

NEED SOMETHING DONE? ASK A BUSY MAN

“Champions are a rare breed. They trust in themselves while others look for answers. They step forward while others pray for a volunteer. They see beyond the demands on their time and look toward the greater good born of their leadership.” --Anonymous

A long time ago, in a YMCA Camp that is now gone and covered with new homes, a young kindergarten boy, on his first Spring Campout, in his first year of Indian Guides asked his dad, “Why don’t you be the new tribal chief? That would be cool!” My son was pleading with me to take on the mantle of the tribal chief.

The vacancy occurred when our long-time tribal leader, an original founder of the Arapaho Guides Tribe, was stepping down after years of cheerful service. Although he was ready to pass the torch, there was no dad willing to receive the flame. There was no rush of dads discussing who should be the next chief. Not one candidate stepped forward. Although, every boy pleaded with their respective fathers, “Come on, dad! Be the new chief!”

My son’s sales pitch continued, “Dad, you’d be a great chief!” His plea was nearly irresistible. Regardless, I was then, as now, a busy man. And I told him so. I was simply too busy. I made sure my son John understood that surely there was another dad, with more experience, and a less demanding job, than mine as a trial lawyer, that would step forward and be tribal chief. I hoped for another volunteer. But my son moved into his best advocacy, “Dad you always tell me to be my own hero; to be my own man, to seize the moment, to seize each day.” I was shaking my head up and down trying to get a word in edgewise. “Dad, you told me that if something important needs to be done, to do it yourself!”

Good Lord! He was only six years old? When in the blazes did he start listening so closely? It’s not easy raising a kid smarter than you. And here I was cornered by my own words, pin downed under the ack-ack fire of my own teachings, trapped by my philosophies espoused through the mind and mouth of a precocious, overly-attentive six year old. What was I to do? I didn’t have time to be chief.

With my son imploring me to volunteer, my mind began spinning like a present day Google search. The tribal chief was the champion of his tribe, moving the tribe forward, getting people to campouts, promoting meetings and activities. But I was so very busy as the champion of other people’s causes in court rooms throughout northern Illinois. Where would I find the time? I rarely had a moment to relax, let alone attend campouts, or be in charge of our fledgling little tribe. My wife and I were popping out kids like a vending machine. We lived in an old house under constant renovation and my wife, a busy commodities executive, was pregnant again. How do I make more time for this little boy at my side, to lead our tribe for him and his sibling already chomping at the bit to be part of the Arapaho? It seemed like no one in the world worked more hours than I. A wave of self-pity started to pull me under when a little hand slipped into mine, “What do you say, Chief?” my son asked.

It was a beautiful spring evening. Dads and kids were all outside enjoying ideal weather. There was a game of touch football, between dads and lads, on the big lawn sloping towards the calm lake. We were all waiting for the sun to set and darkness to cover the camp so we could experience the torch-lit Spring Passage Ceremony. It was a timeless moment in a busy weekend. I was standing on a large flat rock over looking the lake, bare-chested with a head dress and vest, waiting to be in my first ceremony with my little son at my side, my arm around his shoulder. We watched the sun setting over the lake quickly disappearing into the trees on the far shore. “Dad, if you were chief,” my son persisted, “everyone would have lots of fun. You think of fun stuff all the time!” Heaven help me! Would this kid grow up to be a politician, or worse yet, a lawyer?

“Son,” I replied. “I love you with all my heart, buddy. But to be chief of this tribe?” Words escaped me, I groaned some nonsense then said, “Where would I find the time?”

I stopped talking immediately. I had said exactly the wrong thing. There was a very long pause and I knew I was a dead duck; that in a few heart beats, I would be the new tribal chief. There was a tipping point on its way straight from the mind of my lactose-intolerant, overly-verbal, busy-minded little boy. The silence was nearly unbearable. Maybe, if I talked no further, neither would my son. But like a man facing a firing squad, I knew the bullet was coming. It would be a matter of seconds. I breathed my last breathe slowly. “Dad?” Here it comes . . . READY! “You know what Dad?” AIM! “You always told me, Dad.” This was it! FIRE! “That if something was important,” my son said quoting me, “a person can find the time to do it.”

BULLSEYE! He got me. Surely God was punishing me for all the litigious misery I caused the world. Yes! God must have plopped this little boy upon me, now an advocate for all the children of his Tribe and the Federation. He had absorbed everything I ever said. I felt nauseous and wondered where I would find the time to be Tribal Chief. But the boy was correct.

“Son, you’re right. I’ll be your new chief.” He squeezed me with as big a hug as his little arms could muster.

Yes, I found the time to be a Tribal Chief and a Nation Chief. Just as you will too. There is a synergy that expands your time and abilities when you commit to something greater than yourself. The more I volunteered for other roles in the Federation, the energy and momentum in my life and work supported the vitality of being a chief; and the joy of leadership spilled into the rest of my life. When a day became routine, a call from a fellow chief would spark energy and re-ignite the day. The reason is this: life is not a straight line; it’s spherical. Effort, energies and talent invested in one portion of life, will renew and enrich other areas of life. No, it’s not mystical. It’s simple: you get from life what you put into it.

As a Chief, my sons, and my daughter that followed, were all proud of me and excited to say their dad was a chief. And they were happy to go to work with me on campouts and events. Yea! That’s one reason kids love it when their dad is a Tribal Chief or a Nation Chief. They can go to work with dad!

As a small boy I remember the ritual of Dad going off to work every day. Mom would line up my sisters and me at the back door. Sleepy and in pajamas, we’d say good bye to Dad heading to work in his white shirt and tie. We’d hug and kiss goodbye, then run like bandits through the length of the house to the front windows and waive goodbye, again, as Dad swung his big Buick out of the driveway and down the street. I always wondered where it was he went? I knew it was “work,” but what was that, and why can’t we do it together? I’m sure my own children wondered the same thing when they were young and I left daily, dressed in a dark suit, off to do battle, briefcase and car keys in hand. I’m sure they wondered why can’t I go to work with dad?

But as the child of a Nation Chief or a Tribal Chief every kid knows exactly what dads does. And the child gets to help the dad. Being a chief makes dad a hero, a champion of his children’s Guide, Princess and Trailblazers Program. Being a chief gives dad an identity that kids can get their arms around. When my youngest son just started Guides, his teacher asked what his father did for a living. He told her that I was an Indian Chief. It’s what he understood completely and thoroughly. That’s an identity connection if ever there was one because I championed his love for Indian Guides.

Now, at Christmastime, in our privileged demographic, we shower our kids with a bountiful day of toys, games and electronics. Who doesn’t love a great harvest on Christmas morning? It’s fun! But the single greatest gift you can give to your children ----- here it comes; a cliché worth repeating -- brace yourselves . . . The single greatest gift you can give to your kids is the gift of yourself and your time.

Be their champion. Champion their interests. Champion the programs in which they participate. Champion the things they love and you’ll enjoy every minute. It should be easy to champion our programs, because you love your kids, and you love to spend time with them. And you have plenty of fine examples. We are lucky to be surrounded by some of the finest men I’ve ever know: our Nation Chiefs, role models and champions all.

Invest of yourself into this great program. The more you give of yourself, the more joy you will receive. Yes, I know we are all busy, but we are never too busy to be a champion to our own children. And the call to serve will come. It may come from your Tribal Chief, or your Nation Chief, or maybe, directly from the Federation Chief. Most likely, the call to serve will come from your own child. Answer the call, heart and soul. No need to wait. This is your only life. Seize the moment and be a champion.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and yours.

Peace,
John C. Lorenzen, Federation Sachem Keokuk