The Essential Leader

Over the last thirty years, I've had the opportunity to serve in nine different Royal Rangers outposts. I've served in large mega churches where hundreds of boys attended Royal Rangers every week, and I've served in small churches were the entire outpost met together in one small room, led by me and one other guy. A lot of variety and diversity was represented across those outposts. Some seemed to be highly effective, systematically moving boys through an advancement and leadership development process. While in others, we were largely satisfied to just keep the boys from killing each other or destroying church property each week. (I expect you know what I mean.)

Over time, I've come to realize that although the experience a boy has in a particular outpost each week is the product of many factors, none has a greater impact than the hearts of the leaders themselves. Leaders have a variety of resources available to help them provide a great meeting experience, but nothing is more impactful than the heart of the leader.

- The curriculum provides suggested content, but the leader makes it fun and engaging.
- The advancement system provides a pathway for achievement, but the leader makes it an enjoyable experience.
- Uniforms provide group identity, but the leader makes the group something a boy wants to be part of.
- Bible lessons and devotions open the doorway to an understanding of Scripture, but only the boy's leader, who knows him and understands his life situation, can listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and make the message relevant to him and help him apply it in his own unique way to become more like Christ.

When I was a boy in Rangers my Trailblazers commander was Ray Huffman. (Trailblazers was the original name for Adventure Rangers.) In those days, Royal Rangers leaders had no weekly curriculum, very limited Bible lessons and devotions. YouTube, Wikipedia, and Siri didn't exist to help them out. They largely just had to figure out what to do and make it work. Commander Ray did that faithfully week after week. I don't think I remember a single Bible lesson we were taught although I know he taught them every week. I don't remember much about the skill merits we earned. However, I remember Commander Ray. He was just a really good person—always smiling, always fun to be with, and very, very patient with us. (Yes, we were at times those boys who destroyed things, accidentally of course.)

I learned from Commander Ray's example that the most essential element to a successful Royal Rangers program is not the curriculum, or the amount of training a leader has completed, or even his years of experience. It's the leader's heart. Show me a church where a group of men love God and love boys, and I'll show you the makings of an effective Royal Rangers program. Training, curriculum, and other things can certainly help, but the key ingredient to an effective outpost is the leader.

If you've been a Rangers leader for very long, I expect you've at times asked yourself if you're really the right guy for the job. After all, there's always somebody out there who has more training, more experience, more time, more money, etc. It's always easier to just let someone else do it. But the most important thing you will bring to your outpost meeting this week is **YOU**. Bring your heart, bathed in prayer and wrapped in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Your heart is the greatest thing you can bring and share with the boys you've been given this week. Even on those nights when you've had a rough week and didn't have the time to prepare for the

meeting like you should, you can always prepare your heart. Your heart is the most important thing you can prepare.

Get your lesson ready, pack your gear, and load the truck. Send reminders to the parents about the upcoming event, arrive early, and set up the room. Do whatever you need to do. But don't forget to bring your heart. It may be the most important thing you do all week. You are the essential leader.

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