

THE PROGRAM

LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

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- LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #93 -

VALUES

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- COMPETENCE
- WISDOM
- EFFECTIVENESS
- ACCOUNTABLE
- SELFLESSNESS
- INTEGRITY/TRUST
- FAIRNESS
- LOYALTY

THE PROGRAM

The Importance of Core Values

Core Values are essential. As Yoda famously quipped, “Do or do not do. There is no try.” More accurately, when speaking about Core Values, “Be or do not be. There is no try.” To put it simply, we need them.

Typically, when we think of Core Values, we think of them from an organizational perspective. Core Values are the foundation of any team’s culture. As I constantly reinforce with my own teammates at The Program, achieving our financial goals, i.e., winning, matters (more on this in next month’s Letter on Leadership). We just don’t focus solely on it. Instead, we stay focused on our culture and how we do things around here. We stay focused on our Core Values. If we do so, achieving our goals will be a by-product of it (so long as we have sufficiently talented people). If not, we need to change our culture because winning does matter. If we don’t achieve our financial goals, The Program goes out of business. With that said, any organization that isn’t consistently winning must

change either their Core Values, which is very difficult, or change their standards that reinforce them daily, which is easier.

Without Core Values, an organization has no culture, no “how we do things.” Instead, every individual does things the way they want, or they focus on winning. The former is typically in a manner consistent with their own personal core values and ensures a team of individuals. The latter works on seventy-degree, sunny days. A focus on winning works when you have the best players. Unfortunately, the best player gets injured or has an off night. The best players enter the transfer portal. The best player moves on to another school or company. A focus on winning works when unemployment and inflation are low and the economy is booming. It doesn’t work so well during Covid. It doesn’t work so well during its aftermath when the country is dealing with the economic consequences it has wrought. As much as our ego likes to convince us that we control accomplishing any goal, we don’t! At least not in the short term. In the short term, the environment has a vote!

I speak at corporate events throughout North America about being great teammates and leaders. I show photos and video clips of my climb to the summit of Mt. Everest, the tallest mountain in the world. A mountain that I don’t speak about is Nanga Parbat, the 9th tallest mountain in the world. With a much stronger climbing team than I had on Everest, I/we didn’t come close to the summit. Not close to it! Why? Because we had horrible weather and climbing conditions. The day we decided to turn back (read, “the day our climbing partner, [Chris Warner](#), the 2nd American ever to summit all fourteen 8,000 meter peaks of the world, decided”), after returning to basecamp, we watched 4 Iranian Climbers fall to their death. Needless to say, I don’t question Chris’s decision for us to turn around. Everyone should have turned around! Focus on how you behave on the mountain rather than reaching the summit, and you will summit many more mountains in the long run.

The Program has three Core Values. We are Selfless. We take strain from our teammates and act in the best interest of The Program. We are Tough. We stay mission-focused in the face of physical, mental, and emotional adversity. We are Disciplined. We say what we mean, and we do what we say we are going to do. Although it is incredibly important for any organization to have core values for the reasons outlined above, it is just as important for each of us to know our individual core values and behave in accordance with them.

First, knowing our individual core values is important because our satisfaction with being a member of any team (personal, athletic, business, school, etc.) is in large part due to our sharing a similar value system with the teammates who are on those teams with us. As an example, if you share a similar value system with your teammates that you work or play a sport with, you will enjoy it a whole lot more than working or playing a sport with teammates who do not share your value system. The same goes for a spouse. Knowing what our individual core values are helps ensure that we surround ourselves with others who share that same value system. Do not confuse beliefs, life experiences, or personality with core values. Differences in these (along with race, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background) create great diversity, and diversity is a force multiplier. However, diversity is not a force multiplier when it comes to core values. Differences in core values create discord and, eventually, fractures in relationships.

Second, core values should be non-negotiable - a light switch, not a dial; binary; a one or a zero. Many of my friends and teammates at The Program will tell you that I am “the most

disciplined person they know.” I agree with them. I don’t want this to come across egotistically, but I think I am the most disciplined person that I know, too. However, of course, there are times when I am undisciplined. Although extremely rare, I can’t say that I ALWAYS do what I say I am going to do (as a reminder, this is how The Program defines discipline). 99.9% of the time, I do, but not one hundred. This may not sound like a lot, but the average adult makes more than 30,000 choices a day. 99.9% of the time means, over the course of a three hundred and sixty-five day year, I am undisciplined more than I like to admit to my teammates. More importantly, it is more often than what I want to admit to myself. It disappoints me because I acted in a manner inconsistent with my core values. This is true for all of us, regardless of what our core values may be. If, as an example, loyalty is a core value of yours, then if you act in a disloyal manner, you will feel bad about it. Yes, you will feel bad about the impact on the person or people you were disloyal to, but most importantly, to yourself.

Why is our being aware of this so critical for our success? Our physical, mental, and emotional health work in concert with each other. The more consistently we act in accordance with our value system, the better we feel about ourselves and the life we are leading on all the teams we are privileged to be a part of. The greater our physical, mental, and emotional health, the greater our ability to be the best teammates and leaders that we can be on all of them.

Know what your Core Values are. And then, most importantly, live a life in accordance with them. The greater our health. The greater teammates and leaders we can be.

Attack!

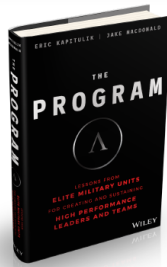


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THE PROGRAM, CEO, Eric Kapitulik, and Lead Instructor, Jake MacDonald, share great wisdom and insight on building world class teams in the co-authored book, The Program, Lessons from Elite Military Units for Creating and Sustaining High Performance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

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