

THE PROGRAM

LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

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- LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #97 -



In last month's letter, I wrote about lifting weights with my thirteen-year-old son, Axel, and his best friend, Angelo. I highlighted the importance of being a great Spotter because we are all Spotters in life. Too often, we make four common mistakes. Thankfully, they are easily corrected.

- 1) Check with your teammates to see if they want assistance. Provide it when you are asked to do so. If you aren't, don't. Providing unrequested "help" signals that you don't trust someone's judgment or ability. The latter signals that we are all on this journey together, and I am prepared to assist if asked.
- 2) If asked for assistance, stand there. Be ready to assist, but not a distraction. Constantly checking with a teammate if he/she wants help elicits a response from them. Their response requires them to expend energy and lose focus on their goal, both of which are detrimental to its accomplishment.

- 3) Rarely do we constantly move forward or up. If so, maybe the mountain we are climbing isn't challenging enough? Instead, while attempting a worthy challenge, we may need to pause, take a deep breath, refocus, and then continue our battle. A pause is not quitting. A pause is sometimes necessary to reenergize a teammate, allowing them to return to the challenge with renewed vigor. A great Spotter understands this and not only allows but encourages their teammate to take one, as required.
- 4) Most importantly, a great Spotter allows a teammate to struggle. If/when required to help, they still afford their teammate the opportunity and gift to struggle. A Great Spotter does NOT take away all the adversity. A great Spotter does NOT do it for them. The most significant growth occurs on the edge of our ability level. A great Spotter provides the absolute minimum amount of assistance to ensure their teammate experiences this growth. The best Spotters cheer for the lifter during their struggle!

As I have taught Axel and Angelo, if a gym requires people lifting weights to "ALWAYS USE A SPOTTER," then we use a Spotter. By joining the club, we are agreeing to their rules. This is true for any teammate joining any club, athletic team, or company. However, a Spotter is not a requirement when working out at the Kapitulik gym (pictured above).

The following are the reasons why:

- As an example, the reason why we bench is to have a strong chest. Instead of barbell bench press, if they don't have a Spotter, they can still do dumbbell bench press. Both exercises will help build a stronger chest. *Don't make excuses or let other people make excuses for you.* Don't blame your weak chest on anything or anyone else. Axel and Angelo will not be victims! If you have a goal, figure out what you need to do and what you need to sacrifice to achieve it, and then go and do it. Take responsibility! An ability to do things for yourself is called agency. We aren't born with it. It must be developed. We do so at the Kapitulik Farm weight room.
- Being underneath a heavy load and unsure if you can lift it is scary. Very scary. The second reason Axel or Angelo aren't required to use a Spotter is that it is ok to be scared. Most things that scare us don't end up not that bad once we try them. Second, just because I *feel* scared and unsafe does not actually mean that I am unsafe. It is even better to be scared and figure out how not to be on your own. This builds confidence and toughness. Both are mission-critical to our success.
- There are some exercises in the gym for which a Spotter does little or nothing for The Lifter. There will also be times in Axel and Angelo's life when they will be faced with a challenge, and Mom and Dad (i.e., a Spotter) will either not be there or won't be able to help (much as my wife and Angelo's mom disagree). If they want to achieve everything they hope to in life, at some point, Axel and Angelo will have to stand on their own two feet and just get it done. It may be a physical challenge, but just as likely, it will be a moral one. Both young men will most certainly face difficult decisions. The tough decision will surely require them to go it alone. They will have no Spotter. The easier decision will always afford them lots of company. That tough decision, should they choose to make it, will define them as men. Unfortunately, so too will the easy decision.
- When you squat down with a heavy bar on your back and try to stand back up, but can't, you must throw the squat bar back behind you and step forward. That bar is going to crash to the floor, and everyone will look at you, know that you just "failed," and probably even laugh at you because of it. What I try to teach Axel and Angelo is, "WHO

CARES!?” Let them laugh. You are The Man (or The Woman) in the arena! You are the one challenging yourself. Most people don’t. They just continue to do whatever they are comfortable doing, and they will try to tear you down because they know that comfort isn’t good enough for you. In the history of Haters, there has never been a Hater who has been doing better than you. Therefore, don’t let them determine what you are going to try to do or not. Failure isn’t having the squat bar crash to the floor. Failure is not going for it! I hope both young men (and my daughter) define failure the same in their own lives.

- Regardless of whether you are attempting a new weight in the gym, thinking about starting a new role in your organization, or founding a company, knowing that you have no Spotter, and no backup plan is not a reason to not attempt it. Instead of using it as an excuse, use it as a benefit. No second option is wonderful motivation to push harder. My hope is that Axel and Angelo figure that out while lifting on the Kapitulik farm. I started lifting weights at 13 years old in my parent's basement all by myself. I didn’t know what I was doing and often did it wrong. Thirteen-year-old Eric Kapitulik knew that not getting that bar lifted back up was going to cause him some serious pain. This was a wonderful motivator for me to push harder. I have found that to be true while a Midshipman at the Naval Academy, a Marine Corps Officer, and climbing Mt. Everest. I have found it to be true when climbing any mountain I have attempted, actually or allegorically. When first starting The Program, my mom always used to tell me that she “wished Dad and she had more money to give me.” It would have definitely been easier if they had! I’m not so sure that “easier” would have motivated me to work and make The Program a success the same way that not being able to afford food did, though...

Leaders ensure their team accomplishes the mission, and we always take care of our teammates. We take care of our teammates by making every decision we ever make with their best interest at heart! I want to always be there to give Axel (and Angelo) a Spot. I want my son and daughter to always be close to me so I can protect them and keep them safe. I am happiest when they are with me. I know, though, that I must make every decision I ever make with their best interest at heart. It is in their best interest to have the confidence, ability, and resiliency not to need Dad or Mom. It is in their best interest to have the confidence, ability, and resiliency to go out into the unknown and challenge themselves in worthy endeavors. Only this will provide them with true fulfillment, and fulfillment leads to happiness. And isn’t that what we want most for all our sons and daughters? Isn’t that what we want most for all our teammates?

The best teammates and the best leaders do. And they never forget to cheer...

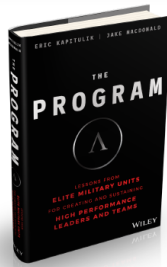
Attack!

Eric Kapitulik
Founder and CEO

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