



### **Letters on Leadership #1: “Kids These Days”**

The job of a parent, coach, teacher or manager is to *“prepare the child for the path.”* We live in the greatest country on Earth, but one of the challenges our society currently faces is that too many of us are instead focused on *“preparing the path for the child.”*<sup>(1)</sup>

My teammates and I at The Program work annually with thousands of parents, coaches, educators and business leaders, many of whom complain about the younger generation. A huge number of deficiencies are attributed to “kids these days:” a sense of entitlement, an inability to handle adversity, poor interpersonal and communication skills, etc.

However, you will never hear any Program team member speak negatively of the younger generation or use the term “kids these days.” The following is just one of many examples of why you will not: On January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the President of The Program Corporate, Cory Ross, was on patrol with a 20-man Special Operations Unit that was ambushed by the Taliban at the foothills of the Tora Bora Mountains in Eastern Afghanistan. The Taliban engaged the vehicular patrol

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<sup>1</sup> *Boys Adrift*, Dr. Leonard Sax, <http://www.amazon.com/Boys-Adrift-Epidemic-Unmotivated-Underachieving/dp/0465072100>



with Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), medium machine guns, and rifle fire from a graveyard just fifty meters away. Cory Ross' Vehicle Gunner, SGT Aaron X. Wittman (US Army) immediately returned fire with his .50 caliber machine gun, designating the enemy's fighting position for the rest of the team to destroy. However, he was quickly cut down by a direct hit from a RPG that detonated in the turret, killing him and either wounding or knocking unconscious everyone else on board the armored truck. The driver was 19-year-old Army Private First Class David Potter. PFC Potter, wounded by a four-inch piece of shrapnel lodged in his right shoulder, continued to maneuver his vehicle out of the kill zone, and into a fighting position that allowed his wounded teammates not only to survive, but then to destroy the enemy force hiding just fifty meters away.

PFC Potter is one of the "*kids these days...*"

Our feedback is simple: Stop blaming the kids! ***We are the generation responsible for developing them.*** If today's children and young adults aren't becoming the men and women we expect them to be, then our leadership and mentorship are at fault.

At The Program, we believe the missing element is a clear understanding and implementation of ***standards***, as compared to ***goals***. Every individual, family, athletic organization and business today has goals, but far too many lack well-defined and consistently enforced standards.

What are the differences? Goals are ***performance-based*** (e.g. summiting a mountain, making a sale, or scoring a touchdown). Failure to achieve a goal results merely in an opportunity to re-attack that objective tomorrow.

Standards, by contrast, are ***behavior-based*** (e.g. showing up on time, wearing the appropriate attire / uniform, and treating others with respect). Failure to meet a standard always carries a ***consequence*** imposed by leadership. ***If a standard is not enforced with a consequence, then it is not a standard!***

Champions have goals, but they also have standards. In our experience, this difference is critical to their success where others fail.

In our next letter, we will discuss how to ***define and implement standards*** effectively on your team. In the meantime, please feel free to contact us with any questions or feedback you may have regarding this important topic.



Attack!

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*"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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