

THE PROGRAM

LETTERS ON LEADERSHIP

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- LETTER ON LEADERSHIP #100 -



Anastasia, my 8-year-old daughter (aka, "The Terrorist"- see [Letters on Leadership #67](#) and [#81](#)), is a Cheerleader. At a competition over the winter, she tripped and fell. On the way home, I told her how proud I was of her. She tripped and fell in front of hundreds of spectators. Nobody likes to fall, especially in front of hundreds of people and judges. It's embarrassing, and your team loses points for it. I told Anastasia that performing to her best makes me happy for her, but it is her behavior that makes me proud of her. More importantly, I hope that her behavior, not the outcome, makes her proud of herself! I was proud of Anastasia because when she fell, she jumped up, put a smile on her face, and attacked the rest of the routine. She also performed flawlessly.

I have coached many of my son, Axel's, teams, and because of that, at times, he and I have spent more time together than I have with Anastasia. Further, I travel a lot for work. So, when I am not coaching Axel or traveling for work, I try to make every opportunity to watch Anastasia and support her while she does her things (soccer, gymnastics, cheer). One night over the winter, I went to cheerleading practice. Anastasia is a "flyer," one of the cheerleaders who is held aloft by

her teammates, the “bases.” Early in practice, one of her bases dropped her. Admittedly, that's dangerous and scary. Anastasia immediately ran to my wife, one of the coaches, crying. My wife consoled her, checked for injuries, and then sent her back out onto the mats. For the rest of the practice, Anastasia was angry, had poor body language and a bad attitude, radiated negative energy (see photo above), and simply “got through” it... while never performing to the best of her ability.

On the way to school the next morning, she and I spoke about the different emotional reactions she had to a mistake at that competition versus her practice the night before, and, most importantly, how those reactions led to very different performances. It was a similar conversation I often have with Axel during basketball. If he makes his first few shots, he plays with joy and typically has a great game. If he misses a few shots in a row, he gets angry, shows poor body language and energy, and then continues to miss shots and plays poorly.

James Loehr (Ed.D.), author of “The New Toughness Training For Sports,” highlights the importance of Emotional Toughness in performing at our best. Specifically, he discusses the Real Self VS the Performer Self. Our feelings (i.e., how we feel or think about something) are very often wrong, but our emotions never are. Emotions are real and part of who we are. Our emotional well-being requires us to address those emotions. As Dr. Loehr points out, though, if we desire to perform at our highest level, we must address or “deal with” those emotions in a manner and at a time that does not hurt our performer self.

Our brains constantly generate waves with specific frequencies and amplitudes that reflect our emotions. We perform at our best when we play with joy. Joy has brain waves at specific frequencies and amplitudes. Anger, frustration, and other negative emotions generate brain waves at higher frequencies and amplitudes than joy, leading to poor performance. Therefore, to perform at my best as a Coach, a CEO, and, most importantly, as a Husband and Father, I need to do so with joy. This can be extremely difficult, admittedly, and it is just as difficult for my daughter, the cheerleader, and my son, the basketball player (as I remind my wife often, married to me, she should always be in a state of joy).

As I discussed with [The Terrorist](#) that morning on the way to school, if she gets upset during a performance, that is a real self-emotion, and she/we must address it, but if her goal is to perform at her best, she/we must address that emotion in a manner and at a time when it does not hurt her performer self. That is detrimental to her achieving and, more importantly, her team achieving their goals. Axel knows that when we get in the car after practice or a game, if he has a poor performance, he has the right and the support from me to scream, yell, swear, cry, or do anything he feels he needs to do to address that emotion, but doing so during the game hurts his performer self. In the car afterward, it does not. For a full discussion on tactics and techniques for addressing emotions during performances, I suggest Dr. Loehr. But deep breathing, positive self-talk, and shifting focus from yourself to your teammates (i.e., cheering for them) are three that The Program has taught for years.

No cheerleader is going to trip and fall during a competition and feel joy or happiness. No basketball player ever misses a shot and feels great about it. Personally, as CEO of The Program, I have never lost a sale and been psyched about doing so. Poor performance by myself or my teammates (i.e., Program co-workers, my wife, son, daughter, and the athletes I coach) frustrates me and, at times, does make me angry (admittedly, while coaching basketball, I have caught myself internally muttering, “make the layup!” when a middle schooler misses yet another wide open one). Poor performance elicits the same frustration and anger from my son and daughter,

and I think, many of us. Competitive people like to do well. None of us is born emotionally tough, but if we are going to perform at our best, we must develop it.

The following weekend was another opportunity for The Terrorist (and Axel) to do so... and me too! The St. Joseph Eagles Middle School basketball team played our rival (and won!)! My wife? She was still living in joy...

Attack!

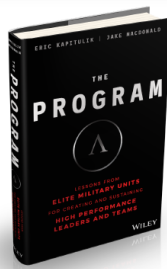


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