

"Indicate a person connected to labor that has had a significant influence on you and describe that influence."

By Sean Daly

The blistering late afternoon sun beats down on my bare shoulders. Irritating mosquitoes buzz in circles around my sweaty face, seeming to wait until I become too lazy to swat them away. I have not eaten in nearly two hours, which in the context of my sixteen-year-old boy appetite means that I am absolutely famished. Then, I hear the sagacious words of my father echoing: "Son, there's only two ways to do a job. There's a right way and a wrong way." So, after nearly eight hours of tedious, backbreaking landscaping in the dead heat of July, I do not call it a day. Instead, I continue to toil away, just as my father would.

Like many other young boys, I wanted to be just like my dad while I was growing up. To me, Dad was the invincible hero who was fazed by nothing and respected by all. I tried to walk the way he walked and to talk the way he talked. Even as I now prepare to leave home for the first time, I understand that I want to become more and more like him each day. My dad has the perfect outlook on life. He has clearly defined goals, and his determination to reach those goals is unwavering. He is quite simply the hardest working person I know. However, my dad is also mellow enough to "roll with the punches" and take each day as it comes. Trust me; an easygoing attitude is invaluable when your mother and teenage sister are about as type A as one can be.

Not only is my dad reliable and laid-back but he is also exceptionally friendly. Perhaps, that is a product of the way he grew up in the Dorchester section of Boston, an Irish-Catholic enclave where everybody knew everybody. My dad has told me countless stories of the fond memories he has of his childhood in the city. However, for each cherished reminiscence, there is a tragic tale of a friend who got caught up with the wrong crowd, got hooked on drugs, or was dragged down by other temptations of urban life. My dad has been able to rise above all the challenges that he has faced, to take the right path when the wrong path seemed so easy to travel, and I am eternally grateful that he has taught me to do the same.

The influence my dad has had on me lies not only in the traits that he has passed down to me, but also in the countless lessons he has taught me over the years. If anyone understands the value of an honest day's work, it is my dad. At 56 years old, he still rises at three o'clock each morning to prepare for the difficult day that lies ahead. For over thirty years, he has been a construction worker, performing difficult manual labor every day with the goal of providing a comfortable life for my sister and me. He has worked on the highest floors of thirty story buildings, exposed to the elements in frigid winter snowstorms. He has dug foundation trenches in sweltering summer heat, with no shade to provide him with any form of relief. In addition, he has sacrificed his Friday and Saturday nights for more than fifteen years working at a parking lot in a rough section of downtown Boston with the hope of one day saving enough money for his children to go to college.

My dad is "man tough," the epitome of strength and toughness, but he does not intimidate anyone. He is a protector who has constantly expressed the idea that being a real man does not lie in showing everyone how tough one is by bullying and manipulating. Instead, he has taught me to afford all people the respect they deserve, no matter who they are or where they come from. However, he has also made it clear to me that, if something is wrong, it is always my responsibility to stand up for what is right.

As I move into adulthood, I appreciate more and more the sacrifices Dad has made. My dad values respect, trust, responsibility, a strong work ethic, and above all else, a sense of honor. As I become a man, I now recognize the true importance of these morals that he has instilled in me. Although I have never taken the time to tell my dad how genuinely thankful I am for everything he has done for me, I will carry the lessons that he has taught me and the memories that we have shared for the rest of my life. So thanks, Dad, for everything.