



Dear _____:

Back in 1977, I got a letter from The President of the United States, congratulating me on becoming an Eagle Scout. The letter was printed on thick, creamy paper with my name typed in at the top, and Gerald Ford's signature at the bottom - right next to the presidential seal. Very impressive. However, as I studied the president's signature, and compared it with those on the bottom of identical letters he had sent to other Eagle Scouts in other troops, I came to the conclusion that I was not holding a personal letter from The President of the United States; I was holding a Form Letter.

Don't get me wrong, _____, it was a nice gesture, and I appreciated the sentiment. But I decided then and there, that if I ever found myself in the position of sending out thousands of letters to Eagle Scouts everywhere, I wouldn't try to fool the recipient into thinking they had received something uniquely personal. After all, _____, a Scout is Trustworthy, whether he goes on to become the President of the United States or the host of a show on cable television. Which is why I want to be absolutely clear about the nature of this letter. While I did in fact write every word, I did not write it specifically for *you*.

The truth is, _____, it was _____ who wrote your name in the blanks, and it is _____ who is deeply proud of what you've accomplished on this day. As they should be. The Eagle Award is still a big deal, and congratulations are most definitely in order. However, the only message I can offer a young man I've never actually met, is the same advice I received from my dad, moments after I received this same honor — "don't get cocky."

Contrary to what many have told you, _____, this award will NOT change the way people look at you. I'm sorry, but it's true. We now live in a world where everyone seems to get some sort of a trophy, and the majority of Americans simply have no idea how difficult or special your accomplishment truly is. But that's not a fact worth bemoaning. Because the truth is, The Eagle Award comes with no magic power or influence. It's simply a recognition of what you've accomplished *so far*. And while it's true that many Eagle Scouts have gone on to do great things in life, it's also true that many others have not.

I know a guy who got his Eagle a couple years before me. His chest literally puffed up and never returned to its normal size. His dad got him into a decent school, and when he finally graduated, he showed off his diploma like it was his first merit badge. Today, he is a miserable, pompous, pain in the butt with no friends, two ex-wives, and a job he hates. He still has a collegiate football trophy on his mantle, next to his diploma, and an identical copy of that same form letter from Gerald Ford, congratulating him for something he did 35 years ago.

Do me a favor, _____. Don't be that guy. Don't wait for the world to acknowledge your accomplishments. When you're finished with Scouting, donate your uniform to The Salvation Army. In a few years, it's not gonna fit anyway. Fold up your sash and stow it away somewhere private, along with all the other tokens of what you've done so far. Then, roll up your sleeves, get out in the world, and put what you've learned to use.

Live the Scout Law. Remember the Scout Oath. And remember, a Scout is Clean but not afraid to get dirty.

Mike Rowe

P.S. The signature, though photocopied, is really mine.