which I think I had just completed. But I tried. And tried again. And again. It just sputtered—wouldn't start. When I told the greens keeper it wouldn't turn over, he mumbled something about having just driven it a few minutes ago. I watched with interest, and some apprehension too, as it immediately started as soon as he hopped in, and of course, pushed in the clutch with his left foot. As I tried to release the clutch and apply my other foot to the gas, jerking along that dirt road, I'm sure my new boss was shaking his head as he walked away. He could have called heads, but, gratefully, he looked the other way. It might have been one of my first "rookie moves." The first of many.

Ironically, when I left Triad America for the Utah Jazz, my office had just moved around the corner and down the hall within the same building in which I had just spent three or so fairly intense years. My new office looked a lot like my very last one at Triad: a small cubicle with a table and chair. Even though I was nervous and uncertain about the future with the Jazz, I was glad to be gone from Triad America. Long hours and insurmountable challenges to persuade people to change shopping, entertainment, dining habits, or move their offices had been more than difficult, especially in Triad America's retail sector,

where stores struggled to stay open while nobody came. My marketing team had felt the pressure: Store owners often showed up at our office doors unannounced with pained faces. Why weren't people coming? Why weren't our advertising and promotion plans working? We often held meetings with retailers to address their problems. But the problem really couldn't be solved. It didn't matter how many advertising and promotional dollars we threw at it; the retail sector of our business was barely breathing. I hadn't spent much time in retail marketing in my career, but I was educated enough to know that we had bigger problems than advertising.

As I began to investigate our obstacles, I realized that the core problem was all the retail stores were buried inside a beautiful office building. No street-front signage, display windows, or beckoning reason to enter what looked like—and was—an office building. Only very ornate miniature street signs along the many Triad Center pathways pointed to the retail shops. The more I researched retail operations, the more I realized our retailers were doomed. Retailers needed storefront visibility and street/foot traffic to survive. We didn't have either. They couldn't survive in a cave, no matter how beautifully it was constructed. What was especially upsetting was the fact that more than a few had mortgaged just about everything they had to go into business at the "Gathering Place." And even if we had some street-front visibility, few people came to Triad Center to do their shopping. Again, I felt helpless. We had a big marketing staff with very creative people, but we couldn't solve inherent problems that became more foreboding as the project ran out of money. Several of our shops and restaurant owners escaped to find success in other locations, but some were never heard from again.

Luckily, that was all behind me. I had been fortunate to land on my feet. I was in sales, purely sales, something I never really contemplated before accepting the job. I remember Larry Baum asking me during one of our interviews if I could sell. I told him I had headed up new business at the ad agency and that I was used to chasing prospects and

winning new accounts. True, but I quickly discovered that this was a little different. In the ad agency business, I was chasing just a few companies with attractive marketing budgets. While we might have had 20 to 30 clients at Fotheringham & Associates, the Jazz could easily have 100 or more companies on their sponsor roster. In some ways, I felt more pressure in the ad agency business. Losing one client could spell disaster for an agency. Losing a Jazz sponsor didn't mean cutting our staff, but it did potentially mean taking a hit in your wallet. Overall, though, a client could be lost and replaced without significant damage to the Jazz. But I never took losing a client lightly, even though most clients left due to problems in other areas of their business. Our informal research told us that a large majority of our clients were happy with their results from a Jazz sponsorship.

However, in 1986, annual sponsorship sales at the Jazz was less than $2 million, which was still a very remarkable feat in my mind since it was really only Larry Baum working full time on sales with part-time help from Randy Rigby (broadcasting), Grant Harrison (game operations), and David Fredman (radio broadcasting). There was plenty of room for more sponsors, albeit selling sponsorships was a new venture for me. I was used to working part time in sales at Fotheringham & Associates. There were clients to manage, people to manage, and strategies to create. We had to help our existing clients be successful and happy with our work, and that took time. Selling was something I did whenever I could. It wasn't first on my list to do each day. But on my first day at the Jazz, I didn't have any clients. I didn't have any strategies to create. I didn't have any people to manage—except one. A rather paralyzing thought occurred to me: I didn't have any prospects, either. I had a pen, an empty notepad, and a telephone on my desk. I had no one to call. I was clearly, by every definition of the term, a "rookie."

In the fall of 2004—18 years after I joined the team—I asked Coach Sloan as I sat next to him on the bleachers of the Zions Bank Basketball Center for a few moments what he thought of our two new rookie draft choices, Kris Humphries and Kirk Snyder, who were among our

veteran players, sweating profusely as our assistant coaches barked at them on the court. Jerry shrugged, looked at me, and nonchalantly said with a slight grin, "We'll know in about three years."

I don't remember how long my rookie stint lasted with the Jazz. Others might tell you. It was probably about three years before I really began to hit my stride. Jerry, based on years of experience assessing talent, probably got that right in my case, too. One who would be quick to weigh in on my start was Helen Daynes, my first assistant/secretary at the Jazz. I grew to love Helen. Everyone in the front office did, too. Before she passed away from cancer years later, the Jazz would hold a tribute luncheon for her. Former staff members and players also attended, including Adrian Dantley, who flew in from Denver where he was working as an assistant coach for the Nuggets. Helen was highly regarded.

Helen was always in the office and could be spotted easily across the room, usually with a half-smoked cigarette dangling between her ruby-red lips as she peered over dark-rimmed glasses and pecked away at a typewriter. And there I was, a former corporate VP with a staff of 20 or so and at least three full-time assistants who I used to be able to call on. Unfortunately, I brought that corporate mind-set with me to the Jazz. It didn't take Helen very long to help me realize that I wasn't who I thought I was. She conducted her own rookie boot camp on my behalf. "White out," that little bottle of ink that was used to correct typos, was her enemy. Didn't like it. Didn't use it. Only on a good day, once you had paid proper homage, would she look up from the typewriter and maybe give you a slight nod, an affirmative look that she might, just might, open it up on your behalf. At least, that's how I felt.

Helen worked at her own pace, and she worked for others in the office too. So, you stood in line. If she liked you, you might see something returned in the sequence she received it. If she didn't like you (I think she liked me on some days, not on others), then it was best to proceed and acquire your own bottle of "white out." But like I said, we all loved Helen Daynes. I think Frank Layden—or someone else—found and rescued her, gave her a job, had her follow the team to Utah,

and kept her alive for more years than some thought possible. I love the Jazz for that. They found room, just like Manny Floor found room, for someone who really needed help, and who, forever grateful, gave it his or her all to perform. I realized later that Helen did that. Most importantly, she trained Mike Snarr. Probably the best business lesson I ever received came from her: Roll up your sleeves, work hard, and don't ask anyone to do something you wouldn't do yourself.

High school and college basketball players are coddled, adored, protected, and virtually worshiped every day of their athletic lives, until the first day they report to camp for an NBA team. Now they're starting over. They need to prove that they can play in this league, on this team, and earn their new "rookie salaries" worth millions of dollars. This is the first time they really get paid for their talents. Are they good enough to make a difference? How long will they be "rookies?"

Although they were undoubtedly the stars of their high school or college teams, now they had to mesh with at least a dozen other guys who had already established a team culture surrounding an all-star-status player like Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Kobe Bryant or John Stockton/Karl Malone. Every team has that kind of leader. I only had to worry about Helen Daynes. If I washed out, I would find another job. A rookie player who doesn't last more than one season in the NBA will rarely find that kind of employment opportunity again. It's a very tough, highly competitive, and pressure-filled position facing a young man right out of college, or in some cases, maybe high school.

A college schedule spans about four months and approximately 25 games. An NBA season lasts six months and 82 games, not including the playoffs. One of the toughest challenges any rookie faces is learning to be mentally and physically ready to play as many as three to four games in one week. It's a near-horrific adjustment, and sometime around four months into the NBA season, most rookies encounter what is known, auspiciously, as the "Rookie Wall." And the "Wall" is real. I've watched just about every one of our rookies hit it, with the possible exceptions of John and Karl. When they do, they begin an

on-court tail spin, looking lackluster, tired, and uninvolved. It's not pretty. Some recover in time to finish the season respectably, getting their second wind, so to speak. Some don't.

Veterans don't make it easy on first-year players either. They have a way of making sure a rookie knows he is a rookie. A rookie might have to carry a star player's overnight bag on road trips. A rookie will soon learn which locker is his, where to sit on the bus, and even when to eat the team meal. Each team has its own traditions and unwritten rules for "welcoming" the new rookie to the team. You might call the process a mild form of hazing. Whether you're destined to be a future hall of famer or a second-round pick, expect to be relegated to the back of the bus, end of the line, or the last room at the hotel.

I don't know what kind of veteran trials rookies Karl, John, and Thurl had to put up with during their initial seasons. In later years, when I began traveling with the team a little, I found it amusing that our rookies wore little, pink children's backpacks. My guess is that Deron Williams may have started that rookie tradition, because I didn't notice it when he was a rookie. Luckily, I don't think our vets made them wear them out on the town during road trips, only around the hotel, during bus rides, boarding a chartered plane, and getting in and out of arenas. Hard to imagine someone like Carlos Boozer wearing a little pink backpack and driving a Bentley.

The other mind shift I needed to make as a rookie (salesman) in the NBA didn't come easily, either. At Triad America and in the ad agency business, business suits and attire prevailed. You never showed up to work without a suit and tie. Never. In the Jazz offices, on the other hand, people often sported open collars or no collar at all. Occasionally, coaches or players might stroll through the office in T-shirts and gym shorts. They had their own dress code, and it had worn off on others in the front office. As business attire began loosening up in all business circles, our salespeople began to "dress down" for Casual Fridays. At one point, Tim Howells, then President of the Jazz, pulled Larry Baum aside and told him that his sales department was starting

to look a little too casual (or something like that). In the next sales meeting, Larry passed along our new dress code: ties, suits, sport coats, and no Casual Fridays. It wasn't long, however, before Larry showed up in slacks and a white golf shirt. In a sales meeting, I asked him about the no-golf-shirt rule.

Without blinking, he said, as if he had anticipated the question, "It's okay if it's white." Larry was the boss. End of conversation.

I learned years later that John Stockton referred to the front office as "suits." I don't think he or any of the other players did it out of respect for what we were doing. There was clearly separation between the front office and basketball operations. It was okay to come to our place, but be wary of venturing too far into the locker room without special dispensation. I understood that. I was okay with that. Still okay with that.

When I took over for Larry Baum and headed up the Jazz Sponsorship Sales Department years later, I read Phil Jackson's book, *Sacred Hoops*. To build loyalty and commitment among his team members, Phil designated a special room that was for players only. He decorated it with Native American artifacts and Western decor. Not even the owner was invited in. Occasionally, I found a separate room in the belly of the then Delta Center that was rarely used and held sales meetings there for the same purpose, sans the Native American artifacts. Dave Dalton from our hospitality group was great at dressing it up and making it look special. It was a refreshing reprise from the hustle and bustle (and continual interruptions) we experienced in the glass-windowed conference rooms upstairs. It was a good opportunity to help ease the stress for our sales team, including "rookie hires," too.

I wanted anyone we brought in off the streets to work for us to feel welcome. In most cases, we hired veterans who had been in sales with other NBA teams, sports marketing enterprises, or local media sales outlets. I only really hired one rookie during my tenure. I think he was grateful for the way we included him. Jackson Brown was a former backup quarterback at Brigham Young University, who would become a star performer for us, but I worried about him incessantly for the first six months or so of his Jazz career. He rarely said a word in meetings, and despite his sports background, he appeared to be struggling to find

his niche in our department. I had to keep reminding myself about my own rookie season in sales. I'd often told my wife—over dinner after a hard day of work turning up zero prospects—that choosing to work for the Jazz was the biggest career mistake of my life. It was obvious to me that I really couldn't sell.

The difficult thing for me (and for most people) in sales is that you can't be "dialing for dollars" all day long, every day. At least I couldn't without going nuts. Luckily, Larry Baum had assigned me a half-dozen existing clients who I could begin to form relationships with and manage the activation elements of their contracts. That helped keep me from going insane. But I still felt lost. Was I not saying the right things over the phone, or was I leaving messages for the wrong people? Should I just drop in on an unresponsive prospect? I talked with my boss. I talked with my wife. I talked with the walls. I rehearsed my approach in the mirror. Unfortunately, I kept struggling. And struggling. Just like Jackson was.

Many times, I debated just hanging it up and begging my former employer or another local ad agency to take me back. I attended a few sales seminars, but even with all that wonderful advice and guidance, I didn't seem to learn anything I didn't already know. Helen Daynes was putting me through rookie boot camp, but not even she could help me figure out this awful, lowdown, dirty business of selling I had gotten myself into. I was unprepared for my new life in sales, just like my rookie counterparts. Dell Curry was probably in the same boat as me, but he could shoot a jump shot. I couldn't even make a layup.

About 20 years after I joined the Jazz, the NBA got smart about their own rookies. They started a two-week rookie "boot camp" of their own. Every drafted rookie was required to attend. The league was motivated by several off-court mishaps involving players, including rookies. Imagine becoming an overnight millionaire. How would you spend all that money in your early twenties? You'd do what many players did: You'd buy things like houses, maybe even a penthouse or two, cars—very expensive cars—plenty of them, and jewelry—exquisite jewelry.

Suddenly, you're the coolest guy in town. You have friends you have never even heard of. And girlfriends—girlfriends that love to shop—multiple girlfriends, potentially one in every NBA city. Of course, most players were careful. They invested rather than spent. They helped family and kept in touch with close friends. Genuine friends. But some players weren't as careful. They were the exception, but they were the ones getting the headlines, not the practical, down-to-earth guys who had heard that the average career in the NBA is about five years. Spend that money now, and in five years, you could be destitute.

At issue were things like the temptation of drugs, lifestyle, attire, agents, investing and saving wisely, a posse (i.e. extended family and friends), fan adoration (or occasionally, scorn), and other issues that few of us worried about at that age. The NBA's rookie school addresses all of this, helping young men realize, if nothing else, just what they are up against in this new world of big-league sports. The league had plenty of examples on either side to draw from: those that had been smart, retired, and lived well, even if they had a relatively short career, as well as those who had made millions upon millions of dollars but lost it all, perhaps even dying broke.

The league was also facing a branding crisis. Players from low-income areas and big cities often sported an urban style that bordered on being inappropriate. Fans noticed. Players began wearing overly long basketball shorts well below the traditional benchmark around the knee. With money and fame, players could appear cocky, ungrateful, distant, or maybe even threatening. The league soon enforced a dress code for on and off-court appearances. Slowly, with the help of changing American fashion, players became ingratiated to fans. Some players never embraced the urban look. My favorite TV commercial from that era featured the three women from the very popular TV series *Friends*, sitting on a couch, watching an NBA game. One of them turns to the others and says in admiration something like "Wait, wait, here he comes. There, there he is, in those short shorts" as the camera flashes to the TV screen showing John Stockton dribbling up the court wearing about the same sized shorts he probably wore in ninth grade. That scene, seemingly from the hit TV show, played right into the hands of the NBA, who needed people like John Stockton for more than just

on-court heroics. They needed a new brand, and John was just the kind of guy who could deliver it to them.

My rookie NBA season didn't include an informative two-week seminar, unfortunately. It would have been nice. I think the NBA front office now offers a salesperson training course for teams. I really had no other choice but to keep going. I kept hearing things like "It's a numbers game" and "Every no just puts you one step closer to a yes." And, of course, I had Helen.

Then one day, I met Randy Orison. I wish I could say it was a cold call, but it wasn't. Randy actually called us, and somehow, I ended up getting the call. He was heading up a new company called Cellular One. Cell phones were just starting to pop into our culture, and he wanted to discuss a potential sponsorship with the Jazz. We met. He brought one of his business associates with him, and within two hours, I completed my first deal: $20,000 of half trade and half cash. It was an icebreaker, so to speak. I was ecstatic. Randy and I became great, life-long friends over the next several years. Of course, the end of the story is that Cellular One morphed into AT&T. A few years later, the late Bill Quick and I put together a three-year agreement somewhere in the vicinity of $675,000 per year, just over $2 million for the term of the contract. I would have been even more ecstatic if I could have peeked into the future. But that day, $20,000 actually looked like $2 million to me.

It was about six months or so after we hired Jackson Brown that he completed his first deal too. I'm sure he felt like I did at that moment. During our annual sales retreat, I often published a top 10 moments of the year. That year, I included one for Jackson: "April 17, Jackson says something in a sales meeting." Today, still a little quiet and shy in sales meetings, he is among a handful of elite salespeople for the Jazz, each of whom I am proud to claim as good friends and people I had the good sense to hire. In the beginning, we faced years in which the team under-performed (or actually, over-performed without headline talent on the roster—but still missed the playoffs), as well as years with a busi-

ness downturn, even a recession, and years of helping educate clients about sponsorship opportunities with the Jazz, a relatively new concept when I first joined the team. I didn't even know what it was until Larry Baum explained it to me. But back then, even with one deal under my belt, I knew I still had an awful lot to learn. One deal does not make a career. One year does not turn a rookie into a veteran player. Just ask Jerry Sloan. He'll tell you.

One thing a rookie will learn very quickly is what the culture of his team looks like. What's expected of him? Is the team culture loose or stiff? Relaxed or buttoned up? On the business side, I'd say we were pretty buttoned up at the Jazz. That's not to say it wasn't fun. It was very, very fun. There was a sense of pulling together, of doing what was needed, of helping out where you could. Everyone felt some responsibility and some ownership for the product on the court. The "Utah" Jazz had only been in the state for about seven years when I joined them. There may have been 25 or so full-time employees. We were still, more or less, in start-up mode. Although we were all about doing business, selling tickets, and selling sponsorships, having a professional sports team in Salt Lake City was still a relatively new venture. Nothing like the sophisticated and more technical systems used in today's NBA world to put people in seats and companies on signs. It hadn't been too many years earlier when Sam Battistone, then owner, asked the city to make a pledge for the number of tickets we could sell before he tried to bring the team to Salt Lake. Could the city sell enough tickets, especially at a $5–10 per ticket price for 41 home games? With the help of the city, including the Chamber of Commerce, commitments were made, tickets sold, and a team arrived to play NBA basketball.

Once here, the team, including its rookies, had to adapt to several cultures: the team culture, the NBA culture (especially visible as teams traveled to other cities), and, of course, Salt Lake City culture. That was probably one of the reasons NBA Commissioner David Stern thought the team wouldn't make it here. Utah lacked the diverse, urban culture that might appeal to most NBA players. Portland, facing a similar chal-

lenge, was rumored to have "imported" a culture more suitable to an NBA player, even building night clubs and restaurants that could quite literally cater to NBA players in their city. The more provincial Utah market didn't appeal to some NBA players and probably never will. But look closely at the caliber of players we've had over the years who were willing to stay and play in SLC: John Stockton, Karl Malone, Jeff Hornacek, Thurl Bailey and Mark Eaton, who both live here full time, Jeff Malone, Antoine Carr, who started a business in Salt Lake after his career was completed, Deron Williams (I believe he still keeps a home here and comes back every summer), Carlos Boozer, Paul Millsap, Matt Harpring, Andrei Kirilenko, Adrian Dantley, Darrell Griffith, Ricky Green, Blue Edwards, who wanted to come back to Utah for a second chance with the team after he was traded, Mike Brown, Ty Corbin, Tom Chambers, Chris Morris, Bryon Russell, Howard Eisley, Danny Manning, John Starks, David Benoit, Donyell Marshall, DeShawn Stevenson, Al Jefferson, Mo Williams, Ron Boone, and Ty Corbin, as well as future greats like Derick Favors, who now lives here full time, Alec Burks, Rodney Hood, Rudy Gobert, Joe Johnson, Mehmet Occur, and that's just scratching the surface. I think that each would speak highly of their playing days for the Jazz and the on-going fan support in Utah.

Of course, the Jazz didn't appeal to some players who vocalized their concerns about playing in Utah, including Rony Seikaly, who ended up retiring when he was traded to Utah, Enes Kanter, whose rather inflammatory comments didn't sit well with Jazz fans when he was traded in the spring of 2015, or Derek Harper, who played for the Mavericks and said absolutely no to the Jazz when they tried to acquire him toward the end of his career. When he was eventually traded to Detroit, he decided to retire and never reported to that team either. Gordon Hayward surprised fans when he opted to join the Celtics to earn less money than he could in Utah. I'll wager Gordon is the exception.

So, what kept so many players here for so long? Easy: The Jazz front office has always had a reputation for building a strong franchise with competitive teams, including 19 consecutive years making the playoffs, a disciplined coach like Jerry Sloan (good players appreciate good coaches), avid fans (among the most avid in the NBA, research shows), and widespread acceptance in the community. One of my favorite stories aptly

demonstrates fan avidity. It happened when we were in the finals with John and Karl. A good friend and neighbor of mine who owned a very successful excavation company had a team of workers scheduled to dig a hole for a new home in an east side, Salt Lake neighborhood.

One afternoon, as the team began to clear the ground, a neighbor, waving frantically, ran across the street and confronted the foreman. "You can't work here today," he said. To the incredulous project foreman, he added, "Because Karl Malone lives next door, and he's sleeping this afternoon before we play the Bulls tonight. You'll have to come back another day." He wouldn't take "no" for an answer, so the work was postponed!

I don't recall anyone asking fellow workers to guard my office door so I could concentrate on landing my next deal after Cellular One. Rookie (or even veteran) status didn't grant me that privilege. In fact, I didn't earn the chance to have my own office until I took over the sales department after Larry Baum retired. Life in a cubicle, especially as a rookie, was intimidating. It was easy to be self-conscious while receiving another "not interested" rebuff from a prospect over the phone. I always felt like everyone in the office could hear me pleading for just one 15-minute meeting with the person on the other end of the line, and I felt like many were probably saying, "This guy is never going to make it."

Making the team is on every rookie's mind, no matter how high he was drafted or how brilliant his college career was. No matter how big, fast, or gifted, most players probably have some doubts about their ability to play and flourish in the NBA. Putting up with rookie initiation, trying to form friendships with other players, developing the skills needed to play in the NBA, and knowing that the coach is watching every move can be unnerving.

Years after he became who many consider to be the most brilliant point guard in the history of the NBA, I reflected on John Stockton's rookie season and early Jazz career. I can't say I know John very well. He's a very private person. All business, you might say, especially on the basketball court.

As a rookie, playing backup point guard for Ricky Green, he shot a very acceptable 47% from the two-point range (on 333 shots), but he took only 11 three pointers and made two (or just under 20%) and shot 73% from the foul line. He had 150 turnovers, but Griffith led the team with 247 turnovers. Still, he was named honorable mention on the All-Rookie NBA Team. One stat does stand out for that inaugural season, glaringly: He was second in team assists with four hundred fifteen. Ricky Green led the team in assists with just under 600, but he played almost 1,000 more minutes than John. At about six foot one, Stockton managed to block 11 shots, which isn't many—but as many as Billy Paultz had in 62 games at six foot eleven! And he was third in steals with 109 behind Ricky and Darrell Griffith. One other statistic worth mentioning: He played in all 82 games along with Mark Eaton. Can you see some trends? Perhaps an underlying tenacity (based on 11 blocks and over 200 fouls), an ability to pass and steal the ball, and play hard throughout the season? Absolutely. Future greatness was coming into view.

My rookie year could be rewarding and painful, often in the same day. I was determined to endure, especially after the Cellular One deal. But I still had doubts and trudged on, filling a couple of notebooks with leads that usually went nowhere. In the meantime, I was learning and staying busy with existing clients, reading books on selling, and keeping my chin up. I was also enjoying the games. Forever a professional basketball fan, I grew up watching Bill Russell and the Celtics win several of their 13 world championships, which was the most by any team in any sport.

The Jazz played their games in the Salt Palace before a max crowd of about twelve thousand. They benefited from the spillover of the Utah Stars days, with players like Zelmo Beaty, Willie Wise, Glen Combs, and Ron Boone, who packed the house for rival games with the Indi-

ana Pacers and other American Basketball Association teams. I used to buy the five-dollar ticket with my friends in college and sneak down to the lower echelon seats to watch them play. Now, I had my own seats for each Jazz game, and I was expected to be there to meet clients and make sure promotional or hospitable details happened for them. Since I loved basketball so much, especially professional b-ball, this was a perk I continued to enjoy until I retired. It wasn't overtime to me.

Typically, I stayed to watch a game throughout its entirety, win or lose. I only remember leaving early once. I'm not sure if it was my rookie season, but it certainly was a rookie move. The Jazz were playing a very good Dallas team. With about 10 seconds to go, the Jazz were down nine points. *Game over*, I thought. So I exited. In the parking lot, virtually alone, I routinely tuned into the game on the radio. Hot Rod Hundley was shouting—no—virtually screaming something I couldn't quite understand. Was it a client's new commercial? No. I soon realized it was Hot Rod's live action play-by-play. Somehow, the Jazz had overcome that deficit to win the game. It involved at least a couple of three-point shots, probably from Darrell Griffith, sealing the victory in one of the team's greatest-ever comebacks. It was many, many years before I ever left a game early after that. I redeemed myself a little when I watched from my seats in the arena as the Jazz beat Michael Jordan's Bulls, down eight points with 40 seconds to go, John Stockton scoring a winning, break-away layup with Jordan breathing down his back.

Somewhere in between Stockton's rookie season and his game-winning driving layup vs. the Bulls, Stockton became the player fans hoped for. I'm not sure if even Stockton knew how far he could go. But John might be one of the most determined, focused, and yes, tough-minded players to ever pick up a basketball. He grew up in a family of athletes, was schooled by his older brothers, and received no sympathy from his father when he would come in from a street game a little bloodied or bruised. Was he gifted? Certainly. But, it wasn't obvious to the casual observer. He wasn't especially fast a foot, yet he

was deceptively quick around the hoop. One of my friends who lived in LA told me he couldn't believe how Stockton would move around Worthy, Kareem, and Magic as he drove to the basket, almost making them look like they were in slow motion. Stockton had a knack for getting inside the paint and being able to dish or shoot the ball. He wasn't known as a great outside shooter, initially, but he eventually developed a very respectable outside shot. Jazz fans will always remember his three-point bomb over Charles Barkley's outstretched hands that sent the Jazz to the finals for the first time in 1997. I think he ended up shooting close to 50% from the field for his career. Not many do that. Not even seven footers.

John was also sturdy. You wouldn't say he had an NBA body, like Blue Edwards, for instance, but in reality, he did. You don't last nearly 20 years in the NBA (especially at six feet one) without having a very strong, durable, rock-solid body. Rarely injured, Stockton, like Malone, could play through pain, get knocked down setting a screen, and be standing again in seconds like nothing happened. He used to drive other players nuts, gaining a reputation for not only being physically tough, but maybe a little bit of a "dirty" player too. However, I never saw John take a cheap shot at anyone. He just shut the door on anyone who thought they could get around or through him.

Stockton also had one other key asset I'm not sure most people knew about or would even consider to be essential. It was the one gift that would separate him from other mortal guards.

What were my key assets, I wondered, during that stressful rookie season? Luckily, I had Larry Baum to tutor me. Today, he would be considered "old school," and by now, I might be too. Larry believed in being very proactive, which is not old school, and he would do anything to help me make contacts in the business world, often making cold calls by driving down one of the main streets in downtown SLC and dropping in on a restaurant, bank, or other potential sponsor. Of course, that's almost unheard of today. The world has changed, and it continues to change ever more rapidly as texting, e-mails, and other

forms of communication now dominate a world that used to live by the phone.

I wasn't comfortable with a "drop-by cold call" approach, however. In my career, I rarely let someone see me if they just "dropped by." I was used to planning a full day, and there were enough inner-office distractions without letting someone I probably didn't know into my domain. Nevertheless, Larry taught me the importance of making a good first impression, watching carefully, and listening intently during a first-ever meeting with a prospect. His or her body language, attire, office decor, family pictures, trophies, awards, and office clutter were all keys to who he or she was, what was important, and what your future client wanted you to know about them. Office clutter, especially desktop clutter, might mean he or she wanted you to think he or she was busy. And, in a few minutes, with the right questions, you could determine whether it was true or not. If someone just wanted to make you think he or she was busy, then the chances were someone else was more likely the decision maker. Important to find out.

Larry had a knack for getting deals, and I occasionally watched them come together. It was impressive. During that first season, I began to gain confidence as I followed his lead. My batting average was still very, very low, but improving. I began pursuing insurance companies, for I had noticed the Prudential Halftime Report on nationally televised NBA games, among others. Health care was also a growing category, along with banks and fast food (later called quick-serve) restaurants. I balanced my day between making calls and scheduling appointments with my clients.

Larry also tried to help me prepare written proposals for clients, but on this point, we tended to disagree. "Keep it simple," he often told me. Easy things to fulfill were TV, radio, program ads, and tickets. Larry had really been a one man show, so keeping it simple was key to him. He had a very small staff, so he was left to fulfill most contracts. I felt like we needed to start creating new inventory/assets and provide reasons for clients to be more distinguishable. In the ad agency business, positioning a client in a way that made them stand out from the competition was very important. I felt the same responsibility here, too. As I began to get deals, he often reminded me that they were too

complicated, but I believed in being creative, and that mindset helped me over the years.

What distinguishing feature helped John Stockton? Big hands. John Stockton had big hands for his size, and that asset separated him from many other point guards who might have been considered quicker, more athletic, more highly touted, more likely to be considered dangerous all-star-quality point guards. I didn't think about the size of his hands until I watched him stop his dribble by simply palming the ball at the top. I was used to making two handed passes, or at minimum, cradling the ball with one hand to gain leverage during my days of pick-up ball. Stockton didn't need to do that. That's why he could throw a basketball overhand like a baseball to Karl Malone from baseline to baseline, past Michael Jordan, to seal the victory in the fifth game of the 1997 NBA Finals. It was a tremendous, pinpoint pass, and it gave him an advantage in that moment and in so many other games as well. John could slow his dribble, eye the court, and throw a strike through a crowd and into the outstretched hands of a teammate before opponents could properly react. He could even pass the ball from his dribble, stopping it in mid-sentence, so to speak, with little hesitation. It was a gift that many players didn't have, especially point-guard-sized players. His receivers learned early to be on the lookout so they wouldn't be embarrassed as the ball whizzed by them, or worse, hit them in the head or chest. It not only helped him control the ball, but also steal it as players, often underestimating his reach, got a little lazy as a smaller six-foot-one guard lurked nearby. It's why, in my opinion, he set NBA league records, which will probably never be eclipsed, in assists as well as steals. Of course, the other reason he accomplished this feat was that he had Karl Malone, one of—if not the best—power forward ever on the receiving end.

Meanwhile, still in my rookie season, I was tossing up shots too, to companies I hoped would join our ranks of sponsors. I was learning

to write proposals and make presentations. I believed in the effectiveness of a Jazz sponsorship. People were beginning to get excited about the Jazz. They came to games in near sell-out fashion, watched on TV in droves, and thus provided us with fans in record numbers. We were quickly becoming the most followed game in town. The "value proposition," in marketing terms, was becoming evident. Using a variety of assets (inventory), like signage, media, in-arena promotions, I realized that we could create what we liked to call "instant awareness" or "top-of-mind" or "top-of-market" awareness for a client. With our help, they could establish a distinctive "position" for themselves in the marketplace, often one-upping their competition. One of the ways for them to do that was to "own" something. Ownership was very singular, very distinctive, and in many cases, it endeared a client to the public. Research told us that companies that became sponsors of the Jazz were perceived as being more community minded, more supportive of the city, and more "user-friendly." Jazz fans (a quickly growing demographic) were more likely to support, buy from, or at the least, have a more positive impression of them. Soon, others started calling us "the only game in town," a phrase we often used internally but rarely with sponsors. It was better, I thought, for them to stumble upon that idea themselves.

Karl Malone, drafted with the thirteenth pick one year after the Jazz drafted Stockton at sixteen, had an immediate impact on the team. That year, he played in 81 games (it would be a long time before he didn't play an 82-game season), shot just under 50% from the field, averaged 14.9 points and 8.9 rebounds, which was good enough to lead the team in rebounds and place second in scoring. Adrian Dantley managed a whopping 29.8 points a game and scored 56% of the time he shot the ball. With Eaton at center, Karl and Dantley next to him, and Stockton and Green finding them open 12 times a game, the Jazz averaged 108 points a game. Unfortunately, opponents averaged 108-plus points per game. And there was trouble inside the locker room. Apparently, Dantley had become sullen and seemed more interested in

scoring than winning. As a result, he fell out of favor with Layden, and it was on the road trip to Dallas that Frank sent him home. That's why he played in seventy-six games instead of eighty-two. That's probably why we lost to Dallas 1–3 in the playoffs. Veterans can make rookie moves too. Hence Frank's claim of "addition by subtraction." Years later, after he had handed the reins to Jerry Sloan, Frank said that an organization either supports the coach or listens to complaints from the team. If they allow the team to determine the culture, then they will be endorsing a coaching change every couple of years. That wasn't the Jazz way. Frank often said he'd rather lose with good guys than win with a bunch of egoists. Maybe that philosophy and the play of the rest of our team helped hasten Dantley's departure. Who knows?

There was no doubt that both John Stockton and Karl Malone were emerging players. Even better, they were likable people. No chips on their shoulders. No condescending attitudes or unwillingness to make the effort. The community embraced them. They had already embraced Frank Layden, whose sense of humor and personality had won over a legion of avid fans.

John and Karl struck up a somewhat unusual friendship based on mutual respect knowing that they could really help each other become better, potentially star players. I doubt the word "legendary" had entered their minds at that point. John was quiet, steady, and frugal. Thurl Bailey said that when he roomed with John during his rookie season, John insisted on keeping the temperature well below comfortable to save money. Karl was more emotional, talkative, energetic, and playful. He adored attention. John didn't. John often avoided fans. Karl looked for emotional support from them.

But they shared one trait that is not easily detected when you're drafting or trading for a player: passion. In fact, it was something more than passion. It was an obsession. To say they were obsessed is not an understatement. It's a compliment.

I loved basketball from an early age. It soon became an obsession of mine, too. I played whenever I could. By the time I was 18 years old, I had my first knee operation (left knee), and at 22, my second (right knee), but it didn't slow my passion/obsession. At 40 years old, I had an osteotomy, which is one step below a knee replacement. I saw three doctors before I found one who didn't tell me to quit the game. He was our team orthopedic physician, and he was obsessed with playing sports like me. After surgery, my wife said the words "wheelchair league." She also said she'd be out of town the next time I had a surgery like that. Somewhere around 52 years old, I measured my vertical leap and realized that I really wasn't playing basketball anymore. It was time to quit. At about 54 years old, left to playing golf and sitting in the hot tub from time to time, I had my first hip replacement. To cap things, I had my second hip replacement (the other hip) about 14 years later. I managed to play 18 holes of golf (my last time playing in the Utah Jazz Sponsor Golf Tournament before retiring) the day before I had surgery. The last three or four holes helped me make the emotional decision that I did need a new hip on that side of my body too. My new doctor (the others have all retired) says I am probably looking at a knee replacement in the near future. Looking back, it would have been smart to take up lawn bowling or swimming at about the age of 40, when most men have grown up and moved on from schoolyard sports. But I did have fun playing the game on cement, on grass, in the weeds, in a gym, and once or twice in an arena. I had just as much fun as John and Karl did. But the pay scale was different. I didn't make any money and probably spent easily over a half million dollars repairing my body. Definitely not smart. Not even close to smart. Rookie move.

John and Karl, at least as obsessed and passionate as I was, had NBA bodies. They were durable, strong, athletic, and gifted. John had those big hands and the ability to play, even on a broken leg. He could pass, and he worked hard on shooting too. Karl had size, speed, and the willingness to run the court like a point guard. He had "attitude," as they say. I can't think of anyone who wanted to take on a charge from

Karl Malone. Maybe a few did, but I'm pretty sure just one of tho would shorten most careers by a couple years. And, they were both ve smart. They played to their strengths—even as rookies—until oth parts of their game developed. John became a pretty tough-minde defender. Karl developed a nice turn-around, fade-away jumper tha served him so well in the second half of his career.

Not only gifted, but as I said, obsessed. Obsessed with playin at the top of their game, obsessed with winning, and that obsessio rubbed off on the rest of the team. Like John and Karl (and Hornace too), their teammates learned they wouldn't play for the Jazz long i they didn't get and stay fit. Jerry Sloan was obsessed too. And tha combination of obsession and talent got them all the way to the finals in 1997 and 1998.

During that march towards the finals, the Jazz made several moves to complement their core players. Adam Keefe was one of those addi- tions. John Stockton always claimed he was one of his favorite team- mates and essential to their making it to the finals. Other players were added, too, like Antoine Carr, Bryon Russell, Greg Foster, Shandon Anderson, and Howard Eisley. Our core players expected anyone add- ed via trade or free agency to come ready to play. During his first prac- tice with the team, one new player became winded and sat down on the outside of the court. John Stockton, while running laps, widened his arc to include the panting new teammate. As the story is told, John started querying him with comments like "Are you okay?" "Should I call 9-1-1?" and "Maybe you should take a nap." Soon, the rest of the team followed suit, and the arc of laps of all the players included the now embarrassed new addition to the team. Other players soon joined in, expressing mock concern for his health and overall wellbe- ing. I heard that this talented player quickly got in shape, realizing he was now playing for a contender whose players probably embraced a different culture, and it didn't want or need extra baggage.

John didn't tolerate anyone on the team's lack of commitment. But he was probably tougher on himself more than anyone else ever thought of being. He absolutely did not cut himself any slack, even as a rookie. Shortly after he had been drafted, his family threw a party to honor him. One of his friends was entering the back door of the Stock-

ton home in Spokane as John was leaving, gym shoes and basketball in tow. When his friend incredulously asked where he was going, John supposedly said, "I've got just one chance to make it in the NBA."

Karl was also tough on himself. In a good way. During his rookie season, teams knew who to foul at the end of a game: Karl. He was hovering around 50% from the foul line, likely costing the team some wins. When the press and fans were a little critical of him, he made a firm resolve and even announced that he would be better. Each year for the next several years, his foul-shooting percentage improved until he ended up shooting about 78% or more for his career.

But Karl and John had been rookies too. They weren't perfect, and they didn't always see the whole court. Once, after he had signed a shoe contract with LA Gear, Karl showed up at team warmups just before tip-off wearing brand new purple shoes. When Jerry asked him why, Karl told him about the shoe contract. Jerry said something like "That's fine, but you'll have to wear those in the locker room, not on the court. We wear white shoes." Karl attempted to plead his case. Jerry didn't budge. Karl may have even hinted that he wouldn't play. I'm not sure, but I think I know what Jerry would say to that. Karl left the floor, and a few minutes later, re-emerged with white shoes, laced up, and ready to go.

I can hear Jazz Announcer Hot Rod Hundley saying one of his patented phrases now: "You gotta love it, baby."

John and Karl played their rookie seasons with passion and that hard-to-define obsessive compulsion. That's my term, not the doctor's. Other rookies have played with a similar passion bordering on obsession too. Another one of my other favorite rookies was Andrei Kirilenko. He played with such infectious enthusiasm that fans were immediately drawn to him. He had some rookie moves too. I remember watching John Stockton shout at him from time to time about where to be for a play, often waving almost violently at him to move, drop back, or get to a spot in order to run a play. But Andrei had skills only a few other contemporary players could match. Statistics proved that he was in an elite group of NBA players who could affect the outcome of a game in a positive way. In one study, he was ranked in the top five invaluable players who could turn a loss into a win at the end of a game.

A couple of classic Jazz stories involved Kirilenko during his rookie season. They're both locker room stories that happened during halftimes of Jazz games. One of the team doctors shared them with me during a visit to his office. In the first instance, Sloan was particularly vocal, frustrated, and angry with the team.

Andrei was paying attention, but Sloan, knowing that Andrei spoke very little English at the time, turned to him during one very heated moment as he was chewing out the team, and said, "Andrei, are you getting this? Do you understand the words I'm saying?"

Andrei, in an oh-so-very-matter-of-fact response, said, "I understand the F-word." I don't know what happened next, but my guess is that not even Jerry Sloan could have remained straight-faced.

In the other story, Jerry was acting like he was chewing out the team, but he was really directing his remarks to Andrei. Sloan was telling the players they couldn't just look for the glory plays and leave the one they were defending in order to block someone else's shot. Knowing Jerry was addressing him, Kirilenko spoke up and said, "Coach, I play forty-seven minutes for you, one minute for my fans."

Jeff Hornacek, a player I really admire for his work ethic as well as skill set, impressed me the first time I saw him play. It was a preseason game against Phoenix on our home court. He was a somewhat lanky-looking rookie whom I had never heard of. He didn't play many minutes, but he made every minute count, seemingly scoring at will. Lights out, as they say. I thought it was a fluke. Too much pressure, too many jitters for most rookies to play with that level of confidence. I kept an eye on him after that, and years later, I was elated when we were able to trade for him. He completed, along with Stockton and Malone, a formidable trio of players every team needs to contend. He was the missing link, and his gifted shooting touch put us over the top. Even though Stockton made that infamous three pointer over Houston to get us to the finals, defenses could no longer collapse on Malone or Stockton without paying attention to Hornacek, or for that matter, Antoine Carr, Bryon Russell, or Howard Eisley.

Although Jerry Sloan told me it might take up to three years to see if his rookies could make it in the NBA, I think he saw potential in Stockton, Malone, Eaton, Thurl Bailey, and others who had an immediate impact as rookies. On the other hand, I sometimes felt like I might need at least three years to make an impact. One of the adjustments I had to make was realizing that selling is really an eight to five kind of a job. It's hard to make cold calls or schedule meetings before eight or after five o'clock. In my world, I had been used to being to work early and staying late. I could still do that with the Jazz, but success really happened between those normal business hours. I could prepare presentations, plan my day, and do administrative tasks at other times, early or late, but I had to be effective during game time, just like any other Jazz player—rookie or not. My goal was to improve my understanding of how a sponsorship could help a company extend their brand, be more recognizable, deliver more customers, and to learn how to structure deals to accomplish just that. It was a process, and I knew I couldn't cut corners or stand all alone to be a hero. Jerry used to tell his players to "let the game come to you." That resonated with me. I think it resonated with Stockton, Malone, Hornacek, and everyone else involved in that run to the finals. Early in our careers, we're all rookies. We don't want to hold onto that title for too long. We need mentors around us who we can depend on and gain strength from so we can eke out wins sooner than later.

chapter three takeaways

1. Have big hands if you play point guard, or if not, find your strengths and fully develop them. Stockton recognized that his hands helped him deliver the ball to his teammates in a very precise way, and he developed other talents to complement his strength. Whatever your go-to skill is, find it, develop it, and maximize it. Play to your strengths.
2. Learn to be patient. A successful career usually takes time to develop. Inevitably, you will experience some ups and downs. Don't give up on the downside.
3. Know and embrace the culture that you'll be working in. Or move on quickly. Being adaptable is paramount to survival. Being headstrong and above the system will not embellish your career. It might even shorten it.
4. Do the work. Know what is needed. Use your time in the office wisely, especially if you really only have from eight to five to make a difference.
5. To get ahead, extra effort will be required. Find time to hone your skills, hopefully not at the expense of a family party, but do what is necessary. You can party later.