

Honorable Mention
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Today. A relative term that only lasts twenty-four hours then starts all over again. Pretty soon, today will be yesterday, and tomorrow will be today. It's a never-ending cycle. Every today is a new day to be faced, a new challenge to conquer, a path to be traveled, another chapter in the book of life. Yet, with these challenges come responsibilities, choices to be made, roles to be taken, and goals to be fulfilled. All these factors of today involve leadership. Although it may seem to be a onetime thing, leadership is a part of everything we do.

Michael Jordan once said, "Earn your leadership every day." But how is that possible? Let me tell you a little story. A couple years ago, I was hanging out with a group of friends. We were just talking, messing around, and having a good time. Very unexpectedly, one of my friends pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He took one out, and then passed out more to the rest of us. I stood there in confusion. I had never smoked before and did not know what to do. I knew the dangers of smoking and why it is terrible for the lungs. One of my uncles died from lung cancer due to smoking. Also there was the addiction involved because of the drug Nicotine. I was quite surprised as the lighter was passed around the circle, and every single one of my friends lit up and started smoking. It was quite terrifying to me because I did not want them all to think I was a wimp or not cool. Then the lighter reached me. I was faced with a choice. So far, no one had refused to smoke, and now all their eyes were on me. I stared at the lighter in my hands, then at all the faces whose eyes were drilling into my skin. Hesitating for a second, I played with the idea. Then before I could do anything else, I quickly shoved the lighter into the next person's hands. Everyone raised their eyebrows. They then asked what was wrong with me. They said it was ok. I would not die if I just took one smoke. Shaking my head, I said no and told them to stop bugging me about it. Then to my greatest surprise, the guy next to me also refused to light up. The rest of my friends did not say anything after that. Later that night, just as I was getting in bed, the other kid who refused to smoke texted me and thanked me for standing up for the right thing. In doing so, I had given him enough courage to do the same. Since then, I have been offered many drugs or drinks and have found it easier to say no to them. That was one of the hardest things I have done in my life, and I regret nothing. That is what leadership is. Standing up for the right thing, and being an example to others, whether it is a little or big thing.

Today, many kids are under the influence of drugs. They did not have the strength to say no. It is easy to understand why. Kids can be super judgmental and will say very mean things to try to make themselves seem better and cooler while making the other kid feel stupid and alone. We live in a cruel world. That is why leaders are extremely important. Whether its drugs, cheating on a test, not being nice to others, or something else that is wrong, we need to do what is right. Do not be pressured by what people will think. In the end, the leaders will win. It is not an easy thing to do, but it is always best. All day, every day, in everything that happens.

Leaders act every day. Leaders are everyday people. They do what needs to be done on that day, and what needs to be done today. So I encourage you, be a leader today. Stand up. Use your voice. It will be heard. Lead.