



Letters on Leadership #30 – Attacking

It is challenging to create a sense of urgency within your team. The type of team makes no difference - whether you own a roofing company, coach a basketball team, or lead a team into battle; instilling a sense of true ownership requires pushing your people further than they think they can go. I would like to say that by mentoring and counseling your team, on a regular basis, you can instill that special sense of purpose that only the team leader, coach or owner of the company inherently possesses.

I thought I was giving 100% throughout my career in the United States Marine Corps. I generally did well, was promoted ahead of schedule, and earned awards along the way. Then I learned that I hadn't been the caliber of teammate I thought I was in my mind. In a well-known Taliban controlled valley in Kunar, Afghanistan, where 11 of the 14 Congressional Medals of Honor for the Afghanistan War were earned, the team I served with came under heavy enemy fire.

We had infiltrated into the valley using the cover of darkness and built crude fighting positions throughout the early hours of the morning. By 11 am, we had been baking in the sun for hours,



waiting for the enemy to attack, and just as the sun made its way directly into our eyes, THEY DID! I thought I had a sense of urgency as I grabbed my machine gun, dragged it up the sand berm, and began to fire into the enemy fighting positions. Very soon into the fight, one of our Afghan Local Police took a bullet to his lower leg, and we knew the enemy had our position dialed in. Rocket Propelled Grenades and bursts of machine gun fire began to impact behind our position as well. Again, I thought I was doing a pretty good job; using my cover, firing, reloading, and communicating with the rest of the team. However, it wasn't until I heard the Team Leader, and my friend's voice come over the radio, saying "We are pinned down in the village, and separated from the team," that I truly understood what attacking with a sense of urgency meant.

You see, my friend and teammate also had our Afghan Local Police Commander with him in that village, and any hope of our mission being successful in that infamous valley, where so many American men and women had died over a decade of war, hinged on both of those men returning to friendly lines - ALIVE. Then, and only then, did I discover what it means to ATTACK with a true sense of urgency. Attacking has a certain flavor to it, and until you taste it, you will never know if you're giving 100% or not. I thought I was attacking until I was held accountable by the enemy that day. When I heard those words, I immediately exposed more of my head and shoulders from the safety of the sand berm, in order to get a better and proper firing position, behind my M240B machine gun. Then my rounds became more precise and their effects consistently hammered the enemy firing positions, and we quickly shut down their ability to fight back. Don't wait for the enemy to hold you accountable. Attack at 100% of your ability, 100% of the time. Your teammates will quickly learn to trust you. They will know you are prepared when you come to the table or into the boardroom. They know that what they get from you in the 1st quarter is the same as it will be with 2 minutes left in the 4th quarter. I don't think my teammates ever doubted me before that day, but they should have.

Cory Ross

President, The Program Corporate



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