



Letters on Leadership #17: 5 Chocolate Glazed Munchkins

Every Sunday morning at 7:45AM, my five-year-old son Axel, my wife, and I stop at the Dunkin Donuts (we are New Englanders) in our hometown on our way to Axel's hockey practice. We purchase 5 Chocolate Glazed Munchkins. Prior to the start of practice, we review how he can "earn" each munchkin: the first is for being tough, the second is for working hard, the third is for saying "please" and "thank you," and the fourth is for making it fun (not for *having* fun, but rather for *making* it fun: it is his job to make it fun. Not the coaches' job).

On the drive home after practice, Axel will immediately ask if we can "do the donuts." I pull the first munchkin out of the bag and ask him what it is for, he responds "for being tough." I ask him what it means to be tough; he responds "when you are tired, you keep going... and you do it with a good attitude." I then ask his Mom (my wife) if Axel was tough. She provides feedback to Axel. I then ask Axel the same question and give him an opportunity to tell us if he was tough. Finally, I provide a few examples of how he was (or wasn't) tough. If he was tough, I hand him the munchkin which he promptly eats in one bite. We repeat this process for the next three



munchkins. When we get to the fifth munchkin, I ask Axel what the fifth one is for. He responds, “because my mom and dad love me so much.” I explain to Axel that the first four munchkins make us proud and he has to earn those, but the fifth one he will always get, because regardless of what he does or fails to do, his Mom and I will ALWAYS love him.

If Axel wants to then talk about his performance, we will talk about how he played, but only if he brings it up. I don’t really care how he *plays*. I care about how he *behaves*. I appreciate that teachers, coaches and bosses care about both (or they should). In our experiences at The Program, we know that most do. Unfortunately, not all. Some care much more about performance than behavior. Even more unfortunate is that in the short term, it can work; you can win games and even a championship on performance. However, to do so on a consistent basis, both must be a priority.

The chance that my son earns a scholarship to pay for his college is incredibly small. The chance that he earns a living playing a sport that he loves is even smaller. However, he *can* earn the first 4 munchkins every day of his life. While this does not guarantee him success in that life, not doing so *will* guarantee failure. In any event, he will still always get the fifth from his Mom and me.

He knows that. Do your students, student-athletes or corporate teammates? If not, I know a Dunkin Donuts...

Keep Attacking,

Eric Kapitulik
Founder and CEO

"Letters on Leadership" are published periodically by The Program, a leadership development and team building company that works with the nation's leading corporations as well as professional and collegiate athletic teams.

For information on developing better leaders and more cohesive teams at your organization, visit <http://www.theprogram.org/corporate>.