



Letters on Leadership #29 – Family Dinner

I watch tv. My kids watch tv. Our family watches tv while eating dinner together. I don't believe that doing so is harmful to my or anyone's children. Seven hours every day of it is though (the average 8-18 year old child consumes seven hours of screen time per/day in America¹).

However, we also eat many of our dinners around the dining room table. When we do so, I stand behind my wife's chair and push it in for her when she sits down. I do the same with her car door. Sometimes Axel, my son, watches me do it and other times I make Axel do it. I make sure that Axel speaks to my wife, his mother, in a certain tone of voice. These can all be considered just teaching good manners to our child. Our hope though is that it also teaches Axel respect for not only his own Mother, but more importantly, ALL women.

I believe that the average man does not sexually harass, or worse, assault, women. For those of you not familiar with college age, male student- athletes, they also, on average, do not harass or

¹ Rideout, V. J., Foehr, U. G., & Roberts, D. F. (2010). Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2.



assault women. Unfortunately, it does happen and even one occurrence is too many (especially, if that "one," is your daughter). As leaders of our athletic teams, businesses, community groups and most importantly, our families, what can we do to ensure it doesn't **ever** occur?

I doubt if there is anything that we can do to ensure it, but to start, make sure your son gets the chair for his mother. It is our job as fathers to teach our sons to respect their Mothers. How can we ever expect them to respect any other woman, if they don't respect their own Mom? We all model our behavior off of others with whom we respect. Don't just tell your son to get the door for his Mom or have them say "thank you," for dinner. We must first do it ourselves.

My wife and I were recently at a wedding. My wife got up from the table to go to the bathroom. I stood up when she left and again when she returned. Another guy at the table told his wife that it was because we hadn't been married for very long yet...

That's just sad.

Instead, be a husband that you would want your daughter to marry and a father that you hope your son can emulate. In doing so, we teach good manners, but more importantly, we teach our sons how to respect women. It doesn't guarantee success, but not doing so, guarantees failure.

Unfortunately, with a breakdown in the nuclear family throughout our society, it puts even more pressure on coaches, teachers, mentors etc to reinforce those lessons with young men who increasingly come from single-parent homes.

I spoke to my wife about this Letter on Leadership that I felt compelled to write. She first made me aware about how egotistical I was and that it is NOT just the husband's responsibility! She highlighted the importance of the Mother. Be a wife that you hope your son marries and Mother that you hope your daughter emulates. Ensure your son sees a woman who is confident, self-assured and independent, while at the same time, passionate about her family's safety and well-being.

I appreciate that this is an over-simplification of the issues surrounding sexual harassment and those that perpetrate it. I appreciate that there is so much that needs to be done and so many



different ways to combat it. As you have read in previous Letters on Leadership, the most successful people are those that stay laser focused on those things that they can control.

I can't or don't control so much. It will become even less as my children grow older. For now, thankfully, I control a few things though, so Axel gets the chair for his Mom...

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>.