

# THE PROGRAM

## LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

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### - LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #89 -



#### The Cotton Ball: Lessons in Deserving vs. Earning

At first glance, a cotton ball might seem as inconspicuous as a raindrop in the ocean. However, embark on a journey with me, and you'll discover that life has a funny way of delivering profound lessons, even through the simplest of objects. Prepare to unravel the tale of the cotton ball and the unexpected wisdom it carries.

The revelation struck during a seemingly innocuous fire-building exercise with one of our corporate clients, where the primal elements of fire - Oxygen, Fuel, and Heat - metaphorically intertwined with the foundations of world-class teams - people and trust. A challenge was set: create fire and sustain it to burn through a rope at 22 inches in height, but there was a catch involving a humble cotton ball.

Initially, I distributed ten cotton balls to participants, believing they deserved them to kindle their flames. Yet, what followed was a humorous but enlightening sequence of events. Blinded by the belief of deserving, people carelessly burned through their cotton

balls without grasping their significance. The average was a staggering nine cotton balls to start a fire. The cotton ball had become synonymous with entitlement.

Cue the 8-count Bodybuilder exercise - a quirky 8-count twist of the body to earn the coveted cotton ball. Participants had to complete two of these maneuvers for each cotton ball. Remarkably, the dynamics shifted. Suddenly, respect for the cotton ball surged. Teams now willingly embarked on 8-count Bodybuilders, gladly trading sweat for cotton ball currency.

Here's where the revelation unfolds: the average cotton ball count required to start a fire plummeted from nine to a mere one! A single cotton ball birthed flames that could defy a 22-inch rope. But why? The answer, deceptively simple yet profoundly significant, lies in the disparity between deserving and earning.

Life often mirrors our cotton ball escapade. Handed privileges and items, we assume they're deserved, our respect for them dwindling. Parents, Coaches, and business leaders - we're all guilty of this. We lavish our children and subordinates with what we think they deserve, only to watch them misuse or abuse their privileges. The cotton ball whispers a different wisdom: "Respect and value lie in earning, not entitlement."

As we navigate life, let's internalize the cotton ball's tale. Cherish the value of earning. Teach our kids and teams to respect the power of what's given and to comprehend that true value arises from effort and understanding; true value comes with earning. Like the cotton ball, when we earn our privileges, they burn brighter, illuminating the path to a more appreciative, wiser existence.

Attack!

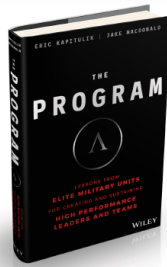
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