

The Vision Behind the FCA Toolbox

- a letter from John Engstrom -

Dear friend,

The vision behind the toolbox was inspired by my reading of the book Raising a Modern Day Knight by Robert Lewis. The premise of the book is that, rites of passage, when coupled with ceremony and gifts, can act as guide posts on a boy's journey into manhood. My goal being to guide my own boys into being authentic men.

In his book, Lewis references the medieval time period. In this past culture, young boys admired the heroes of their day, the knights. Each squire had to go through a regimented training and development process full of service, grunt work, and other rites of passage until their day would arrive -- a well-deserved and hard earned day of celebration and ceremony where he himself would be knighted! There was no question he had reached the status of knight. There was no doubt he had become a man.

When does a boy become a man in our current culture? Is it when he drinks his first beer? When he has sex for the first time? Is it when he graduates from high school? Is it when he has a child or when he turns 18, 21, or 30 years of age? Our culture provides no sufficient answers. Our boys need help getting this pivotal question answered!

Lewis writes that we need to find the rites of passage in our culture and mark them with ceremony, celebration, and gifts to help our boys recognize that they are in fact progressing down the path of masculinity. Then, one day, with great rejoicing, other men, namely the father, need to bestow on this boy the right and rank of being a man!

The details in the book are left for a dad to choose how to implement these ceremonies and at what stages in life. It was in this process of thinking about what I wanted to do with my two boys that started me on the journey of finding the FCA Toolbox.

The book emphasizes the importance of marking each rite of passage with a ceremony and a gift. I began scouring the internet for ideas of gifts that other fathers had used with their sons. I came across the idea of a toolbox. It resonated with me instantly. I saw the symbolism of the toolbox so richly! I vividly remember being a young boy watching my father work around the house with his tools. Often, I would be scolded for using those tools and not returning them to their proper place. They were distinctly my father's tools! Then, I can remember going off to college, my father's tools were no longer accessible to me. I realized I would need my own set of tools. At this stage in life I should not rely on my father to come and bring his tools or to do for me the things that I knew I should do for myself. So I began to piece together my own set beginning with a very humble toolbox. After these thoughts, I recognized the opportunity for me to meet this practical need I know my sons will have in the future. While also, significantly marking the road that they are traveling, the road to independence and authentic manhood.

I really wanted to stew on this idea for a while and flesh it out well, in order to go through it with my boys. When, one morning I was having breakfast with John Sayger, a local youth pastor and great friend. We were meeting to plan for a semester of devotions for a local football team where we serve as character coaches. He remarked using more visual aids as symbols to bring to life the topic at hand. I mentioned the idea of a toolbox with tools inside and how we could craft a chapel talk around each tool. He almost jumped out of the chair! It also resonated with him instantly. It was settled then, the toolbox it would be, that would be our theme of the year. I was excited! There would be one toolbox, we would hold it up for all to see and share the lesson for the week. John's vision was bigger. He said, "No John...every one of these players needs a toolbox." My mind stammered. He said, "We need 100 toolboxes." It took me a moment to process, but I knew that if the LORD was in this, the money and resources would come.

A long story shorter, this vision has continued to resonate with every person with whom we have shared. Not only has it resonated but it has grown! The first person we sat down with to ask for money to sponsor tools asked, "Why are you just doing the one team?" He immediately saw a bigger vision. Another asked if anyone at the state level of FCA knew about this idea? When we went into our locally owned hardware store and told them what we were doing she said, "I will pay for the hammers and duct tape. And any tool that I can order you can have at my cost." She instantly wanted to be involved! She then raised the bar again when she asked, "You are putting theme Bible verses with every chapel talk, right? There are a few of the tools where I can get the manufacturer to engrave that verse on the tool!" The last example is from the director for FCA in our state he said, "This toolbox is Mississippi." Meaning that it represents the hard working blue collar ethic of many of the people in our state. I take that a step further and say "This toolbox is America!" The hard work, ingenuity, and self-sacrifice of its people is what has built this country into the greatest nation on Earth.

In a very short amount of time John Sayger and I realized we were sitting on an idea that was highly combustible!

In our first year to implement this project we started with five varsity men's teams and one ladies team. These were spread across three different school campuses and our presenting team was comprised of four character coaches. We were, relatively easily, able to purchase or have donated an estimated \$12,000 worth of tools, comprised of 355 units of each tool.

The highest part of our vision is that you would consider joining in this journey with us and multiply this project to a team near you. Perhaps you know of a coach that would be interested in having this provided for his players? This could be a foot in the door project that the LORD uses to plant and grow character coaches on teams all across the U.S. and the world! Perhaps you know local businesses, churches, or other supporters who would purchase tools for local athletes, both boys and girls, to help mark their journey from boys to men and girls to women.

To clarify, the vision of this project is not to go around giving out tools to teams, but that these tools would be a physical and practical representation of the spiritual principles that are taught! Each tool being a reminder of the lesson. Each lesson working in the context of all the others, ultimately to build men and women of true character.

I believe if multiplied this project will impact the crime rate. I believe this will impact teen pregnancy. I believe this will inspire many young people to one day be engaged fathers and mothers to their children. I believe that young men and young women will be impacted for eternity as they commit to being Bible believing, followers, and disciples of Jesus Christ!

This website has been designed to pass this vision forward and to make these resources available for anyone interested. May the LORD richly bless your journey in "Building Men and Women of Character."

Love from,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Engstrom', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

John Engstrom
FCA Northwest Mississippi