

Chapter 1

The Road Home

June 24, 2019

"It'll be a crazy long shot."

—Chandra Zenner Ford

Scott glanced at the rearview mirror, his house getting smaller and smaller in the reflection. Smiling, he turned his gaze forward as he started this new journey. He wasn't driving away from something but rather, toward a new venture, an extraordinary, full-circle, life-changing event. He might be alone in his car with a stuffed Joe Vandal in the passenger seat, but he didn't feel alone. In fact, he'd never felt more embraced by a loyal group of individuals than he did at that moment. His family was anxious about the move, but they understood the pull of tens of thousands who eagerly awaited Scott's arrival in Moscow, Idaho. He was heading toward his Vandal family, toward a new chapter in his life and theirs. As of July 1, 2019, C. Scott Green would officially step into the role of the University of Idaho president.

He started his 2700-mile trek west on I-80. He would cruise through eastern Pennsylvania, the hardwood mountains and valleys of western Pennsylvania, and then the hills in Ohio dotted with barns. Other routes existed, but this course seemed faster and more comfortable to drive. He'd packed enough clothes and personal items to cover a week, plenty of time for the moving truck to arrive at University House with the rest of his possessions. The moving truck was well on its way from Long Island, and by the looks of it, he was making excellent time to beat them there.

His mind wandered as the vast landscape he typically viewed at 30,000 feet from an airplane zipped by in shades of lush summer greens. Yes, he was speeding, anxious to log as many miles as possible on his first day traveling west. Dozens of things raced through his brain, but for whatever reason, he settled on dissecting how he'd arrived at this spot, not only on the road but in his life.

He still couldn't quite believe how he got here, but in every fiber of his body, Scott knew he'd made the right decision. Leaving his wife, Gabriella, at their home in Glen Head, New York, where they'd made their life together with the kids and dogs for 23 years, was the hardest thing he'd ever done. But she and their kids were with him, maybe not physically, but in spirit. He smiled, knowing they each would dive deep into their lives and activities, and the next time they all got together, the four of them would have countless stories to share.

He'd been laser-focused as global chief financial and operations officer at the international law firm Hogan Lovells, comfortable in that role even though each day brought new challenges and experiences spanning four continents. He entrenched himself in the plan of working in this capacity for a few more years and then retiring at a modest age to enjoy the fruits of his hard work. After closing that life chapter, he would relish time with his beautiful wife and adult children and enjoy *not* commuting or putting in long hours unless he chose that. It was all set.

The smile on his face widened as he thought about the eight-word text that sent his well-planned future spinning on a new trajectory, one he'd never imagined. Ever. Not even once.

It had been a typical day at the office in August 2018. Scott's focus at the time involved meeting with all his direct reports—the senior management team—to go through their finances and how they'd dealt with the recent implementation of a new finance system.

"We asked our team in London if all our offices in various countries had cleared their billing templates because we knew the new system's templates would be very different," Scott explained. "They claimed inside out they had. As it turns out, they hadn't. That created some problems for us. My deputy COO, Darren Mitchell, and I traveled around, collected data, and worked on those billing templates to get them fixed. It wasn't smooth, and the partners were understandably not happy with the billing issues we encountered. Still, at the end of the day, we systematically resolved those problems and had the program up quicker than any other law firm installing that system."

Just business as usual.

Scott's phone buzzed daily with constant texts, emails, and voicemails. When his cell dinged or chimed, he always glanced at the screen to see

who was reaching out. This particular day brought a text from his friend Chandra Zenner Ford. It wasn't unusual to hear from her; they'd been friends for years. Chandra and Scott were both alumni of the University of Idaho. When Scott served on the advisory board for the College of Business and Economics (CBE), Chandra was the college's assistant dean for external relations (she would later become CEO, SW Idaho and Special Advisor, Office of the President, University of Idaho).

"I met Scott through CBE and observed his commitment to the U of I firsthand," Chandra conveyed. "Despite his responsibilities managing international professional firms, he never wavered in his commitment to the U of I as a volunteer and benefactor. He and his wife, Gabriella, established the Scott and Gabriella Green Scholarship in CBE and made leadership gifts to the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences in honor of his grandfather. He also had received numerous awards. He moved on from the advisory board to the Foundation Board of Directors about the time I left the U of I in 2015 to become the director of philanthropy for the City of Boise, Idaho."

Scott was knee-deep in work that day but felt compelled to take a moment and read Chandra's text. Maybe she was headed to New York on business and wanted to connect. It was a short message, but it took a beat for the eight words to register. He blinked, shook his head, and reread the text to ensure he saw it correctly.

You should be the next president of UI. . .

His incredulous laugh punched the air in his office. Never in a million years had he pictured himself as a university president. The closest thing he'd come was working as an adjunct instructor in finance at Hofstra University on Long Island. He'd enjoyed teaching a few semesters, especially when the students lit up when he explained something in a way they could understand. At Hofstra, he'd gotten involved with legal panels on campus, published an article for their annual legal journal, and met great people, including Marty Lipton, the prominent mergers and acquisitions attorney at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz who created the "poison pill" defense against hostile takeovers. But never once did he hold any inkling or desire to become president of a university.

His phone dinged again, bringing him out of his reverie—another text from Chandra.

It'll be a crazy long shot.

He sat back in his chair, completely sidetracked from the business at hand. His mind flew in all directions, but all thoughts led to his beloved alma mater, the University of Idaho. Memories flooded his mind, from childhood when his grandfather Leon worked as the athletic director to his treasured college days. He'd joined the Kappa Sigma fraternity, been ASUI

president, reveled in Don Monson basketball and Dennis Erickson football, and received his undergraduate degree in 1984.

Earning his bachelor of science in accounting prepared him to drive away from Idaho in his Dodge Omni hatchback toward Boston to attend Harvard Business School for his MBA. In his wildest imagination, he never thought he'd drive back to the university—his university—35 years later to serve as its president.

Sure, Scott had stayed involved with his alma mater over those three-plus decades, never forgetting his roots and always giving back to the place that had given him so much. He'd set up a scholarship endowment, served on boards, and given time and treasure as a proud alumnus. And, like any loyal Vandal, his blood ran silver and gold, but he'd never entertained any thoughts about working at the university in any capacity.

He wasn't an academic. He didn't have a terminal degree. Even as an adjunct instructor at Hofstra, he'd only considered himself an educated, successful person willing to share and teach everything he knew about finance. He *had* authored two books about the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, offering a deep dive into his dedicated research and knowledge of the subject.

He knew enough to understand that a nontraditional president—even a published author and expert in his field—would never be entirely accepted by some at any university or college, regardless of a stellar resume. Chandra's texts bordered on ludicrous.

The University of Idaho had seen its share of troubles the past few decades. It had witnessed turnover at the top; there had been six presidents since 2003. It bothered Scott that his alma mater served as a steppingstone for some of those folks, equating to their tenure only lasting a few years. He completely understood the drive to advance in one's career—he'd done it himself. But even as human as it was to do that, a university couldn't handle turnover at the top and maintain its strategic mission and growth. It couldn't sustain any respectable standing in national polls, which affected enrollment and everything else. It also affected the U of I's relationship with the State Board of Education (SBOE).

The lack of continuity, stability, and leadership at the university constricted the ability to make meaningful progress on the institution's strategic priorities. This frustrated SBOE members because they knew the university had so much more potential to serve the students and employers in the state, but it was just caught in a cycle of churn at the top.

Turnover wasn't just occurring at the top position on campus, either. Over decades, a surge of new deans and provosts, right along with presidents, left the institution without long-term vision or continuity. Even the

division responsible for recruitment, enrollment, and retention had seen turnover at the top.

He was in no position to judge, but he had been concerned about the U of I for a while. He knew his beloved institution was struggling but wasn't privy to *why*. When he served on the U of I Foundation Board after his stint on the CBE advisory board, he'd seen things that left him scratching his head. For example, a proposal for all first-year students to live in the dorms showed a complete disconnect from one of the cornerstones of the university—the Greek system. A decision like that would have an immense impact on the sororities and fraternities, not to mention upset the U of I's significant Greek alumni base.

While serving on the Foundation Board, he'd also witnessed turmoil around the planning and construction of the new president's residence on campus, University House, involving costs and design. During the initial process of updating the showcase campus building, Scott glimpsed signs of a disconnect between the university and its decision-makers and stakeholders.

Scott pointed out, "The people always had the will to keep things going and potentially fix problems—like financial issues—but they just didn't have the propensity to make the tough decisions, formulate the right ideas, or create any solutions."

Maybe Chandra was on to something.

"So what's the meaning of this text," he threw out as soon as she answered his call that fateful day. He'd opted to call her because this conversation was too important to conduct via text.

"Well, Scott," Chandra laughed, "you have the leadership skills. You have some academic credentials. You have a passion for the place. That makes you a strong candidate even though you're not a traditional academic."

Scott let the words hang in silence for a moment.

"I've never envisioned myself as an academic and certainly not as a university president," he finally answered.

"Not just a president, Scott," Chandra retorted. "The *University of Idaho* president. There's a difference. A huge difference. That place is part of you, and you're a part of it. I stand by my original statement. It should be you."

Over the next several days, Scott and Chandra had volleyed the idea back and forth in texts and phone calls. At first, he didn't seriously consider her suggestion; becoming the U of I president was just a fun idea to discuss in a what-if way. They both agreed that even if he did throw his name into the applicant pool, he would be the longest shot since Buster Douglas knocked out Mike Tyson in Vegas in 1990.

But Scott's self-confidence wouldn't let him think he was an underdog. He knew he had strong credentials to bring to the table. But did he *want* the job?

Chandra had continued to urge Scott to apply. "After twenty-five years of seeing the U of I presidents come and go, I had a decent idea for what the university needed at the time," she articulated. "The problem? Scott had an amazing career on the East Coast, and this job was not exactly a promotion. I knew he would only do it because of his passion for the place."

She also knew he had the work ethic, big brain, leadership experience, and, maybe most importantly, intense loyalty to the university. "Then you throw in the fact that he was already planning to retire in Idaho, and he had nothing else to prove beyond this last capstone job; it all added up to one fact. Scott Green was the best person on the planet to be the U of I's next president."

Within the same week of Chandra's text, Scott received another pivotal message from his longtime friend and fellow Vandal, Clint Marshall. Scott and Clint served on the CBE advisory board from 2009 to 2015.

"One of the first things that struck me about Scott was he obviously had an impressive background," Clint shared. "He was traveling all over the world. One time, at an advisory board meeting, I asked him, 'Where were you yesterday?' and he answered, 'Vietnam,' and I answered, 'And you're in Moscow today?!'"

Of course, Clint was joking, but he knew Scott's bond with the U of I ran deep like his. Clint was a first-generation Vandal, committed to giving back to his alma mater. "Attending the University of Idaho was an incredible, life-changing thing for me," he expressed. "And anything I can do, over time, to repay that debt, I'm going to try to do. I was impressed by Scott's passion, intensity, commitment, and like-minded dedication to the university. So we struck up a friendship."

Clint was aware of the university's quest for a new president—at that time, he held a seat on the U of I Foundation Board. In Spring 2018, he'd had coffee with then U of I president, Dr. Charles "Chuck" Staben. The lengthy and detailed conversation left Clint wondering, *Is my university in peril?*

Clint had seen enrollment decline and costs grow at "an alarming clip." As a businessperson, he'd witnessed academic institutions lose their sense of economic reality. "The U of I had seen years of bloat," he said. "I left that meeting with President Staben worried but thinking, *What the heck can I do?*"

When the SBOE announced in May 2018 that they would not renew President Staben's contract and that he would step down as president in

spring 2019, the wheels started turning in Clint's head. He began to ponder the appetite for a nontraditional candidate for the U of I president.

"I kind of had Scott in the back of my mind but thought there's no way in the world he'd do it," Clint laughed. "But with his love for the university and his experience, he could serve as a prototype for a candidate."

Scott and Clint ended up in Las Vegas at the same time in the fall of 2018 and got together to catch up before they had to jump on their respective flights home. Clint took the opportunity to pick his friend's brain about the U of I's search for a new president.

"So, Scott, there's an opening at the University of Idaho," he'd nonchalantly posed. "Is that something you would ever at all be interested in? Because you would be amazing."

A second person—unsolicited and independent of Chandra's quest to head-hunt Scott—voiced the opinion that Scott should be the next president at their alma mater. Scott had sat dumbfounded.

What the hell was happening?

"Yeah, I'm aware," he'd hesitantly responded.

The two talked in depth over the next few hours before they departed Vegas.

"And I could just tell by his reaction that it was something he would consider," Clint smiled.

After Clint and Chandra independently approached Scott about considering applying for the position, the two Vandals, unbeknownst to Scott, started casually asking their connections to determine if support existed for a nontraditional candidate for the U of I president.

"I started putting feelers out and talking to my network," Clint recalled. "It was pretty clear to me there was frustration and concern about the U of I's direction. I sensed an overwhelming willingness to consider a nontraditional. I never mentioned Scott's name. I was just feeling it out in general. To me, two major pillars had to fall. One, was SBOE willing to hire a non-traditional candidate, and two, was Scott willing to do it?"

As Scott stared through his windshield at the gray asphalt of I-80 stretched out ahead, he smiled at the recollection of those life-changing interactions with Chandra and Clint. He'd always believed that certain people were in one's life for a purpose beyond being a colleague or friend. It wasn't a coincidence that two of his trusted allies had channeled the same belief that Scott could be the next U of I president. Fate had played its hand, and Scott was on his way to Moscow, Idaho, to shake hands with Destiny.

Scott's Management Insight

Don't take the journey alone when operating outside your field of expertise. Identify a trusted colleague, a Sherpa (or two), who will help you understand the political landscape and avoid mistakes. Chandra and Clint became my Sherpas—they spent hundreds of hours of their own time preparing the ground and leading the way.

You must also do your homework to get the job and sketch out how you will add value and improve the institution. The more I learned about the challenges the U of I faced, particularly the financial issues, the more concerned I became. But I also knew I could help. I had improved financial performance at every place I worked as a senior executive. I knew I could do the same for my alma mater.



Gabby, Sam, Zeus, Scott, Nick (Scott and Gabby's son), and Joe Vandal take one last photo at their house in Glen Head, New York, the evening before Scott drives cross-country to Moscow, Idaho.

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