



THE Faithful

HIGH COUNCILOR

*I learned a valuable lesson about “lifting where you stand”
from a faithful high priest in Germany.*

By Donald A. Coe

In October 2008, as I was listening to the broadcast of the priesthood session of general conference, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, began speaking about serving in the Church. He related a story about how he and some other brethren had tried to move a heavy piano. When all efforts failed, one man urged them to simply stand close together and “lift where you stand.”¹

President Uchtdorf went on to talk about serving in the Church wherever you are called to serve. Some people feel they could serve better if only they were called to do something befitting their considerable talents. He said, “No calling is beneath us. Every calling provides an opportunity to serve and to grow.”²

As President Uchtdorf spoke, my mind drifted to a time I met an unassuming member of the Church who was willing to lift wherever he was standing.

In 1985, I was stationed as a U.S. Army officer in a small town in Germany. I had served a mission in Germany 10 years previously. Upon arriving in 1983 as a soldier with my wife, Debra, and two young daughters, we began attending a serviceman’s branch of about 100 members strong. After two years, we decided to immerse ourselves fully into the German culture and began attending the small Bad Kreuznach Branch, which had about 12 members.

About the second week after we began attending, we noticed a new man there. He was in his mid-40s, and we learned that he was the high councilor assigned to our branch. He wasn’t there to conduct stake business, just to visit. We spoke for some time after church, and when we said good-bye, I figured we would next see him again in perhaps six months.

The next week, the high councilor was there again. I learned he lived about an hour away from our small town. During the remainder of his calling as a high councilor, he came to our branch two or three times a month. He was friendly, low-keyed, and encouraging. He always spoke with each member of the branch. And, with a branch that small, he was often asked to speak from the pulpit. Impressed with his dedication, in my mind I nicknamed him “the Faithful High Councilor.”

One Sunday he came to the branch services in the morning and then returned at 6:00 p.m. to attend a baptism. In between, he had gone to another branch. I have to admit that the thought actually crossed my mind, “What did he do to upset the stake president? Why else would he have been assigned to the smallest and most remote branch in the stake?” Maybe he wasn’t really the intelligent, humble, and likeable man I thought him to be. Maybe he didn’t like his home ward and used this assignment to get

away. I couldn't figure it out, so I just accepted it.

Several weeks after this baptism, I returned home after midnight on a Sunday morning. I had been training near the border between East and West Germany, and it had taken me three and a half hours to get home. I was exhausted when I walked in the door. My wife, Debra, was still up. She told me that "the Faithful High Councilor" had called. He wanted to meet with me. I asked, "Before or after church?" Church started at 10:00 a.m. I was hoping it was after church so I could sleep until 8:30.

"Before," she said.

"9:30?"

"No. He has to go somewhere else on stake business. He wants you to meet him at his office in Frankfurt. He said to go to Gate 5."

"What time?" I asked.

"Six," she responded.

Now I was upset. It was already 12:30 a.m. In order to make the appointment at 6:00, I would have to get up at 4:30. That meant less than four hours of sleep. What was I going to do? I didn't even have a phone number to call him the next morning to tell him I wouldn't be meeting him. I dropped my clothes next to the bed and lay down without setting the alarm clock. As I lay there, these thoughts went through my mind:

If I didn't meet "the Faithful High Councilor," what would happen? If I didn't show up at his office, I was sure he would make productive use of his time. The next time I spoke to him and explained why I hadn't met him, he would respond, "Of course you made the right decision. I would never have asked you to come if I had known you were getting home so late. We can take care of that business now." And besides, I wasn't *really* a member of the branch. Sure, our records were there and we attended every week, but we were foreigners, spoke some pretty atrocious German, and would be moving in five or six months.

My conscience was almost clear. A few more minutes



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and I could drift off to sleep. Then I remembered the nickname I had given him and all the times "the Faithful High Councilor" had come to the branch since we had been attending. He came to that baptism late on a Sunday night. He came to a branch activity in the middle of the week. He always spoke to all the members and encouraged and inspired them. He never seemed judgmental or indifferent. He was respectful of the branch president and of his efforts. If he was disappointed in being assigned to this little branch, he certainly never showed it.

I got up and walked over to the dresser where my alarm clock sat. I set the alarm for 4:30 a.m. In deciding to meet "the Faithful High Councilor," I was not concerned about what he would say or think if I did not. After all, I would probably never see or hear of him again after we moved. I decided to get up in less than four hours and drive 50 miles (80 km) to his office because I truly respected him for what he was, "the Faithful High Councilor." I decided to follow his example.

I pulled my car up to Gate 5 at 6:00 a.m. that Sunday morning to be greeted by a security guard with a machine



gun. He eyed my American Armed Forces license plate. He may have wondered if I was lost. Had “the Faithful High Councilor” decided not to show up? Not more than two minutes later, though, his car pulled up next to mine. He said, “Good morning, Don. Let’s go into my office.” The guard opened the gate and let us pass.

After some small talk and showing me around his office building, he came to the point of the meeting. He said he was calling me to serve as the counselor to the branch president. Not the first or second counselor—the only counselor. Before my arrival, there had been only two priesthood holders in the branch, and they had traded off every few years between being branch president and elders quorum president.

I accepted the call and served until I left three months later to attend a two-month training in the United States.

During my absence, my wife and young son both became ill. His medical issues took him to a hospital about 60 miles (97 km) from our base. Being a strong army wife, Debra never complained or asked me to return to Germany. In fact, I didn’t learn of the true nature of *her* illness until after I got home. After one visit to the local clinic, the doctor had driven her home because he didn’t think she was well enough to drive herself. The branch president and Relief Society president both offered to help, but she politely refused. In addition to language and cultural difficulties, Debra didn’t want to put anyone out.

One day “the Faithful High Councilor” called her. He had recently been called to be the stake president. He gently

inquired about her health and refused to take “I’m doing all right” for an answer. Every assurance from Debra was met with a gentle but effective inquiry into the actual condition of the family. Finally he explained, “Debra, you need

to let the branch help you. They really want to help, and it will bring the branch closer together to be able to assist you.” She gratefully accepted their assistance.

Upon my return from the United States, we stayed in the branch for another two months before finally moving to a larger city.

My memories of that time in my life faded as I leaned forward in my seat and refocused my attention on President Uchtdorf’s voice coming over the speaker system. I was truly impressed by the implications of his message. Unlike other times when I’ve wondered about the correlation between a speaker’s words and the speaker’s personal actions (in business, in the military, and, yes, even some talks I have heard in church), I had no doubt about President Uchtdorf’s message. It wasn’t just the fact that President Uchtdorf’s accent reminded me of Germany and my experience with “the Faithful High Councilor.” It was the fact that President Uchtdorf *was* “the Faithful High Councilor.” The industrial complex we met at that early Sunday morning was the Frankfurt International Airport, where he was Chief Pilot for Lufthansa German Airlines.

I can honestly say I have never known a man more humble and more faithful in practicing what he preached. I was grateful to have learned a valuable lesson of what it means to “lift where you stand.” ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Lift Where You Stand,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 53.
2. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Lift Where You Stand,” 56.