



Selfless

At The Program, Selflessness is one of our core values. We define it as “taking strain from our teammates and acting in the best interest of The Program.” Everyone wants to talk about “giving *effort*.” Instead, we focus on “taking *strain*.” Great effort may or may not benefit our teammates. We are not saying that giving great effort is not necessary. In fact, we argue that giving great *effort* in the pursuit of mission accomplishment is imperative. However, *effort* is not enough. We want to find ways to help our teammates too. We want to shoulder more than our share of the burden so that they may bear less.

We can easily see a person labor and toil. We can see the pain on their face and hear the exertion in their voice. That person is often publicly recognized for their effort, as they should be. However, an outside observer will have no idea that I have taken weight out of my teammate’s pack and put it in my own as we climb a hill. I may get no public recognition because almost no one knows, but my teammate, with whom I am climbing, does. I am willing to bear that burden without recognition because I know that a time will come when my teammate will take *strain* from me. A great individual effort can win a game. A team that truly takes strain for each other can compete for championships.

Acting in the best interests of our team does not always come naturally to us. We all have egos. We all have self-interests. When the team or company picture comes out every single one of us scans it to find our own faces first. Only then do we look for other people. Staying focused



on our teammates and the best interests of our team needs to be a consistent, conscious endeavor. It is a challenge to subordinate our own wants and needs to those of the team. Some are in fact, more selfless than others.

Sergeant First Class Alwyn Cashe was the Platoon Sergeant for a Bradley fighting vehicle platoon operating in Daliaya, Iraq in 2005. While “clearing” a route that follow-on forces would use, his armored vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb. The blast ruptured the vehicle’s fuel cell causing fuel to spray everywhere. The vehicle rolled to a stop and immediately burst into flames. Although injured and soaked with fuel, Sergeant First Class Cashe crawled forward in the vehicle to assist the driver who was seriously wounded and on fire. Sergeant First Class Cashe then pulled him from the vehicle, dragged him to safety, and extinguished the flames on the driver. Sergeant First Class Cashe realized that most of his teammates were still trapped in the rear of the burning vehicle. He ran back to the vehicle now fully engulfed in flames, reached into the fire, grabbed another teammate, and pulled him to safety. The fuel that had soaked into Sergeant First Class Cashe’s uniform ignited, melting the fabric into his skin. Ignoring the immense pain and his own welfare, Sergeant First Class Cashe, now on fire himself, again ran to the vehicle, reached into the inferno, and saved more of his teammates. Even when other soldiers arrived to assist, Sergeant First Class Cashe continued to help his injured teammates even though he himself was one of the more seriously injured. He saved six of his teammates from certain death that day, even while sustaining 2nd and 3rd degree burns over 72% of his body.

When he first regained consciousness in the hospital, Sergeant First Class Cashe did not ask where he was, why he was covered in bandages, or even if he was going to be okay. His first words were “How are my boys?” Tragically, Sergeant First Class Cashe succumbed to his wounds a few weeks later. For his actions and selfless sacrifice that day, Sergeant First Class Alwyn Cashe was recently approved to receive the Medal of Honor, our nation’s highest award for valor.

Most of us will never have to repeatedly enter a burning vehicle to save our teammates, thanks to men and women like Alwyn Cashe. However, each of us will face adversity in our lives. There is none however that we will be unable to overcome if instead of just giving *effort*, we take *strain* from our teammates. If rather than prioritizing ourselves, we always put the team first. If, we always ask “How are my boys?”

Attack!

Jake “Mac” MacDonald
Leadership Instructor



"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>.