Bill Ford Makes Employee’s Marriage Proposal Wish a Reality

In 2017, Wesley Burkman’s life took an unexpected – and tragic – turn.

His wife, Aleea, passed away at age 29, within a few weeks of being diagnosed with stage IV breast cancer.

In the time that followed, Burkman’s Ford colleagues gave him an outpouring of support to help him cope. People often asked him if his work was being flexible.

“In many of the thank you cards I wrote to people, I found myself saying that my work community had gone so much further than being just ‘flexible,’” he said. “Not only were my boss and manager incredibly understanding, but when they heard about my wife needing a wig made with her own hair during chemotherapy, they got enough people together to cover the cost.”

While Aleea passed away before they had a chance to make it happen, Burkman was able to put the $990 raised for the wig towards a college fund for their 2-year-old son.

Endeared by this show of support from his colleagues – including fellow members of a Ford bible study group volunteering to walk his dog early in the morning so he could stay home with his son – Burkman decided to submit a Ford employee story about how his coworkers had helped him through his grief.

About a week later, when he was casually working from home, he received a phone call from Bill Ford. The Executive Chairman said someone had showed him the story and he thought it was awesome how much Ford colleagues were doing for each other and he wanted to call to express his condolences.

At the end of that call, Ford told Burkman to contact him if he ever needed anything.

In the two and a half years that followed, Burkman, a technical specialist at the Ford Engineering Laboratory, was able to reassemble his life and find a new love, Tiffany. When he decided it was time to propose, he wanted to make sure the venue was extra special.

“I’ve always believed that asking someone to marry you is too important to waste over dinner and a movie” he said.

That’s when he remembered Bill Ford’s offer for help. He was looking for a grandiose location to give the occasion a unique, gritty Detroit feel. He considered the Michigan Theater, but the iconic train station was his ultimate location.

So he sent Bill an email with a unique request, not counting on getting a reply. But Bill’s team reached out soon after and granted Burkman his wish, to plan an elaborate proposal inside the historic train depot.

With a grand piano-serenaded dinner and the station’s grand lobby as his backdrop, he proposed to his girlfriend on October 5. Every detail was meticulously planned by Burkman and seven of his friends, six of them coworkers at Ford.

“Bill gave me a call a few hours before I popped the question to wish me luck,” Burkman said. “I feel like I’ve been the beneficiary of so much of his care and support.”

By the way, she said ‘yes.’
Burkman now gets asked by many people to explain how he was able to secure Michigan Central Station as the venue for his proposal.

His answer: “Sometimes you have to imagine what hasn’t happened yet. I asked and it happened and it was awesome. I’ve had multiple experiences working within Ford where if you ask for something, big things can happen.”

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