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# THE PROGRAM

## LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

**- LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #81 -**



**5 CHOCOLATE MUNCHKINS - REVISITED**

[\*Letter on Leadership #17: 5 Chocolate Munchkins\*](#) was published nearly six years ago. It was about our son's attempt to learn to ice skate and the behaviors we tried to instill in him as he took lessons to do so. Letter on Leadership #81 is now about our five-year-old daughter Anastasia (see [\*Letter on Leadership #67 – The Terrorist\*](#)) as she learns to do the same.

Every Saturday and Sunday morning at 7:45 AM, my wife and I, along with our son, Axel, and daughter, Anastasia, stop at the Dunkin Donuts in our hometown (we are New Englanders) on our way to Anastasia's Learn-To-Skate practice. We purchase 5 Chocolate Glazed Munchkins. Before the start of her practice, we review how she can "earn" each munchkin. The first is for being tough. The second is for giving 100%. Did she give her maximum effort? With Axel, it was for working hard. Now, we want to clarify working hard, so instead of asking if she worked hard, we ask if she gave her maximum effort. The third munchkin is for saying "thank you" to her coaches. Saying "thank you" reflects appreciation. Not doing so reflects entitlement. Success for me as a father does not depend on my children knowing how to ice skate. It does depend on their being appreciative. I will have failed as a father if either of my children grows up to be entitled. This is also why at least once a month, you can find my son walking along the side of the road at the entrance to our driveway with a garbage bag picking up trash that people (I call them "pigs," but my wife doesn't like this word) throw out their car windows. Tough to feel entitled when picking up old diapers and leftover McDonald's trash. The fourth is for making it fun (not for having fun, but rather for making it fun; it is her job to make it fun, not the coaches').

On the drive home after practice, Anastasia, like her older brother before her, will immediately ask if we can "do the donuts". My wife or I pull the first munchkin out of the bag and ask her what it is for, and she responds, "for being tough." We ask her what it means to be tough. Axel was taught that it meant "when you are tired, you keep going... and you do it with a good attitude." We now teach that being tough means "when you are tired, you keep going... and you share positive energy with your teammates." A positive attitude means, "I can do this." This is mental toughness and is incredibly important for our success, but even more important is our emotional resiliency. Because we are human beings, we are emotional beings. Regardless of the proportion of physical to mental our sport or job may require, all our lives are one hundred percent emotional. Therefore, my wife and I want to teach, and hope to develop, not only her physical and mental resiliency but, even more important, her emotional resiliency. We believe that sharing positive energy when faced with adversity is one way to develop it, so we ask Anastasia if she shared it. Finally, we provide a few examples of how we feel she was (or wasn't) physically, mentally, and emotionally tough. If she was tough, we hand her the munchkin, which she promptly eats in two bites. Axel did it in one, and his mom has been yelling at him about his poor table manners ever since (and simultaneously blaming her husband - i.e., me).

We repeat this process for the next three munchkins. We explain to her, as we did for her older brother, that the first four munchkins make us proud, and she must earn those. We

then highlight to Anastasia that we hope they make her proud. They should! And that is much more important.

When we get to the fifth munchkin, we ask Anastasia what it is for. She responds, “because my mom and dad love me so much.” As we explain to her, regardless of her “earning” the first four munchkins, she will always get the fifth. Always! Because regardless of what she does or fails to do, her mom and I will ALWAYS love her. Always!

Anastasia, like her brother, often wants to discuss how she is improving at skating. She wants to talk about her performance, and when she does so, my wife and I obviously make a big deal about it, but we are very clear and deliberate in how we express what a big deal her performance is. We tell her how happy we are for her because we know that a great performance makes her happy. We always then highlight how proud we are of the physical, mental, and emotional toughness she displayed. How proud we are of her giving 100%. How proud we are of her for saying “thank you” to her coaches without being reminded. How proud of her we are that she made it fun. We are happy for her about her performance. We are proud of her for her behavior.

In our experiences at The Program, we know that many parents, teachers, coaches, and business leaders appreciate this difference. However, some care much more, or only, about performance rather than behavior. Even more unfortunate is that in the short term, it can work; you can win sales, games, and even a championship on performance. However, to do so consistently, both performance and behaviors must be a priority, and we must consistently recognize both. We must have goals and accomplishing them is important! Almost every team (spouses, family, athletic, corporate, etc.) has them. But world-class teams have goals and standards. Goals represent what we want to achieve. Standards represent how we are expected to behave while we work to achieve them. Anastasia doesn’t always get every munchkin. If she doesn’t meet the standard for that behavior we are trying to instill in her, she doesn’t get it. The consequence is no munchkin. No consequence or inconsistently enforcing them means no accountability. We must remember, though, that accountability need not just be about consequences. Holding someone accountable should also include rewards for meeting and exceeding standards. Hence, the munchkins. Accountability helps us to be the best version of ourselves. Remember first to hold yourself accountable, then hold your teammates accountable. That means both when they aren’t and, even more importantly, when they are meeting and exceeding standards.

The chance that my daughter earns a scholarship to pay for her college is incredibly small. The chance that she earns a living playing a sport she loves is even smaller. However, she can earn the first four munchkins every day of her life. She can make herself proud without it being attached to her performance. While this does not guarantee she will win a championship, my wife and I believe it will help ensure her happiness. And isn’t that what is most important for all our children? My wife and I think so. Regardless, Anastasia will always get the fifth from us.

She knows that. Do your children, students, student-athletes, or corporate teammates? If not, I know a Dunkin Donuts...

Keep Attacking!

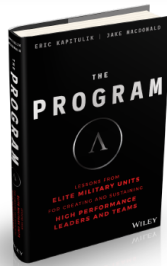


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THE PROGRAM, CEO, Eric Kapitulik, and Lead Instructor, Jake MacDonald, share great wisdom and insight on building world class teams in the co-authored book, The Program, Lessons from Elite Military Units for Creating and Sustaining High Performance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

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