



### **Letters on Leadership #23 – Getting Outside Your Comfort Zone**

When I get asked what my major was at the United States Naval Academy, I usually joke and say “swimming.” As a competitive swimmer, there were days that I felt I spent more time in the pool than in the classroom. Needless to say, I'm comfortable in the water. I competed for over 20 years at every level from age group, state, national and collegiate. I even made a run for the 2000 Olympic team. My love for the water goes beyond chlorine and competitions, as well. Growing up in Florida, California and Texas, the coast or a lake were never far away. I spent as much time as I could participating in various water activities such as surfing, wake boarding, water skiing and rafting. But there is one thing I do not like – AT ALL – and that is putting on a mask and snorkel, and trying to "breathe" while in the water. To me, it is not natural and definitely outside my comfort zone.



At The Program, we believe in personal development, leadership development and team building through shared adversity. We believe that we don't actually grow as individuals or as a team until we get outside of our comfort zone. We don't just talk about this with our athletic and corporate clients, however – we hold ourselves to those same standards as well. Recently, I was asked by a friend to go snorkeling. I was visiting family in south Florida and my brother's best friend is a "free diver." He needed a safety observer and someone to hold his video camera while he dove and used his spear gun to fish. I've known him for years and he knows I'm a swimmer, so he naturally assumed that I would love to join him. This couldn't have been farther from the truth. Little did he know that I am basically terrified of breathing through a snorkel. Some would say that the things I've done may be terrifying to them: flying the SH-60B helicopter off of Navy ships all across the globe in rough water and at night, rappelling out of a helicopter, and going through survival school. However, he had no idea that putting on that mask and breathing through that snorkel was about the LAST thing I ever wanted to do. But before I could think about it I said yes, because I wanted to be a good teammate.

We spent two hours in the Atlantic swimming among the fish and getting tossed around by the current. It was physically and mentally challenging and I wouldn't say I got over my fear of breathing through a snorkel, but I survived. I swallowed a few gallons of the Atlantic and determined I wasn't going to drown. In my mind, I wanted to swim to shore, walk back to the house, and call it a day. But I also wanted to be a good teammate and that is something that I take very seriously. So, I concentrated on the ONE thing that our bodies do that most people never even think about – breathing. I took long slow breaths and kept swimming, trying to appreciate the beauty around me. I'm glad he asked me to go, because I NEVER would have done it otherwise, and it felt good to get outside my comfort zone. What are you going to do to get yourself outside of your comfort zone? Trust me: it's worth it, and you won't regret it.

Did I mention the sharks...?

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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