

When my sister Tara was eleven and I was thirteen, we often fought. We are best friends now and I couldn't live without her, but back then . . . watch out! It had been one of those fights where I stuck my foot in my mouth, she started crying, and I rolled my eyes and slammed my door. And what did she do? Of course—she told our mom.

So Mom sits us both down at the kitchen table. I had a bad attitude and proceeded to sit with my arms crossed and eyes averted. Tara next to me just sniffled.

In spite of my efforts to ignore her, Mom caught my attention because she didn't yell. She didn't list all the things we'd done that were mean to each other . . . she just looked at us and said:

“Kristin, Tara, you are on the verge of your teenage years. You are going through a lot of changes. Now, the world is going to tell you how it thinks you should be, simply because you've turned thirteen. Our culture says that from the minute you turn thirteen until you reach your mid-twenties, you will be disrespectful, stubborn, and selfish. Most adults seem to think kids turn into some sort of inhuman creatures the minute they turn thirteen. I want to tell you girls today—you don't have to be these things. You can either choose to conform to the stereotypes of teens that this culture has, or you can choose leadership and rise above.”

And as disinterested as I tried to look that day, Mom had struck a chord in my heart; I wanted to be different. I didn't want to simply conform, but rather I wanted to choose to be a leader—starting right then at that young age. And now I like to pass that message along. Do not give in to the pressure of teenage stereotypes. Just because you're a teen doesn't mean you have to suddenly rebel, hate your parents, and complain about how unfair life is.

Certainly, teens are in a naturally more self-focused phase of life—but come on now, is there any phase in life that isn't somewhat self-centered? I don't think that's a teenage thing; I think it's a human thing. That doesn't magically disappear when you turn twenty. It's something we all learn to overcome. Leaders overcome these stereotypes. Leaders choose to control their thoughts, and practice personal accountability. Leadership starts at any age—so choose to influence others in a positive way now!

Kristin E. Lindeen (speaker and daughter of *QBQ!* author John G. Miller)

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever been labeled as being a “typical teen”? How does this make you feel?
- What are five traits of leadership or characteristics of leaders?
- Is leadership as simple as influencing the people around us? Why or why not?
- Some say leaders are born that way and that leadership is not for everyone. What do you think? Are leaders born or raised? Can you choose to be a leader? Can you learn to be a leader? How?