

THE PROGRAM

LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

To access our full archive of The Program Letters on Leadership, please visit [Letters on Leadership - TheProgram.org](http://LettersonLeadership-TheProgram.org).

- LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #90 -



At a recent Small Boat Leadership Challenge training event with Ameren Illinois, a client with whom we work extensively, The Program had the opportunity and privilege to dedicate one of our new boats to a fallen warrior, Corporal Riley Baker. His parents attended the dedication held on the beach directly after the training event on a cold, sunny morning at the end of October.

As we head into the holiday season and the start of a new year with accompanying resolutions, we thought it was appropriate (with his parent's permission) to share those remarks with you.

Good morning. I'm Eric Kapitulik. I am the CEO and Founder of The Program and a former United States Marine. This is a great privilege to speak to you today in remembering and honoring Corporal Riley Baker.

I speak often in public, and typically, I wait until I finish before I gauge how good a job I have done.... I do not need to do so today. Before I even begin, let me start by saying that I'm sorry. This dedication speech will not be very good. Please believe me when I tell you that it was not from lack of effort. Simply, although I am sure that there are others who may have done it better, I am equally confident that no one would have gotten it just right. Over the last month, while reading and watching just about everything that has been written or produced about him, I realized that it is an impossible task to truly capture just what a hero and warrior Corporal Riley Baker is in words.

Corporal Baker, amongst countless other accomplishments, was an All-Conference Linebacker and a State Champion High School wrestler, the first ever from Eureka High School. He was both Prom and Homecoming King. He is the recipient of numerous awards for valor in combat, including the Purple Heart and Bronze Star with Valor-in-Combat insignia. On average, I believe most people might describe Corporal Riley Baker with these accomplishments. They would be wrong to do so. As amazing as those accomplishments are, they are simply a manifestation, a by-product, of who he is!

So, who is he? Let me use the only word I could think of while researching him that accurately reflects him: Marine. As his dad, Grier, has said, his son was one (a Marine) long before he enlisted! And Grier would know! He is one, too! And, although I didn't know Corporal Baker personally, I do know Marines. And although Marine is a title, it is so much more than that. Let me tell you who a Marine is.

A Marine is selfless. They sacrifice for their team and teammates. They put both of those, their teammates and the team, before themselves. Always.

Marines are physically, mentally, and emotionally resilient. They are tough. Most people think of a "tough guy" as a stoic figure. And yes, admittedly, if that is what the mission calls for, a Marine can be that, but not only do Marines NOT have no emotion, they are, in fact, some of the most emotional people I have ever met. They laugh loudly and cry often.

Marines are disciplined. They do the "right" thing. All day. Every day. Not just when it is convenient. All day. Every day!

Marines are honorable. They say what they mean and do what they say.

Marines have boundless motivation and enthusiasm... and they bitch and complain too.

There are sheep. Those who go about their days in blissful ignorance. There are wolves, violent people who prey on sheep. And there are sheepdogs. They protect the sheep. Now, a sheepdog can be violent, and because of that, they often make the sheep a little bit nervous, but their violence is reserved, calculated, and professional. Their violence is swift and just. Their violence is reserved for the wolves. Thank God for the sheepdogs. Thank God for the Marines. Thank God for Corporal Riley Baker. A Marine. No greater friend. No worse enemy.

And, if there is even a minuscule possibility of it or if it is in any way acceptable, we will be shirtless, raise hell, and have fun. Corporal Baker, who sacrificed his life for his fellow Marines and his country, is a hero, just not a saint! He's a Marine!

When reading about Corporal Baker, I constantly thought about my best friend, Doug Zembiec. In fact, I have no doubt that wherever Doug Zembiec and Riley Baker are, they are either working out or deer hunting together right now. My buddy, Doug, was an All-American wrestler and classmate at the Naval Academy. Like Corporal Baker, he was also the first state champion from his high school. I am the godfather to Doug's daughter, Fallyn. She was one year old when he was shot and killed in Iraq on May 11th, 2007. I was privileged to be asked to give his eulogy.

I would like to share a quote with you that Doug had written down in one of his many notebooks that I found while preparing for his eulogy. I thought of it constantly while preparing for this boat dedication.

“Be a Man (Person) of Principle. Fight for what you believe in. Keep your word. Live with integrity. Be brave. Believe in something bigger than yourself. Serve your country. Teach. Mentor. Give something back to society. Lead from the front. Conquer your fears. Be a good friend. Be humble but be self-confident. Appreciate your friends and family. Be a leader, not a follower. Be valorous on the field of battle and take responsibility for your actions.” It is the most fitting description of Doug I have ever heard, and it should be. He knew its author longest. Some quotes in Doug's notebooks had people's names that the quotes belonged to, and some did not. After this quote, it simply read – “Principles My Father Taught Me”.

When reading about Corporal Baker and learning more about him as well as his father, Grier, I feel that was not only the most fitting description ever of my buddy, Doug, but it might be of Riley (and his dad), too.

Teammates, your effort and enthusiasm here today during your training have shown great respect to Riley. But now and for the rest of our lives, I hope we can all show him our honor. In an effort, in some small way, to do so, I dedicate this boat to a hero, a warrior, a Marine. I dedicate this boat to Corporal Riley Baker. In doing so, I hope it honors *him* and his family in some small way, but in fact, it does *us* a much greater honor to be associated with him and his family.

Instead, I challenge all of us to show Riley our honor by doing something much more profound than simply dedicating this boat to him. Let it simply be a reminder to challenge ourselves to be Marines. However, my earlier description of what and who a Marine is does NOT require any of us to have attended Marine Corps boot camp. It does, however, require us to be a man, a woman, of principle. It requires us to fight for what we believe in. It requires us to be brave, teach, mentor, give something back to society, conquer our fears, be a good friend, and appreciate our families. We must be selfless: put others before ourselves. We must be physically, mentally, and emotionally resilient. We must say what we mean and do what we say. Always!

And we must do something that, as Grier said in the video I shared with you last night ([youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=MIZJoYPKbys&themeRefresh=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=MIZJoYPKbys&themeRefresh=1)), he wishes he could do worse than anything else in this world: kiss our sons and daughters. Be a great

teammate, and lead your people, not by the title you possess, but by the title in your heart: the title of best teammate and leader we can be. And if we do, we will have done Corporal Riley Baker our honor, and though he may no longer be with us in body, he will surely not be gone either.

A few years ago, while serving in special operations, I lost some very dear friends of mine while training for a deployment to the Persian Gulf. At the end of one of the Marine's funerals, I stood behind the parents of the fallen warrior as the congregation filed out of the church. My parents had attended the service, and as my father stepped in front of the fallen Marine's father, he shook his hand and said simply, "Congratulations." The father, startled, looked up and said, "For what!?" My dad, never having lost eye contact or the firmness of his grip, replied, "For raising your son to be a man."

Ameren Teammates. Program Teammates. Most importantly, Mr. and Mrs. Baker, thank you for being here with us today, for the dedication of this boat in your son's memory, and...

Congratulations.

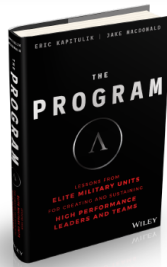


Eric Kapitulik
Founder and CEO, The Program LLC

"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 <https://theprogram.org/>.

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.

#THEPROGRAMPODCAST



Dive deeper into your knowledge of leadership by following #THEPROGRAMPODCAST. Listen to great insights from corporate leaders, coaches, authors and our Program teammates by subscribing and listening to our podcast. Follow by clicking the buttons below.

[PURCHASE BOOK HERE](#)



SERVICES PROVIDED



GREAT TEAMMATES. GREAT LEADERS. WORLD-CLASS TEAMS.



The Program, LLC, 48 Quinebaug Road, North Grosvenordale, CT 06255, USA, (781) 281-0751

[Unsubscribe](#) [Manage preferences](#)