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THE PROGRAM

LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

- LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #78 -



Over the years, we have witnessed a growing sense of entitlement throughout society. Many teammates now feel they are owed something. They are owed playing time, corporate perks, a bigger “piece of the pie”, a promotion, or certain titles. When they do not get what they feel they are owed, they become disgruntled, share negative energy, and often, quit. And by “quit,” we don’t necessarily mean that they actually quit or move on. Often, they do something much more insidious and detrimental to the team, they quietly quit; they put no more effort into their job than what is absolutely necessary to not be fired from it. Following are a few ways that we can battle this sense of entitlement.

We don't get what we deserve. We only get what we earn.

We must be cognizant of the fact that, despite what our ego may try to tell us, we are not "self-made". Our success has not been all about us. If successful, almost all of us have something or someone to thank for it - typically the environment in which we were raised, a family member, teacher, coach, or mentor. However, we must not use a lack of those same things or people as a crutch. If I want something, I am going to have to earn it. I may believe that I deserve financial success or good physical health. However, my belief does not matter. I must earn financial security through hard work, sacrifice, and sound, long-term financial decisions. I must earn great health by exercising and eating right. Same for playing time. However, we must understand that great decisions do not guarantee great health, financial success, playing time, or a promotion. The only guarantee these decisions provide us with is the guarantee for the possibility of success, on whatever our chosen battlefield.

"We don't get what deserve. We only get what we earn," is the ethos of a highly successful Division 1 wrestling program with whom we had the privilege to work. In practice, this meant that you could wrestle in the program for three years and win three national championships, but if you wanted a spot in the lineup your senior year, you still needed to defeat everyone else in your weight class. If the team recruited a stud freshman and he beat you in a wrestle-off, then that stud freshman would represent the team in that weight class instead of you, despite all the hard work you had put in and accomplishments gained in the years prior. To many, this may seem unfair. It is. However, although a cliché, life truly isn't fair. We are constantly reminded of that. Program CEO and Founder, Eric Kapitulik's, sister, Monique, our former teammate, is a three-time All-American lacrosse player, two-time first-team All-American, and a consistent sub-three-and-a-half-hour marathon runner. She has never smoked a cigarette. Ever. She has stage 4 lung cancer. Life isn't fair.

In a perfect world, we would get everything we deserved. However, life, including sports, business, and any other competition, does not work that way. It isn't about what we deserve. It is about what we earn. Develop this mindset. It enhances our appreciation of everything we do have rather than a sense of entitlement for that which we do not.

Titles

Leadership is influence. A leader has the ability and desire to use it. We gain influence first and foremost through who we are (talented, charismatic, hard-working, disciplined, etc.) and second, by our title. Of the two, who we are is much more important, but titles do matter. Naming someone a Captain, Head Coach, or Supervisor gives them more influence. On far too many teams though, a Captaincy or leadership position and accompanying title is given not to those who have the attributes to lead the team to mission accomplishment but rather as a thank you for services rendered. Athletic teams end up with Captains, and businesses with managers, who often have no ability or desire to lead. Further, because of this habit, organizations foster a culture of entitlement with the younger members that as long as they stick with the team and don't get kicked off, one day, they too will be Captains or get promoted. In this culture, can we really blame those athletes or corporate teammates for thinking that they are owed something for doing their jobs? We should not give people titles

just because titles matter. Titles help provide greater influence for an individual. We must therefore always ask ourselves prior to conferring a title, do we want this person to have additional influence? Do they have a desire and ability to use it? And most importantly, have they earned it?

Leaders Eat Last.

We have the honor and privilege of attending quite a few pre-game meals. Seniors and grad students get food first, then the juniors, and on down the chain. In the Marine Corps, we reverse the order. Junior Marines eat first. Leaders eat last. This is not only a tradition but also a powerful visual reinforcement of the Marine Corps' servant-leader culture. Officers and all enlisted leaders will make difficult decisions throughout their careers. All subordinate Marines must trust that those decisions are being made with their best interest at heart - always! Leaders eat last is a constant reminder of a leader's need to do just that. If there are 40 meals for 41 Marines, the leader won't eat. In reality, because of this knowledge, Marines share, but the priority would still always be to ensure that our youngest and newest Marines are fed and taken care of first.

There are certainly privileges that come with age and rank. As a senior, you are more experienced on the field and in the weight room. This can often lead to increased playing time, but only if earned. Giving those older and experienced teammates even more perks like being first in line for food, executive dining rooms, the best seats on the bus, or first-class airfare needlessly increases a sense of entitlement. Many of us are or were athletes at some point. Few things are more impactful than seeing our team Captain stay after practice to pick up the balls or be the last out of the bus or locker room as they pick up the trash.

Entitled people put themselves first. Great teammates and leaders put the team first. Commit to the latter.

Attack!



Jake "MAC" MacDonald
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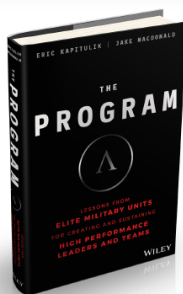
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THE PROGRAM, CEO, Eric Kapitulik, and Lead Instructor, Jake MacDonald, share great wisdom and insight on building world class teams in the co-authored book, The Program, Lessons from Elite Military Units for Creating and Sustaining High Performance Leaders and Teams.

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