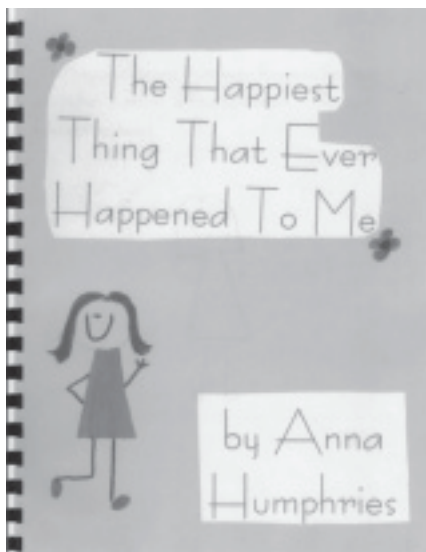


# EXTENDING SMART TRUST: THE ANNA HUMPHRIES STORY

In my presentations I sometimes share the story of Anna Humphries, the only girl on a third/fourth-grade Little League flag football team I coached years ago. Anna was a decent player, but she did not have the experience and skills of some of the other players. I had made the decision to play everyone equally, but that decision was really put to the test when our team made it to the final game, when we played another undefeated team for the unofficial “championship.” Our opponents were only one point behind, and they were going for two points for the win. With our team goal of winning on the line, I had to decide whether to leave Anna in to finish her turn to play or to replace her with a better player. In the moment of decision, I determined to extend trust to Anna and leave her in. We all held our breath as the opposing team ran toward Anna’s side, but she executed the planned play and pulled the runner’s flag (only the second time she had pulled a flag all year) and stopped him just short of the goal. When I saw the exuberant look on Anna’s face as she realized what she had done and her joy as she received the enthusiastic congratulations of her teammates and the cheers of a supporting crowd, I was thrilled that I’d decided to extend trust.

As I share this experience, on occasion people will come up to me and say, “It’s very convenient for you to call this Smart Trust because it worked, and if it hadn’t, you could have said, ‘Oh, I exercised too much trust.’” Certainly there’s something to be said for the question of accurately labeling a decision “Smart Trust.” Making such decisions is a matter of navigating through life and learning how to make good judgment calls. Sometimes we trust too much, sometimes too little. But hopefully, as we become more discerning and capable in considering the opportunity, risk, and credibility of those involved, our judgment calls become better.

In retrospect, however, I have to say that even if Anna hadn’t made that winning play and we had lost the game, I still feel it would have been an exercise of Smart Trust to give her the chance. There was more involved than winning the game. Even if we had lost, I believe that everyone on the team would have come out of that experience knowing that they were valuable and that they were believed in and supported as individuals. I think they would have felt good about their efforts and their overall experience in being part of a team.



At the time this story was written, Anna was a freshman at a major university. She has blossomed into a stunningly talented, beautiful, and confident young woman, an operatic soprano who has performed both locally and nationally. Recently her mother came to my office and said, “You need to see this. I was going through Anna’s things, and I found this story she wrote in the fourth grade.” It was the story of what happened that year with our football team, and Anna had titled it “The Happiest Thing That Ever Happened To Me.” I cannot help but believe that my extension of trust to her made a positive difference in her life.