

THE PROGRAM

LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

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- LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #92 -



Earlier this year, my high school Football Coach, Terry Henigan, passed away. He, along with my parents and a few leaders in the Marine Corps, is largely responsible for teaching me how to be the great teammate and leader I strive to be. This past weekend, I had the opportunity to attend his Celebration of Life in our old high school gym in Irvine, California. I was enthralled listening to his sons and granddaughter speak about him as a father and grandfather, giving us a glimpse of a side of him we never saw when he had his whistle and ever-present clipboard. I was also fascinated by a story that almost every former coach, nearly all of whom are now head coaches, told about their early days with Coach Henigan. They all spoke about trying to impress him by showing up to the football office before him, eventually giving up when they realized that even when they awoke at 4 AM, Coach Henigan would be in the office with the lights on and coffee brewed, breaking down game film when they got there.

We didn't know that. We didn't know he was in the office at 5 AM even though school started at 8. We just knew that practice was incredibly organized and efficient. We knew that despite our unbelievably long practices, there were no wasted movements or inefficiencies. We thought he was just a naturally organized guy who could "wing it."

Very few people in this world can "wing it." Even those who pride themselves in their ability to be spontaneous and think on their feet are not approaching their potential if they haven't prepared themselves for that moment. Preparation is the third P in our acronym CLAPPP, which details how to communicate effectively. Our communication will always be more effective if we prepare it. Sometimes, that may mean taking 20 seconds to gather your thoughts before addressing your team. Other times, it means rehearsing a speech over and over again until you know it by heart. It may seem paradoxical, but preparation allows you to be more spontaneous and flexible in the moment. Knowing that you have already considered the contingencies, you can veer from the plan and always come back to it. That is not the case when you "wing it". When you veer from the plan, if there is one, you get lost and start to ramble and meander, whether in the form of an important presentation or an actual physical mission. You will never approach your potential without proper preparation, even if you consider yourself very good at improvising.

One of the best public speakers I have ever heard is our founder and CEO, Eric Kapitulik. After delivering a keynote address, one of the attendees later remarked on how powerful it was and appreciated that Kap "spoke from the heart." I laughed because I knew the truth: Kap had spent countless hours preparing and rehearsing the speech. His preparation allowed him to deliver the speech confidently without any awkward "ums" and "yeahs". It also allowed him to adjust to the energy in the room and go off script without rambling or diluting his message.

Preparation will also cover any deficiencies we have. I don't have a very good sense of direction. I never did. I used to get lost in my hometown once I started driving. My school friends were shocked when they found that navigation was one of my primary jobs in the Marine Corps. Overseas, I was often tasked with finding the best routes to take to an objective and leading the force there. I can honestly say that I don't remember taking a single wrong turn. That wasn't because of my naturally gifted sense of direction. It was because I spent hours before every mission pouring over my maps. Every turn was plugged into my GPS. Every choke point and possible ambush site was marked on my maps. I studied alternate routes as well, knowing that, in all likelihood, I would never use them. This preparation allowed my Marines and me to perform at a high level.

Why do we prepare? To perform at a high level. Why is that ultimately important? At Coach Henigan's Celebration of Life, a few speakers talked about how Coach prepared so intensely because he didn't want to let us down. Twenty-five years ago, that would have blown me away. The idea that a larger-than-life figure and legend in the coaching community was concerned with letting down 16-year-old Jake Macdonald wouldn't have made sense. Now I understand. I prepare because I want to maximize my potential and perform at a high level. I do so because I want the people around me to be proud of me. I want my family, Marines, friends, and teammates to be proud of me. I want Coach Henigan to be proud of me. I hope he is.

Attack!

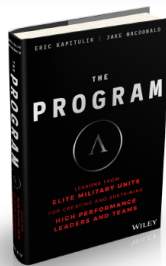


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THE PROGRAM BOOK



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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