

Boy Scouts 1:

*"I made a tolerance wall in my middle school," Ryan Andresen said. "I did that because I have been through a lot of bullying in my life and middle school is probably the hub of that." Andresen joined the Cub Scouts at the age of 6 and Boy Scouts at age 11, long before he began to wrestle with his sexuality in middle school. "I went back to my middle school and I had three hundred blank tiles, and I basically just told them: write something that promotes kindness and combats bullying. They did an awesome job; it looks so good. I'm so proud of them."*¹

To reach the rank of Eagle Scout, Scouting's highest honor, scouts must attain five ranks, earn 21 merit badges, serve six months in a leadership position and complete a community service project. For his project, Ryan worked at the local middle school to organize an art project for Respect All Differences Day, which has an anti-bullying theme. Students created 288 tiles expressing "kindnesses," which he used to create a mural that was mounted — and remains — on a wall by the school library.

NFL1:

"It was like being in a car accident. Everything was fast, then was suddenly slow motion. I was running down on punt coverage," Ricardo Lockette says, "against Dallas last season, like I've done a thousand times before. I pushed off my blocker. I turned to my left. I saw a white jersey."

Car crash.

*I hit the ground, and I heard the sound you never want to hear. When you have a brush with death, people always say you see a light. Well, I didn't see a light. I heard a noise. It's that weird, far-off ringing sound. It was terrifying. I couldn't hear the crowd. I couldn't hear my teammates. That's when I knew it was bad. I was thinking, 'O.K., get up. Just get up'. But I couldn't get up. My whole body was numb. I couldn't move my arms. I couldn't move my head. I couldn't talk. All I could do was move my eyes. I was thinking: Am I deaf? Am I paralyzed? What is going on? Am I about to die? Please, somebody help me."*²

Values Proposition 1:

Al Cheit Shechatanu L'fanecha, for the sin that we have sinned before you by turning a blind eye.

V'al Cheit Shechatanu L'fanecha, for the sin that we have sinned before you though simple-mindedness.

¹ From an interview between Ryan Andresen and CNN's Anderson Cooper: <http://www.cnn.com/2013/01/08/us/california-gay-eagle-scout/index.html>

² Retrieved July 6, 2016 from <http://www.theplayerstribune.com/am-i-about-to-die/>

Boy Scouts 2:

For more than 100 years, the Boy Scouts of America has been one of the nation's largest and most prominent values-based youth development organizations. And I do mean large: more than 2.4 million kids participated in Scouting this past year. While many participate only for a short duration, some six percent of Scouts strive to obtain the highest possible honor. Obtaining the rank of Eagle Scout is a significant accomplishment that takes most young people well into high school, often to their senior year.

Ryan Andresen was one such individual. Having completed the requirements for Eagle Scout and prepared for his review board, he submitted his application before the cut-off on his 18th birthday. Yet Ryan was denied his Eagle Scout rank in 2013 because he is gay. At the time, the Boy Scouts of America policy stated unambiguously that they do "not grant membership to individuals who are open or avowed homosexuals."

NFL 2:

"Please, somebody help me," Riccardo Lockette thought as he lay helpless on the ground. In a later visit with Redmond firefighters and paramedics, Lockette expressed his gratitude for the work they do every day by illustrating how close he came to dying on the field. "[The doctors] said if I would have stood up then, the weight of my head...I would have died....If the returner...would have broken a couple tackles, and...would have... fell on me, I would have died on that field."³ Do you remember that game? In Week 8 of last season, against the Dallas Cowboys, Lockette was covering a punt when he got hit. He suffered a concussion, along with disc and ligament damage in his neck that required immediate surgery. Lockett survived — at least temporarily. His concussion was one of the 271 self-reported by the National Football League for last season alone.⁴

You have seen the movie Concussion with Peter Landesman and Ridley Scott and actor Will Smith. You have seen PBS's documentary League of Denial. You have seen the news and listened to the radio and you know that the NFL, the multibillion-dollar commercial juggernaut overseeing America's most popular sport, has a major problem. Even more importantly, those playing in the NFL have a major problem. Thousands of former players have claimed the league tried to cover up how football inflicted long-term brain injuries. Our society persists in referring to it as the "Concussion Debate", perhaps to assuage our consciences as we cheer on men who die a slow, painful death. The Concussion Debate.

³ Retrieved October 2, 2016 from http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/15511455/riccardo-lockette-seattle-seahawks-retires

⁴ Retrieved September 4, 2016 from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/what-the-nfls-new-concussion-numbers-dont-answer/>

Let's try some different words on for size. The NFL's recent settlement, where they admitted no wrong doing, sets out monetary recompense for former players with ALS, with Parkinson's Disease, with Alzheimer's Disease, with Level 2 Neurocognitive Impairment, with early-onset Dementia. It doesn't sound quite as abstract when you know the NFL set aside more than a billion dollars to pay the medical bills of retired players with these progressive neurodegenerative diseases. Perhaps scarier still is that the neurological dangers of professional football were brought to light following the suicides of NFL players — Junior Seau, Dave Duerson, Mike Webster, and many others — players with chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a disease set off by repeated head trauma that can still only be diagnosed after death. Yes, football is a contact sport, and players know many of the risks. Knee injuries. Shoulder injuries. Can I say this on Yom Kippur? Hamstrings. But do you really think players can consent to Alzheimer's and Parkinsons Diseases?

The Concussion Debate? Let's be clear. There is no scientific debate, only a moral one.

Values Proposition 2:

Al Cheit Shechatanu L'fanecha, for the sin that we have sinned before you by misrepresenting the truth.

Al Cheit Shechatanu L'fanecha, for the sin that we have sinned before you against those who do not know.

Boy Scouts 3:

Albus Dumbledore, the fictional headmaster in J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series, said: "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to your enemies, but a great deal more to stand up to your friends."⁵ It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to your enemies, but a great deal more to stand up to your friends.

Ryan Andresen's mom, Karen, decided it was time to stand up to her friend. And make no mistake, The Boy Scouts of America — the organization in which her son spent 12 years, made his best friends, and learned so many life lessons — the Boy Scouts were a friend. Karen started a petition and gathered 479,737 signatures...for her son to **continue** in the organization he loved. She did not want to boycott the boy scouts, on the contrary: she wanted her son to be able to continue. "It hurts me so much," she wrote, "to watch Ryan suffer for being who he is, because to me, he's perfect. Ryan has worked for nearly 12 years to become an Eagle Scout, and nothing would make him more proud than earning that well-deserved distinction. I hope that if enough people come together, we can convince my son's troop leaders to help him feel proud of who he is and all he's accomplished."⁶

⁵ Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.

⁶ <https://www.change.org/p/overturn-ban-on-gay-scouts>

Karen Andresen knew that a proud, popular, well-supported organization like the Boy Scouts of America would not bow to external pressure. In fact, with more than 20% of Boy Scouts coming from a Mormon Church diametrically opposed to the inclusion of gay scouts, external pressure wasn't even a concern. Karen understood that only as a member of the organization did she have the opportunity, and indeed obligation, to help determine the morals and the direction it would take for the future. Boycotts would only strengthen their resolve; internal pressure brought by those who care the most was the only way to affect change.

Indeed, as Robert Gates — Director of the CIA, Secretary of Defense, Eagle Scout, and Boy Scouts of America President — said during his term about gay scouts and gay scout leaders: “We cannot ignore the growing **internal** challenges to our current membership policy...While technically we have the authority to revoke their charters, such an action would deny the lifelong benefits of scouting to hundreds of thousands of boys and young men today and vastly more in the future. I will not take that path.”⁷ Internal pressure — the leveraged support of those who cared most about the organization — brought about change.

And there was change. In 2013, the Boy Scouts of America changed its membership policies to admit openly gay scouts, and in 2015 openly gay scout leaders. Let me say it again. Internal pressure, leveraging overwhelming support for an organization, brought about morally necessary change.

NFL 3:

Ricardo Lockette's story is different than the stories of Mike Webster, Dave Duerson and others because he is still alive. He is alive, and has begun living life by his highest values. “When it's all said and done,” Lockette said, “when the temporary fairy tale Coach Carroll talked about is over, we have to ask ourselves why we're really here on this earth. I feel like I finally know why I'm here.” “My worries are the woman who's in a shelter with her kids who doesn't have anywhere to go. My worry is the guy who has a PhD degree that's on the corner right now, that just needs a little confidence, a little help. Or that kid in school that's being bullied or teased that could grow up to find a cure for cancer. That's my focus.”⁸

Ricardo Lockette is alive, and has begun living life by his highest values. What if we were to apply our highest values to allow others to live? Internal pressure, leveraging overwhelming support for an organization, can bring about morally necessary change.

⁷ <http://scoutingnewsroom.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/DR-GATES-REMARKS.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.seattletimes.com/sports/seahawks/for-ricardo-lockette-life-after-the-seahawks-means-helping-others-with-the-same-passion-he-played-the-game/>

And change is possible. Just this year the NFL instituted a number of rule changes to protect player safety. Chop blocks, where one player hits below the waist and another above it, are now illegal. Ripping someone to the ground by their jersey from their nameplate up or by their shoulder pads is illegal. Perhaps most noticeable was the decision to spot the ball five yards closer to the end zone on a touchback, a rule change encouraging players to take a knee and avoid collisions during the most dangerous part of the game. Player safety has increased, and Seahawks tickets are no less difficult to obtain because of these rule changes. I trust none of you have returned your Seahawks jerseys? The NFL is still on track for 13 billion dollars in revenue this year. 13 billion dollars. Increasing player safety doesn't have to destroy America's Game or diminish support for the game we love.

And there is more that we could do. Smarter people than I are proposing changes that would greatly impact player safety. Impact sensors and investments in materials science for helmets. Stiffer penalties for head-to-head contact and targeting defenseless players and allowing doctors rather than coaches to determine whether a player should be removed from a game. Investments in medical science to better understand the brain and how to protect it from damage. There are many possibilities, but it takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to your friends. The NFL is a proud, popular, well-supported organization that will not bow to external pressure. With expected revenues of 13 billion dollars this year alone, 50% higher than five years ago, external pressure isn't even a concern. Only as financial supporters of the organization do we have the opportunity, and indeed obligation, to help determine the morals and the direction it will take for the future.

And make no mistake, we are supporters of the organization. Twelfth-Man mania has so consumed Seattle that schools canceled class for the parade. Cheers at home games register on the Richter scale. So many people own \$100 football jerseys that you can spot them in the grocery store — even during football games being worn by people who don't even care to watch. I can't even schedule a synagogue event during a Seahawks game because that attendance score board reads Seahawks 1, Temple 0. We are supporters of the organization, supporters with enough emotional and financial leverage to bring about morally necessary change.

Continue to buy tickets. Cheer on the Seahawks...or the 49's — Rabbi Weiner made me include that...and when you do, express your support for increased player safety. Talk about it at the games. Talk about it with your friends, on social media. Make sure the NFL hears that we are cheering for the players and their sportsmanship and not for their early, painful death.

Values Proposition 3:

Al Cheit Shechatanu L'fanecha, for the sin that we have sinned before you by hardening our hearts.

Al Cheit Shechatanu L'fanecha, for the sin that we have sinned before you by casting off responsibility.

The responsibility is ours. We are, each of us, involved in or supporting organizations over which we have tremendous power. The Boy Scouts. The NFL. Our local schools and clubs and non-profits and government and so many organizations where we can influence their future, ensure their morality, and impacts so many lives. Internal pressure, leveraging overwhelming support for the organization, can bring about the morally necessary change more effectively than boycotts, and certainly more effectively than continuing to pretend like there is no problem. "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to your enemies, but a great deal more to stand up to your friends."

Al Cheit Shechatanu L'fanecha, for the sin that we have sinned before you by not being brave.