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To the donors of Second Spoon Inc.:

D-Sol

Admittedly, I have been vacillating over the ‘right’ time to release this memo. In some ways it quantifies this transitory stage – both in its response to graduation and reflection of organizational uncertainty. In other ways, this extended time has helped organize my philosophies on paper. As we begin to make strides toward redefining our operation to best fit the needs of our ailing communities, I hope that this letter will serve as an insight into our newly realized direction.

Today, this is our reality:

- The Music City Casino Royale was cancelled due to CDC and state mandate. The implications are tough to overlook. A walloping 70% of our projected funds were to stem from this fundraiser alone.
- Universities are closed. Dining halls have halted food production. Student-athletes are home. (For context, we are a student-athlete led non-profit organization whose primary activity is a function of a partnership with universities and their dining halls).
- Nashville needs help. The Middle Tennessee tornado relief efforts have undoubtedly been metabolized differently as a consequence of the onset of the pandemic only a few weeks later.
- These days, I’m frequently asked some iteration of: “What happens to Second Spoon now that you are graduating from Vanderbilt?”
- Or even better: “*How do you plan to scale (given all of the above)?*”

At risk of redundancy, I mentioned in a past letter our propensity to turn the perception of a systemic failure (food waste) into a solution for the 40 million Americans battling food insecurity. For the high-level athletes who makeup this organization, this is a framework for evaluating adversities, and one that governs their pursuits. In other words, we run toward obstacles while others run from them. Anything short of that falls to the tyranny of soft expectations.

Banking literature is littered with accounts of Goldman Sachs’ affinity for hiring elite athletes (my former roommate and esteemed ‘Second Spooner’, Justice Shelton-Mosley, as one of them). Chief among the correlates of good athletes and investment bankers is the virtue of maintaining intellectual humility in the face of uncertainty – a calculus that Adam Smith might have corresponded.

Howard Marks has been considering metacognition in the context of decision making under uncertain prospects for longer than most. In his memo, *You Bet*, he quotes Annie Duke:

What good poker players and good decision-makers have in common is their comfort with the world being an uncertain and unpredictable place. They understand that they can almost never know exactly how something will turn out. They embrace that uncertainty and, instead of focusing on being sure, they try to figure out how *unsure* they are, making their best guess at the chances that different outcomes will occur. (*Thinking in Bets*)

Now think about how micro-failures are ingrained into our nation's most popular sports:

- World-class baseball players routinely fail to make contact with the ball. The average hall-of-famer spends over 10,000 hours of practice and misses 70 percent of the time.
- Super Bowl winning quarterback Brett Favre is the all-time leader in interceptions thrown (by an order of magnitude) - 336.
- Michael Jordan epitomizes performance under pressure. He missed 26 game winning shots.

Bottom line: few have more resolve in the face of obstacles than athletes – a bet that Goldman's David Solomon and I are happy to take.

Into the Storm

Asked how he feels about these times as a Pulitzer Prize winning author, Jon Meacham initially used a phrase that implied that, whatever is going on, is unlike anything he had ever seen. "Every day is Christmas." I might add, *with dire consequences*.

What he would say as a Tennessee native, rather, is probably similar to what we heard from the community members affected by the five tornadoes that devastated the city on March 3rd. Families (particularly low-income) affected by the 25 deaths and 1500+ damaged residential structures needed immediate assistance. The following day, we dispatched a group of Belmont volleyball players alongside Vanderbilt football players, coaches, and administrators to bring 150 nourishing meals to those individuals. By the end of the week we distributed upwards of 525 boxes of food.

Meacham's *American Lion* tells us that Andrew Jackson called America "one great family." In the aftermath of the tornado, Nashvillians poured into the streets for one another, many taking time off work to rebuild. What we didn't anticipate, however, was a virus' rapid spread and the implementation of social distancing guidelines that followed soon thereafter. While businesses are faltering and it remains difficult to congregate in large groups, the need for operational adjustments has become clear – because that's what families do, dropping our former plans for the betterment of the group.

Surely, You're Joking Mr. Feynman!

At the heels of change I did some eclectic borrowing from some personal heroes. When the community development representatives from Blackbird Media reached out about displaying a graphic for Tennesseans facing a double crisis, one image in particular immediately came to mind.

An aside: I felt the responsibility of sharing the right message at such a critical time. Tim Ferris asks each of his guests the following,

“If you could have a gigantic billboard anywhere with anything on it — metaphorically speaking, getting a message out to millions or billions — what would it say and why?”

My answer, standing on Nashville’s signature billboard, “The Nashville Sign,” read:

Stay hungry,
Stay foolish
Change the World

Under different circumstances, my homage to Steve Job’s combustible spirit may have appeared overly anachronistic. Here, it is meant to represent the foundation for Apple’s success – a penchant for change – the rival of giants we all knew and loved such as Blockbuster, Kodak, Tower Records, etc. Jobs remained fastidiously, almost obsessively oriented toward the evolution of Apple’s brand. He summed it up with a staple expression that still echoes in the halls of business schools: “If you don’t cannibalize yourself someone else will.”

Jobs, like Richard Feynman, shares a kind of broad, eternally curious relationship with questioning the most obvious practices. Up until now, Second Spoon has planted its flag in the food waste industry, distributing nutritious surpluses to populations experiencing homelessness. In light of estimates reporting the permanent closure of around 25% of all restaurants, but also of the heroic acts of first responders, we posed a question which would make Feynman proud: Is there a better way for us to serve our communities during these times?

Alongside Vanderbilt’s launch of the #FeedOurHeroes challenge in early April, we are grateful for the opportunity to support local businesses and first responders through the delivery of restaurant prepared food. Last week, this took the shape of 100 meals from Mojito Grill being delivered to the Jackson Memorial Hospital workers in Miami. The week before, 120 sandwiches from French bistro, Patis, for the Coral Gables police department. If you have not already, we greatly appreciate your donations through the purchase of our Second Spoon merchandise listed on the website under “hat.” All proceeds go toward these meals.

Moving forward, I envision our operation abiding by a similar structure for the time being (Miami, Nashville & Los Angeles) with our ethos held tightly, navigating us during these trying times – helping those who need it most.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Ferris', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.