



"I Ain't Your Momma."

Insights

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I thoroughly enjoyed my seven years as a Scoutmaster in an inner city housing project. The boys were poor and few of them had a dad at home, but they were good kids. Given decent examples, assistance, and a bit of luck, they could escape what had become a multigenerational cycle of poverty. However, despite being poor, these boys had been raised by their moms as little princes with no requirements placed on them. In other words, they were pretty much the same as overly entitled kids.

Our Senior Scoutmaster and Fulton County Superior Court Chief Judge Jack Langford blended strong expectations, endless patience, and a no nonsense approach. When one teen came up to him on a camp out with a can in one hand and an opener in the other, Jack replied, "I ain't your momma; open it yourself." Many of these now-adults still send Father's Day cards to Jack every year. Some of them are successful executives or distinguished military officers. And they started as kids in a project. Support your local BSA!

I recently thought about the admonition "I ain't your momma" as I pondered well-meaning companies who spend money to retain solid safety professionals to run "their safety programs, but still experience multiple OSHA citations or a serious injury. An experienced safety consultant can draw on their varied experiences to jump your safety efforts to the next level, but they are not a substitute for management and employer engagement. One cannot contract out or rely on a third party to continuously discover and address hazards.

Supervisors must be regularly trained and graded in part on objective safety achievements. I don't mean simply looking at recordable injuries. That's focusing on lagging indicators. Focus on the percentage of employees trained, number of regular "safety observations," discipline, safety meetings held, near-misses investigated, etc. As to employees, train them and then use hourly employees to prepare Job Safety Analysis, ergonomic analysis, or regular walk-around inspections.

Even in big companies, there is too much reliance on annual insurer audits or inspections by consultants. Even the best auditor cannot know your site as well as your own people. Use consultants' expertise expertise, but don't stop there.

HR and Other Consultants

And what about other “consultants?” You should avail yourself of proven strategy, HR, Industrial Psychology, and Union-Free Consultants, but they are not the equivalent of a tetanus shot inoculating you against infection. Learn from the experts. An outside eye is invaluable! But don’t assume that even the best consultants are a substitute for investing management time and commitment.

Quotations and Articles on Jack Langford ... worth the read!

Jack’s mission was to bring Scouting to the young boys of Techwood Homes, the public housing neighborhood nearby, and expose disadvantaged youth to the possibilities of Scouting.

Jack was once quoted, “In the five years I served as the judge of the juvenile court in Atlanta, I saw how difficult it is to rehabilitate people who’ve started down the wrong path in life. I decided to devote my energies to keeping young people on the right track.” The opportunity to address these youth in the context of Scouting seemed like the perfect challenge and a perfect fit.

From its inception, Troop 42 provided numerous youngsters the opportunity to work, play, and learn alongside boys from radically different, social, racial and economic backgrounds. From 1977 through 1994 (when Techwood homes was razed for the Centennial Community), the troop was roughly 50% boys from the Techwood housing project and 50% from the church and more affluent backgrounds. For many boys, participation in troop activities was their first step at independence.

Jack has always believed Scouting is the organization that best serves boys in their early adolescent years. “Today’s world offers so few opportunities for boys to succeed in acceptable situations,” he says. “In the Boy Scouts they can excel and be recognized within their own range of abilities. If we can get a boy addicted to success at an early age, it’s a massive step toward producing a constructive member of society.”

In a response to what he viewed as his primary successes with the troop, Judge declined to assess his decade plus tenure as Scoutmaster of Troop 42 in black and white terms. He chose to define the experience by the education that each one of the boys received. In living, playing, learning and laughing together, any one of the boys could say that another boy was “not much different from how I am”.

At a recent dinner honoring the Judge’s achievements in Scouting, former Troop 42 Scout Wade Hooper noted, “Perhaps his most admirable quality is the manner in which he lives his life as the manifestation of his character – in short, Scouting is a part of his very being.” According to Wade, “Judge Langford’s example – consistency, dedication, attention to detail, reprimand in private, praise in public, use of the chain of command, team work, toughness, compassion, and understanding were all values that were demonstrated and taught at every meeting and every camp-out.”

Former Troop 42 Boy Scout Michael Mallory said of Jack, “I don’t think I ever met anyone who was so utterly without prejudice”. As a judge, Jack felt it a part of his responsibility to help make his courtroom more representative of the world outside the courthouse. To this end, Jack attempted.

wherever appropriate, to integrate his courtroom. One long time courthouse worker recalled that Jack was the first person who ever asked for a black deputy or calendar clerk to be assigned to his courtroom. Fittingly, Jack's successor on the court was an African-American female, a milestone for the court.

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