

Honorable Mention  
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### The Real Leader

“Go be a leader today.” These words left my dad’s mouth everyday as I climbed out of the car for school. We’d lock eyes, as I was exiting, the intensity of his gaze sent me the message that he expected the best from me and nothing else. Leadership was the role that my dad believed I was born to fill, no matter if I liked it or not. The responsibility was placed upon my shoulders in fifth grade by my dad’s demands to guide others in the right direction and place the wellbeing of my peers above my own. The challenge of positive leadership was much more arduous than the request to eat my vegetables or drink my milk, for which the average preadolescent child received from their parents. However, in the eyes of my dad, I was not the average preadolescent child, to him I was a leader.

Although dad spoke many words to personify the term ‘leadership,’ his own actions brought the word itself to life. Without knowing, my dad led to inspire his three children through his selflessness, respect and affection shown towards others. Before I was born, he had a dream to own and manage a business, but realized that it was not possible with the family that he and my mom would be starting very soon. Over the course of six years, three children entered the picture. My dad worked long hours in the office to support our family, despite the fact he wasn’t able to have his “dream” job. Unfortunately after many years of work, my father was fired and left to support my family and I without a job. During his time of unemployment, my dad persevered through the challenging times and made countless sacrifices to ensure the happiness and stability of our family. My dad’s hard work was rewarded with the purchase of his new business and fulfillment of his lifelong dream. Leadership is not always the kid on the playground sticking up to the bully or the president leading his country. In my dad’s circumstance, leadership came from within his heart to put his family above himself.

In my sixteen years of life, my dad has continuously personified the true meaning of leadership. He never aimed to be a leader himself, but his selfless actions and care for others formed him to be a leader. Eventually it wasn’t leadership, it was servant leadership he was called to. My dad serves others through his business, helping make a positive difference in the lives of those who work with him and for him. He not only serves others at his workplace, but everywhere he goes. Whether he is volunteering at God’s Kitchen or shopping at the grocery store, my dad puts the needs of others before himself.

I miss the days of riding to school with my dad. The drive to school is no longer filled with the encouraging words to “go be a leader today,” but rather voices rambling on and on. Without my dad, the drive to become a better person and, especially a leader, would not have been present. Each day is a new chance to make my dad proud of me because I chose to serve others. No amount of words could express the true meaning of “leadership” as accurately as my dad has in his life.