



# SAINT THOMAS ACADEMY

WANT YOUR SON TO BECOME A LEADER?

## HERE'S HOW!

*Nobody can be an alpha all the time. But everyone can be a leader at some time. That means your son has the capacity for leadership, even if he does not start out as the biggest, strongest, fastest, most athletic, smartest, or most charismatic. "Some people ask if you're born with leadership or if it's learned," says noted leadership expert Col. Neil Hetherington, U.S. Army (ret.). "Becoming a leader takes a little bit of both. And, it can never be perfected. Every single day I still learn something new about leadership."*

*Different situations call for different forms of leadership that rely on various skill sets, mentalities, backgrounds and experiences. Through that lens, here are five steps you and your son can take toward leadership, as shared by Col. Hetherington, now the Commandant of Cadets at Saint Thomas Academy (Mendota Heights, Minn.), an all-male, Catholic, military leadership school for grades 6-12.*

### START BY UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is all about people. If you do a Google search on "leadership" you'll get nearly 10 billion results. It's a broad, deep topic. I teach military leadership to our seniors at Saint Thomas Academy. As a visual reminder for parents attending back-to-school night, I put out in my classroom about 40 books on leadership to demonstrate the breadth and depth of ideas about leadership. But it all boils down to how you build relationships with people.

The Army definition we use in class is "the process of influencing groups of people to achieve a mission by providing them with the purpose, motivation, and direction needed to accomplish that mission."

### EMBRACE A PERSONAL JOURNEY INTO LEADERSHIP

When I was in college ROTC at the State University of New York at Fredonia, I was introverted, a shy kid, not a leader. I realized I needed to get comfortable in my own skin and lead myself first in order to become confident in leading others. You have to go through trial and error. Leadership is a personal journey into who you are and how you interact with others.

At Saint Thomas Academy, you hear about that in the Cadets' senior speeches. Every Cadet is required to give a speech during the course of their senior year. What these boys – now young men of character – are sharing is a validation of our mission. They talk frequently about the battles of life that they face and how they overcome them.

### READ

**Col. Hetherington's recommended books on leadership include:**

- "Leadership Wisdom: Lessons from Poetry, Prose and Curious Verse" (edited by Bob Vanourek)
- John C. Maxwell's "The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership"
- "Good to Great" by Jim Collins
- Brene Brown's writing on vulnerability.





### SEEK INSPIRATION FROM FAMOUS LEADERS

One of the most inspiring things I have learned about leadership comes from Teddy Roosevelt's "Man in the Arena" speech: "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

That gets down to the nuts and bolts of leadership. The man in the arena is the guy who's going for it and is not afraid. It ties in with Brene Brown's ideas about vulnerability and leadership. As an effective leader you definitely have to make yourself vulnerable, and the man in the arena is vulnerable. I've been the man in the arena a lot of times in my career, and you take a lot of criticism. When you're leading, people are quick to point out all the things that could go wrong, but you have to go ahead with your plan.

### FORM A PARENT-CHILD-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP FOCUSED ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

For parents who send their sons to Saint Thomas Academy, one of the most important things they can do to help their sons become leaders is to trust that our faculty is eminently qualified to do what we do.

In addition to classroom instruction in leadership, we spend a lot of time focusing on leadership in day-to-day life. We teach freshmen the foundations of leadership. With sophomores we focus on citizenship. In their junior year, we spend more time on theory and problem-solving. As seniors, they lead the cadet corps chain of command and get a taste of what it means to be responsible for the others in your squad.

Our values – faith, integrity, respect, and excellence – surround everything they do here. They are reminded of that 24/7 and practice it in school, at home, and in their churches. They get it through sports and other extra-curriculars. We had a football game recently against a much larger school with much larger players, and we won 44-0. I asked one of our players for the down-and-dirty of what made the difference in that game, and he said it was the discipline and respect for each other that they learn every day.

The boys will tell you it's a brotherhood here, and that comes from the math teacher, the science teacher, who is also the cross-country coach, the priest, the theology teacher, English, social studies, chemistry...they're all involved in our mission. It all adds up to a sort of acronym, LDRSHIP: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.

As much as we do on campus, it's still important for parents to add to those efforts. Parents can simply continue to support their sons in whatever way works for them. Ask questions about his day, what he's learning. Be patient and understanding of these young men of character, because they have a lot on their plates. Unconditionally support them even if they sometimes do not have much to say at the dinner table.