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THE PROGRAM

LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

- LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #82 -



Dr. Robert Waldinger and Dr. Marc Schulz recently wrote and published, “The Good Life, Lessons from the World’s Longest Scientific Study of Happiness.” The book is built on the research conducted during the Harvard Study of Adult Development that began in 1938 and is still ongoing. It is the longest in-depth repeated observation study of human life. The study set out to find out not what made people sick but rather what made them thrive, what made them have a *good life*. The answer? Spoiler alert...

Strong, deep, meaningful relationships. Being a member of great teams.

Individuals do well. Individuals and individual talent win *games*. But great teams compete for championships on any battlefield. And on those teams, we fill one of two roles, teammate and/or leader. Great teams are formed through great relationships among teammates and between teammates and leaders. If we are going to have a good life, we must, therefore, commit to being the best teammate and/or leader we can be *for* our other

teammates, be they our spouse, our children, our significant other, student-athlete, or coworker. To do so, as *The Good Life* highlights, we must be able to communicate effectively. It is mission-critical.

Often, when we hear “communicate effectively,” we think about how we speak, and although this is a very important piece of effective communication, it is far less important than how we listen. And almost all of us do a very poor job of listening. Why? On average, our brains are powerful enough to synthesize or make sense of four hundred words per minute. However, most of us only speak at a rate of approximately one hundred fifty words per minute. What do we do with that additional capacity? We check emails. We send texts. We tweet. We multitask. Most detrimental to our effectively communicating with a teammate, and growing a stronger relationship with them, we think about how we will respond. Rather than just listening.

Don't.

Instead, *listen to understand*. Picture your first date with your significant other. I bet you were a really good listener. I know I was. With my ego, I usually suck the air out of any room. I talk about myself. But not that night. The synapses in my neanderthal brain were firing just strong enough, telling me that I should instead (novel idea) ask my now-wife questions about her. After I asked those questions, Iwait for it.....listened! I kept great eye contact. I nodded my head when the conversation called for me to nod my head. I laughed when she said something funny. Rather than rush to give my opinion or share my beliefs, I asked follow-on questions in an attempt to learn and understand this woman I was seriously attracted to. I showed her that I was paying attention. I even went so far as to note something she said she liked and then bought it and gave it to her on our next date. That is listening to understand.

Now, think of your last verbal fight with your spouse, significant other, coworker, boss, coach, student-athlete, or significant other. That, chances are, is listening to respond. A coach provides feedback to an athlete, and the athlete immediately provides an excuse for why they did what they did. The coach, just as quickly, might tell them they're wrong and what they need to do. And the athlete might respond to why the coach is wrong. In this scenario, both coach and athlete are attempting to prove they're right to the detriment of gaining a better understanding of each other's perspective. Spouses, parents, business partners, etc., all do the same. We listen to respond. We speak *at* each other rather than listen *to* or, most importantly, *for* one another.

Like any new habit, listening to understand will be challenging to develop. Once we have developed a habit, good or bad, we will always have it, even if we develop a new habit to replace the old. This is why it is so easy to slip back into old habits. As the saying goes, they truly are “hard to break.” However, regardless of how often or how long we have been listening to respond, we can still develop a new habit of listening to understand. Commit to asking three questions to the person you are conversing with before you allow yourself to state your point or belief. Then, after you state your truth, and chances are, your teammate responds, ask them another question or two. Nod your head. Keep eye contact. Show that you are paying attention. Attention is how we show we care for someone else.

The best teammates and leaders do so for all their teammates, be they teachers and students, coaches and athletes, bosses and coworkers, parents, children, or spouses. Listen to understand, not to respond. Doing so helps us form the strongest relationships that create the strongest teams. This, in turn, as the Harvard study found, helps ensure a good life.

Let's go ATTACK it!

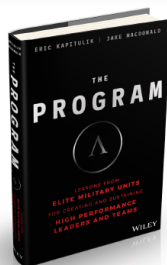


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THE PROGRAM BOOK



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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