

January 2011 – “Hey, Olson, your dad’s here.”

Invariably, as we did our pregame shoot-around, one of my teammates would take note that my dad was in the stands. And invariably, I would brush off the update as if it were no big deal.

But it was a big deal.

While I telegraphed little interest on the outside, on the inside, I loved it.

For four years, my dad never missed one of my high school basketball games. Regardless of the demands of running a business, he logged more than a few miles on the family station wagon in traveling to some of the most obscure (and musty) gyms in Los Angeles County. There were many occasions when he was the only parent seated in the bleachers. (Note to file: back in the day, the Inglewood Sentinels did not typically command a faithful following!).

In short, my dad knew what it meant to show up.

As I recount those high school years, I find myself asking, “What does it mean as a leader, to ‘show up’? What does it mean to be there for those who look to you for leadership?”

“Showing up” comes in all shapes and sizes. For a moment, let me give center stage to a handful of them.

By studying the times when leaders performed at their personal best, we were able to identify five practices common to most extraordinary leadership achievements. When leaders do their best, they challenge, inspire, enable, model, and encourage.

–James Kouzes and Barry Posner

You show up for others when you demonstrate interest in their personal lives. You ask about their families. You become a student of their life story. You know and track their dreams.

You show up for others when you communicate your belief in them—that you are in their corner, that you see their upside. You are the first one to remind them that even after fouling out of the game today, there is another game tomorrow—a new opportunity to take your best shot.

You show up for others when you open the ledger of your life, sharing your journey, recounting your victories and defeats, and providing access to your network of resources.

You offer an open ticket.

But perhaps more than anything, you show up for others when you vouch for them, when you stand up to attest to others for who they are.

Flipping through the pages of the New Testament, there is a compelling story of how Barnabas showed up for Saul (soon to be Paul) and, without a flinch, vouched for him and co-signed for his credibility.

Back in Jerusalem he [Saul] tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him. They didn't trust him one bit. Then Barnabas took him under his wing. He introduced him to the apostles and stood up for him, told them how Saul had seen and spoken to the Master on the Damascus Road and how in Damascus itself he had laid his life on the line with his bold preaching in Jesus' name.

THAT is a powerful story—a story with implications that continue to echo down the hallways of human history.

And a reminder that “showing up” IS a big deal.

Lord, thank You for those who have showed up in my life, who have been used by You to move me to the next level of life and leadership. May I faithfully seek to do the same in the lives of those You place in my circle of influence.