



Letters on Leadership #3: Team Accountability and A Commitment to Standards

In our last two installments of *Letters on Leadership*, we defined goals and standards, highlighted their differences, and discussed the importance of having both in order to create and sustain a Championship Culture. Today we will discuss another essential ingredient: creating a culture in which everyone is committed to reinforcing those goals and standards on a daily basis.

We believe that a great coach or business leader can *create* a Championship Culture through sheer force of will. Why? We have seen numerous examples of a new coach, school principal or business leader do exactly this through their own herculean effort. They refuse to accept mediocrity and single-handedly carry the entire organization to the mountain top. However, to *sustain* a Championship Culture over the long-term takes a commitment from the entire organization. At The Program, my teammates and I hear coaches and business leaders throughout America lament the fact that their players or employees don't hold their teammates accountable. Our response is typically, "to what?" To what *standards* are your athletes, employees, co-workers and teammates supposed to be holding each other accountable?



As stated earlier, we believe that “this generation” is exceptionally talented. We also believe that exceptional talent does not necessarily make someone a *Warrior*. A Warrior (also known as a “Culture Carrier”) is an individual who may or may not have exceptional talent, but who exemplifies the culture you want to create – an individual you trust implicitly and would “take to battle.”

Our suggestion to coaches and business leaders: identify the Warriors on your teams, tell them what your Core Values are as a leader, and explain how you define those Core Values. Then, task *your Warriors* with creating the standards (i.e. behaviors) that a) reinforce those Core Values, b) to which they want to be held and c) to which they want to hold their teammates accountable.

Leaders often question this approach: what if my Warriors want too low of standards? If that turns out to be the case, you have either a) picked individuals who are not Warriors, b) not clearly defined your own expectations or c) not been in the organization long enough for the Warriors to appreciate your expectations.

Warriors do not want participation trophies! Participation trophies recognize the *average* participant. A Warrior does not like someone else receiving the MVP Award, but dislikes even more being disrespected by receiving a participation trophy. A Warrior wants high standards, wants to be held to those high standards and wants to hold their teammates to those same high standards! A Warrior doesn’t want average and doesn’t want to be associated with it!

Numerous clients who tried this approach have reported back to us that not only did their Warriors NOT provide them with too low of standards, but that as the leader, they actually had to introduce a bit of “reasonable person theory” into the discussion about what team standards should be.

Let the players or employees whom you view as Warriors determine your organization’s standards. All of us love ownership. As a leader, this is our way of giving ownership to our team. The Warriors appreciate the trust you put in them to determine what the standards should be, and are more committed to enforcing them because they aren’t your own. They are **their** standards! These are the standards that they said that **they** want!

In keeping with this approach, if a standard is not met, the leader does not and should not correct the individual who is failing to meet it. Instead, the leader holds *the Warriors* accountable. Remember, it is *their* standards that are not being met. It is *their* standards to which they said they wanted to be held accountable. And it is *their* standards to which they said they wanted to



hold their teammates accountable. The leader's job is not to enforce the Warriors' standards directly with the rest of the team – it is to ensure that the Warriors enforce them.

Everything that happens or fails to happen is the responsibility of the leader...

Attack!

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.

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