

THE PROGRAM

LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

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- LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #96 -



Axel Kapitulik spotting Angelo Trayner while the author looks on.

A year ago, my thirteen-year-old son, Axel, asked if he could start working out with me. His best friend, Angelo, has since joined us. Axel and Angelo have lost fat and gained muscle and, more importantly, confidence. They have stuck with it and increased their strength, toughness, discipline, and work ethic. I couldn't be prouder of them, and admittedly, I have had a blast with them as they have developed.

During our training, I have tried to teach them proper nutrition, lifting techniques (i.e., how to squat), gym etiquette (i.e., wipe down equipment after use, share equipment, etc.), and Kapitulik-specific gym rules (i.e., no sitting EVER, no cell phones EVER, etc.). Although not a Kapitulik rule (more on this in next month's Letter), one rule that many gyms have is to "ALWAYS use a Spotter." For the uninitiated, a Spotter assists a Lifter in successfully and safely working out. Often, a Spotter will help move a bar loaded with

weights off the apparatus (squat rack, bench press, etc.), watch the Lifter while they are doing their set, and then, upon completion of the set (or muscle failure), help put the bar back onto the apparatus.

Without hyperbole, we are ALL Spotters. Every friend, teammate, spouse, parent, coach, teacher, and business leader is a Spotter... in life. Therefore, although I disagree with the requirement to ALWAYS use one, I have still tried to teach Axel and Angelo how to spot properly because I have witnessed too many teammates, spouses, parents, coaches, teachers, and business leaders do it improperly. They make four common, detrimental mistakes. Thankfully, they are easily corrected.

The first mistake some gymgoers make is spotting someone who hasn't asked for their help. I have often been lifting in a gym and started to struggle on my last rep or two, only to have someone who wasn't asked run over, grab the bar, and put it back onto the apparatus. I always ask that person, "What are you doing?", and they always reply, "I saw you struggling and wanted to help. I thought you might be in danger." Therein lies the mistake - if I don't ask for help, don't give it. It isn't anyone else's job or responsibility to decide when or what type of "help" I need. I'm the guy under the bar. I decide when I need help. Instead, if you see someone struggling, walk over and stand in a location where your teammate can see you and from where you *could* provide assistance if asked. Communicate to your teammate, "I am here if you need me." The former signals that you don't trust my judgment; you don't trust that I know what I am capable of. The latter signals that we are all on this journey together, and you are prepared to assist if asked. Some readers may initially think, "What about my teammate who is struggling with a mental health issue and doesn't want to ask for help?" I recognize the gravity of that issue, and NONE of this letter is meant to provide guidance for it or that teammate.

If asked for a "spot," another mistake many Spotters make is hovering over the Lifter with their hands constantly under the bar, fidgeting nervously. They don't immediately grab the bar, but they constantly ask the Lifter if he/she wants them to do so. Don't. Constantly asking, "Are you ok?" or if your teammate wants you to "take the weight" forces a response from them. This consumes his/her energy. Energy that should be used to accomplish the mission. Second, if only for a moment, it causes our teammate to lose focus. Instead of focusing on lifting the weighted bar (i.e., their goal), the Lifter is focused on responding to the Spotter. Trust is the foundation of every relationship. If asked for a spot, ensure you know and deliver what type of help, how much, and when a teammate wants it, and then provide it to develop trust with teammates. If we do so consistently, our teammates will know that we will be there to spot them if/when they need assistance. Until then, they can use all their energy and focus to accomplish the mission successfully.

As a Lifter tires during a set, they often pause between reps. They may take a few deep breaths, refocus, and then continue. While working hard on accomplishing a worthy endeavor, we may all get to a difficult point when we must do the same (pause, take a deep breath, and refocus) prior to continuing the battle. The third mistake many Spotters make is not allowing it. Instead, they force the bar (and the Lifter) to be constantly moving forward or "up." This signals to our teammates that slowing down, pausing, or taking time away is bad when, in fact, regardless of the battlefield, quite the opposite is true. Even the most dedicated Lifters take days (and weeks) off. They understand that pausing is essential for their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Time off is essential for long-term growth and improvement. By not allowing it, a bad Spotter instills in their

teammate a very detrimental mindset that can and often does eventually lead to burnout, anxiousness, unhappiness, and worse, depression. A great Spotter affords their teammate the time to pause, knowing that after it, teammates attack their goals with renewed strength.

During warm-up sets, no one wants or needs a Spotter. We want one on our final set, our heaviest set, when we know that we are going to struggle. When things get difficult, when a Lifter starts to struggle under the bar, the fourth mistake a bad Spotter makes is to grab the bar and jerk it up with all their strength. They take away all the adversity. They don't allow their teammate to struggle. This is so unfortunate. First, it sends the message to our teammates that struggling is either not allowed and/or not good for them. Both are horrible lessons to instill. Second, the greatest amount of growth occurs on the edge of our strength and ability when we struggle. Instead of grabbing the bar, cheer! During those moments in life when a teammate is struggling, even a little bit of positive enthusiasm can make all the difference in their success. Remember it. If something more is required, a great Spotter then puts two fingers on the bar (TWO FINGERS!) and provides just enough help to get the bar back on the apparatus safely, but they most assuredly allow their teammate to still do the real work. It is their teammate's responsibility to keep pushing. A Great Spotter then congratulates their teammate. As I have written before, my child's or any teammate's successful performance makes me "happy" *for* them. Struggling as hard as they can while they do so makes me "proud" *of* them. This is what will ultimately make them successful in life! A great Spotter always reinforces this lesson through their actions and words.

The best teammates and the best leaders have proper spotting techniques on every battlefield. A great Spotter is always vigilant but takes direction from the Lifter if, when, and how to provide assistance. They ensure their teammate uses his/her energy to focus on the task to be completed. A great Spotter understands that sometimes, the greatest assistance they can provide is to allow and encourage their teammate to pause. Finally, when asked for assistance and it is required, a great Spotter uses two fingers to keep their teammate safe, but they still allow them to struggle. Great Spotters know that this is when the most significant growth occurs, and they congratulate their teammates for it.

Be a great Spotter. Be a great teammate and leader.

And always remember to cheer!

Attack!

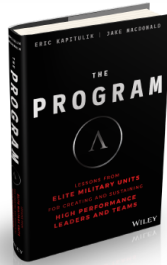


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