

The 4 defining moments of 4 great leaders

Need a quick jolt of leadership adrenaline? Check out these stories of four famous people who came within a whisker of losing it all ... or never making it big in the first place:

Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman in Congress, later became the first major-party African-American candidate for president. During the 1972 primaries, the notorious segregationist George Wallace was shot, and Chisholm stunned everyone by visiting him in the hospital. "I knew that I was going to be thrown out of office," she said. "The people in my district came down on me like anything." Despite the guaranteed political fallout, she made the decision to go anyway.

How she went to offer sympathies to an ideological opposite became a permanent footnote to her career. Faced with a choice with the spotlight on her, she simply listened to what her conscience told her to do. Much later, Wallace lent his assistance when Chisholm sponsored a bill that extended the federal minimum-wage law to domestic workers for the first time.

You have to wonder what was going through Kurt Warner's mind in 2006, when he was replaced as the starting quarterback of an NFL team for the fourth time in four years. The two-time league MVP had fallen far after injuries and ineffectiveness. Through it all, he practiced. Watched. Waited. And he quietly mentored the young quarterbacks who kept taking the field when he was pulled.

Then, in 2007, an injury to the Arizona Cardinals' Matt Leinart put Warner onto the field one more time ... and he led a moribund franchise to the title game they'd never been to before. Now he's a Hall of Famer who raised two different teams to glory. It's a reminder that every Whatever-Happened-To might be just one turning point away from being an Aren't-They-Amazing.

In the early days of building *The Huffington Post*, Ariana Huffington was one of the busiest people on Earth. One day in the middle of yet another stretch of hectic activity, she fainted, hit her head on her desk and woke up bleeding. Exhaustion had simply caught up with her. She made the choice then to slow down, disconnect more often, say no to more things. She recognized that she couldn't do it all—and wound up reaching greater heights.

Taking more time off work, getting more sleep and shutting off devices that held her captive cost her not at all in the end. It created a happier, healthier influencer.

Tyler Perry, whose abusive father's "answer to everything was to beat it out of you," once attempted suicide as a youth to escape that tyranny. Perry even changed his name to distance himself from the man. His early days were made even more stormy when he suffered abuse at the hands of others. He did not complete high school, but upon learning about the therapeutic effect of writing, he penned a musical based on letters he wrote to himself. He spent his life savings to produce it through a community theater—and it failed. Yet he decided to rewrite it, again and again ... and years later, the audience finally came.

Today he's one of the most powerful people in Hollywood. Perry had a lot of reasons to give up even before those first theatergoers didn't embrace his work, but there was something in him that wouldn't let that happen.