Quiet Leadership- Smarter Friends

The late Jerry Traylor and I did not see eye to eye on a lot of things when it came to raising teen leaders. He was adamant that nicknames were the downfall of civilization, and I am convinced being bestowed a loving nickname helps people to grow into their potential. He believed in an agenda full of lectures, I wanted one full of movement to balance out the dead butt syndrome. Even though we did not see eye to eye on several things, I admire his ability to help people understand their worth in the world.

Jerry could do what I am not good at, see the lone soul who needs a hug. I am better at reading a room’s energy and adjusting the agenda to pump it up. Jerry would sit for long hours and listen as hurting and broken souls told him their stories, just so he could tell them they had the power to overcome the pain and the unfair ceilings life had put on them. He did it, like a good Quiet Leader, with a whisper. I hope to do the same with a page full of words or a microphone. I also live my life with fully functioning legs, Jerry did this, and so much more, with the constant, overwhelming pain of Cerebral Palsy.

Jerry ran multiple Marathons, climbed Pike’s Peak, and crossed the US, from shore to distant shore, on crutches. I shall never do any of those things, crutches or no. Nor will I live up to his greatness as a role model for overcoming personal limitations. He also had a moment in his signature speech that I, as a speaker, wish I had. Jerry would tell his story, shuffling back and forth across the room, raising one cane in the air to make a point, he would move from quiet to raucous, enthralling the audience. When they were totally his, he would talk of his decision to cross the US, by himself, on crutches. He would get quiet and ask the group, “what do you think my friends said to that?” Responses would include, you’re crazy, they’d laugh, they’d say no way. Jerry would stop, look dumbstruck and say, “my friends asked how they could help, I don’t know what kind of people you are hanging out with, but you might need better friends.”

There was, every single time, a gasp, an audible awakening, a realization that your friends really do make you who you are, and It is both your privilege and your obligation, to be part of a group that offers help instead of negativity to one another.

This story comes to mind today because a friend mentioned overhearing a Senior Citizen say to his friend, “I need smarter friends,” as he scrolled his phone. His companion replied, “I think I need to be smarter for my friends.”

Imagine, if we, the Quiet Leaders made that a life goal, to be smarter for our friends, our teams, our communities. What if every day you asked yourself how you could lead those you love to better outcomes, better experiences, and better versions of themselves? Think how fun it would be to be in your circle! Think of everything you could accomplish, together!

Kelly Cresswell, Executive Director of Reach Higher Montana, was discussing this theory with her son recently, that he could be the leader, the one to show his friends how to behave, how to make life choices for himself that improved their lives, and got them closer to their goals. Parents often discuss the tired but oh so true “birds of a feather flock together” adage, and just as often it falls on deaf ears. What I loved about Kelly’s approach was the reminder that sometimes we should be smarter for our friends. That when we make good decisions for ourselves, we help others to do the same. We not only stay out of trouble, but we also help them to stay out of trouble as well.

One of the interesting facts about obesity is that if one person is obese, their entire social circle tends to be if not obese, overweight. People who believe in serving their communities join service organizations, thus multiplying their efforts. People who write music, well they put the words in our mouths, don’t they? Teens who are taught how to lead, end up changing the world, or at least their small part of it. We are, as can be proven if you look at anyone’s food and exercise journal, the sum total of the things we do every day, and the people we hang out with.

Every single day we get to decide if we will hang with friends who make us smarter. We get to decide if we will be the friend who raises another to their full potential. We, the Quiet Leaders, get to decide if we will quietly do nothing, or quietly do something. I would argue that if we quietly choose to do something, especially be smarter for those around us, we are being the very best version of us that we can be.

Let’s be that.

Let’s do something.

Let’s at least try to be smarter for our friends and followers.