

NOT ON MY WATCH!

By Brett J. Porter

The key to our success was to love the young men while we served them.

I was close to a family who had a son in Young Men. During an activity while he was a deacon, a leader got after him and embarrassed him in front of his peers. He subsequently felt further discredited, quit attending activities, and sought friends outside his ward.

That experience had a tremendous impact on me. I determined that something like that would not happen on my watch if I were called to work with young men. Two years later I was called to work with the deacons.

Within a few months I found myself dealing with a young man who was constantly pushing the boundaries in his behavior.

“This is the line,” I finally said regarding his actions. “Do not cross it.”

He crossed it, we had a bit of a verbal altercation, and he left.

Later, I had a chat with him to resolve our differences. I said, “David, I love you and you’re a good young man, but I don’t love some of the things you do. The other young men look to you as a leader, and if they see you getting away with something improper, they may try it as well.”

We patched things up, he felt accepted, and we leaders helped temper some of his personal challenges. When he turned 14, he asked me to ordain him a teacher. Today, years later, he gives me a big bear hug whenever he sees me, and he talks with admiration about his time in Young Men.

When we love the young men and enjoy being with them, they know it. That’s why my counselors

and I took a genuine interest in our young men. We never did an activity just because it was in the book; we did it because we knew the young men would learn a skill, grow, and have fun.

On one occasion, we had a young man whose parents were not interested in our program.

“That’s OK,” I told them, “but do you mind if your son still comes, learns, and has some fun?”

We included him in our program, and before long his parents said OK to his full involvement. They saw that their boy was learning and having fun. Later he served a full-time mission. His younger brother blossomed as well and also served a mission.

We saw a correlation between leaders taking an interest in a young man and that young man learning, growing, and eventually serving a mission. It’s satisfying to watch young men grow, and it’s enjoyable to learn with them. The key to our success was to love them while we served them. ■

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