

## In Service of Others

It is a call that echoes throughout every hall across the Quad, “Sir, Excellence, Integrity, Leadership, Loyalty, Respect, Selfless Service, sir!” It is these words spoken through a freshman cadet’s lips that represent the honorable legacy of Texas A&M, a hard-earned legacy forged in the blood, sweat, and tears of the nation’s finest sons and daughters. It is a challenge presented before every Aggie to do right by our predecessors who have embodied these Core Values everywhere from Pointe Du Hoc to the Governor’s mansion. It is not an easy code to live by, it is challenging by design, for it is falling short that we learn how to stride further, it is in failing that we learn how to succeed. By holding ourselves to our Core Values, Aggies have excelled in every field imaginable. We prove the worth of the “other education,” we pride ourselves on so much. At the heart of the matter is not an arrogant superiority, rather an ardent humility. A Good Ag is, above all, a servant. He gives of himself to raise up others, he lays down his life for his friends. This Selfless Service is the font from which springs the other five Core Values. It is an altruistic drive that pushes the Good Ag to respect others, to stay loyal to their buddies, and to be honest at all times. In raising up his fellow man, he finds satisfaction and peace. It is ultimately a simple desire that starts in little ways and with careful cultivation can grow into a force strong enough to build nations.

A&M has always understood that Selfless Service begins by being faithful in small matters. From the moment I began my training as a young cadet, it was instilled in me that I would either succeed or fail as a unit with my buddy class. It compelled my buddies and I to work together and contribute our unique talents to the cause of raising us all up together. No fish got left behind. How true this simple lesson holds in the real world. What begins as a game of making beds and doing push-ups culminates in the key to personal and professional success. So many in this world lie and cheat to achieve short term gain, but Aggies truly understand that a rising tide lifts all ships. It is a maxim I strive to live by every day in my present leadership roles and beyond.

While there exist many Traditions and organizations on campus for Aggies to refine their sense of Selfless Service, there is no Tradition that thrust Aggies into the role of service quite as much as Aggie Bonfire. Anyone who has ever killed those trees and stacked those logs can attest to the transformative and fulfilling work it performs. Bonfire is so much more than a pile of sticks, it’s a microcosm of what it means to be an Aggie. Every moment of the Bonfire experience is about serving your fellow Aggies. You wake up early, why? Because your buddies need help. You clear brush even though its hot and you’re tired, why? Because your buddy needs to get to that tree. You place a massive tree upon your shoulders and carry it a distance that’s inevitably a lot longer than it seems, and why? Because if you didn’t do it, everyone you care about on that log would suffer just a little bit more.

I was honored this past year to hold a leadership position in the Corps Bonfire Crew. There I was tested like I had never been before. Cut season was a phenomenal experience and

drove me to truly live out the value of Selfless Service. As a leader, you cannot take a break in the woods. You are constantly looking out for the safety and well-being of cadets in addition to assuring they're getting the most out of their Bonfire experience. I did this willingly because I cared about my people on a personal level. Their successes were my successes and their failures, my failures. It was taxing work and come the conclusion of cut season, I believed I knew all there was to know about servant leadership. I was deeply mistaken. With the arrival of stack season my workload increased immensely. No longer was it just cut on the weekends, now I was working weeknights, sometimes into two in the morning. After every stack shift, I was still required to get up and workout with my outfit at 0530. It was a grueling time; every day was long and the nights even longer. Despite this, I suffered gladly. In the midst of all my weariness, there was pride deep in my heart, because I knew I was not struggling in vain. I was doing this for my people, for those it was my responsibility to serve. Many cadets who wanted to help could not give their fullest during stack season because of academic or Corps obligations. As a servant leader, it fell upon me to pick up that slack. When they left early, I worked late. If they couldn't carry a weight, my shoulders carried it for them. It was deeply uncomfortable and at times painful work, but I gladly sacrificed for my people, our legacy, and love of this university.

This is where Aggies learn to rise to the occasion. In the little things. In the Traditions. In the shared goals. We never built Bonfire for tu. We built it because it taught us something about ourselves and about others, about how to be good leaders, good followers, and above all good people. Just because from the inside looking out you can't explain it, doesn't mean it's not worth it. By all utilitarian accounts, it does not make sense to build a Bonfire, it does not make sense to hold Muster, and it definitely does not make sense to go to Midnight Yell. But Aggies have always seen past that materialistic lie, we've always known the value of spiritual goods. We understand that a good cause is still worthy, even if it comes at a personal cost. The great paradox of Selfless Service is that the more we give of ourselves to help others, the more we receive in return. While A&M is an outstanding university and I am immensely grateful for my education, out of everything I ever needed to know, and I mean the things I *really* needed to know, I did not learn in a classroom. I learned these Core Values on the wall, on my face, and with an axe in my hand. I learned alongside my buddies what it means to be a good man, what it means to be a servant leader, and what it means to be an Aggie.

This is the journey every Aggie is dared to undertake, to learn, to grow, and to love. As I look out at the road ahead of me, I can say with confidence that Texas A&M has prepared me for the challenges ahead. This school and its' Core Values have instilled in me something even greater than an education; it has given me the spiritual and mental edification necessary to take on the challenges of this modern world. As so many young men and women enter the workforce of today, they are unsure of their beliefs and most certainly unprepared to defend them. I and countless other young Aggies can march ahead knowing that our values, our character, and our commitment to serving our fellow man has been tried and found sufficient. For this and so much more, I will forever be grateful to Texas A&M and her Core Values.