

---

# 7.

## POSITIONAL LEADERSHIP

---

*“Being in power is like being a lady. If you have to tell people  
you are, you aren’t.”*

**– Margaret Thatcher**

*“Leadership is extremely important. I tell every team that it’s  
the seniors’ team. If they do a good job leading, then we’re going  
to have a great year.”*

**– Roy Williams**

*“Earn your leadership every day.”*

**– Michael Jordan**

*“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments  
of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge  
and controversy.”*

**– Martin Luther King, Jr.**

*“Don’t go around saying the world owes you a living; the world owes  
you nothing; it was here first.”*

**– Mark Twain**

**E**ven though every player on a team is a leader (either positive or negative), there still is a crucial element of leadership that captains or other positional leaders can provide. Being the team's captain, senior, or star is a great opportunity to represent your team in a public manner. It is a great opportunity to create a championship culture that everyone can be proud of. Bill Walsh, the Hall of Fame football coach with the San Francisco 49ers, had an interesting take on his positional leaders in his book *The Score Takes Care of Itself* when he said,

“One of the reasons the 49ers won five Super Bowls in fourteen years is that we expected veterans to do everything possible to bring along rookies. In effect, they were expected to train their own replacements, and it was one of the reasons I prohibited hazing. I wanted new players, new staff members, new scouts, and everyone else who joined us to sense immediately they had joined an organization with a unique environment”.

You might have positional status on your team but remember that more influence is exerted through personal power than through positional power. However, if you combine positive personal power with positive positional power then you can make a tremendous impact. The stronger that your foundation core values are and the better habits that you have, then the better you will be able to lead. An old cliché says that in calm waters, every ship has a good captain. As a positional leader, you will be tested when the storms come. If you have developed a strong connection with your teammates and have built up positive daily habits, then you will be a calming influence when your team faces challenges.

Your coach and your teammates are going to rely on you. As a positional leader, you should be an individual that your team shouldn't have to worry about. They know that you are going to consistently have the best interests of the team in mind. The coach might set the vision and define the culture for the team, but it is the players that will carry it out and make it a reality. As a captain, star or senior, you will be at the center of this. You have a great responsibility to help the team progress and to take ownership in creating a championship culture.

## **KEVIN DURANT**

Kevin Durant is a special talent in the NBA. He is a 6'10" player with Go-Go Gadget arms. He can play any position on the floor. He is a matchup nightmare for opposing coaches. He is too big for guards to handle but too athletic and skilled when bigger players attempt to stop him. Outside of LeBron James, there probably isn't a better basketball player on the planet than KD. He is the epitome of a player that outworks his talent. He has tremendous talent but doesn't rest on that fact. He doesn't stop at talent alone. In fact, his former coach, Scott Brooks, once said of Durant,

“He works and practices like he is trying to make the team.”

That is what people say about hard-working blue-collar type role players. That is not often said about the stars. Think about what an average player can do if they out-work everyone. Now think about a star that takes on that same mentality. Durant has gone from being a supremely talented player to a great player.

More importantly, KD wanted to be more than just a great player. He wanted to be a great teammate. Great players who are also great teammates can inspire others to do more and go farther. Durant is a great player, a great teammate and a great champion. After he won the 2013-2014 NBA MVP award (with 119 of 125 possible first-place votes), his acceptance speech gave us a glimpse inside of the mindset that has made him such a great teammate. His speech gave insights into why he is both an MVP player and an MVP leader.

Championships in team sports are won by individuals coming together and playing as a team. Durant understood this. He might be the best player but he still can't do it alone. He plays a team game. That is one reason that he thanks and praises his teammates. He knows that he is talented but he also recognizes the sacrifices of his teammates and how they push and encourage him to be his best.

During his speech, it seemed that Durant thanked everybody in the organization by name. He even mentioned specific things about most of the people that he thanked. When it comes to success, no man is an island and he seemed to understand basketball coach John Wooden's philosophy of

“It takes ten hands to make a basket.”

Everybody has a platform. Everybody can influence somebody else through their words or actions. When a star with the platform of a Kevin Durant steps up and provides a positive example then it can affect a number of people. If you are a star, a captain or an upperclassman, you have a bigger responsibility because you have a bigger platform. Will you use your position to add value to others or to prop yourself up? Kevin Durant chose to lift others up. No matter your role, you can inspire others. When you have a position of responsibility, you have an increased opportunity to make a positive impact. One of his most impressive statements was when he said,

“Basketball is just a platform for me to inspire people.”

What about you? Does your sport, coaches or teammates exist to serve you? Are you waiting for what you think you are entitled to? Durant isn't like this and he is one of the best players of all-time. He serves others. He wants to inspire others. He wants to use his platform and status for good. You have a choice in everything that you do but in the end, that choice makes you. Will choose to be served by others or will you look for ways to encourage, praise and uplift others like Kevin Durant?

## **TALENT MUST EXCEED YOUR PROBLEMS**

Santonio Holmes was the Pittsburgh Steelers' first-round draft pick in 2006 after playing at Ohio State. He was extremely talented as you had to look no further than his earning MVP honors of Super Bowl XLIII when the Steelers defeated the Arizona Cardinals. So why was he traded by the Steelers that off-season for just a 5<sup>th</sup> round pick? Probably the same reason that he was out of the NFL entirely five years later. Even though he was talented, his talent did not exceed his problems. In the story on ESPN.com about the breaking trade news, the article described Holmes as the “talented but troubled wide receiver.”

Looking back, the Steelers probably did the right thing in getting rid of this locker room problem and selfish, though talented, player before he hurt their organization. In fact, he was suspended for the first four games of the 2010 season for failing the league's drug policy. His history of being a locker room cancer and getting into legal trouble off-the-field probably

shortened his career. There was no question that Santonio Holmes' had tremendous talent but his leadership was lacking, which most likely cut short a promising career much earlier than it should have.

One of his most infamous seasons was in 2011 when he was a member of the New York Jets. During that season he criticized coaches, the starting quarterback, and the offensive line. He even fought with teammates in a huddle and was benched during a key game. All of this while he wore the captain "C" on his jersey. Every coach wants their captains to be unafraid to speak up. However, the speaking should be productive and have a point. Holmes seemed to allow his verbal vomit to do nothing but stink things up. He had talent but couldn't keep his mouth shut and didn't help his teammates focus on the important stuff...like winning. He made things about him.

After the 2011 season, he would say that he was unfairly labeled as the scapegoat for the Jets difficult season. As the team captain, a Super Bowl MVP just two years previously and a guy that signed a 5-year, \$45-million contract prior to the 2011 season, that would probably qualify him as someone that could have had a huge influence on the team. If he was giving his all on every play and being a respected member of the locker room then he would have been able to help the Jets.

As an athlete, you can learn from Holmes' career. Talent is important but is not the only thing. Are you making your team better in the locker room? Are you adding value to your teammates? Are you staying out of trouble? Are you reliable? Are you focused on the team or your own agenda?

## **DEREK JETER**

In a long line of New York Yankee greats, Derek Jeter is considered by many to be the greatest of all. He ended his career 6<sup>th</sup> on baseball's all-time hits list and earned the nicknames "Captain Clutch" and "Mr. November" for his success when it mattered most as he led the Yankees to five World Championships. Yes, his play was at a Hall of Fame caliber for 20 years but what was most impressive and has endeared him to fans and foe alike were his leadership skills.

Joe Giglio wrote an article for *Bleacher Report* during Jeter's final 2014 season. In it, we gain some insights into why Jeter was such a good leader and what his teammates thought of him,

Although Jeter wasn't officially named a captain until 2003, it was clear who the leader of the team was from the moment the rookie shortstop began his first full season in 1996.

..."Derek carried himself like a veteran," Dwight "Doc" Gooden said. "Confident, but not cocky. What I always admired about Derek was how he never changed. When I came back to the Yankees in 2000, he was the same exact guy. Much more accomplished and with a big contract, but that work ethic never changed."

...Tino Martinez—a teammate of Jeter's throughout New York's dynasty run from 1996-2001—extolled similar praises and acknowledged that vocal leadership wasn't Jeter's specialty, but it didn't have to be in order to get the mandate across.

..."He led by example," Martinez said. "His whole career has been that way. Plays hard, plays to win. Expects the most from his teammates. When you're in battle with a guy like that, it's important not to let him down. From superstars to the 25th man on the roster, we all felt a responsibility to play hard and play to win because of Jeter. That's rare."

When your best player is also your hardest worker and most respected team member then your chance for on-field success is increased. Just as impressive was how Jeter seemed to stay away from the drama that could have sabotaged his team. He was a celebrity in the nation's biggest city. He dated movie stars and singers. Yet, he was considered the ultimate professional. He had a personal life away from baseball but was wise about it and conducted himself as a professional and did not let it interfere with his play or that of his teammates. If he could be the consummate professional and leader underneath such a large microscope then what is stopping you and your teammates from keeping the drama out of the locker room and staying focused on your goals?

## EXAM WITH ONE QUESTION

How you treat people that are below you or don't benefit you at a particular moment says a lot about your character. What is your attitude toward the freshmen, the reserves, the assistant coaches, the trainers, or the walk-ons? Your leadership power can be increased exponentially if you have a greater positive influence on people.

In order to increase this influence, you must be someone that is respected. The more value you add to others, the more others will look to you. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but rather thinking of yourself less. In other words, how can you think of others more and add more value to them?

In a *NY Times* interview, Walt Bettinger, the Chief Executive of Charles Schwab talked about a major lesson that he learned in college:

“A business strategy course in my senior year stands out. I had maintained a 4.0 average all the way through, and I wanted to graduate with a perfect average. It came down to the final exam, and I had spent many hours studying and memorizing formulas to do calculations for the case studies.

The teacher handed out the final exam, and it was on one piece of paper, which really surprised me because I figured it would be longer than that. Once everyone had their paper, he said, ‘Go ahead and turn it over.’ Both sides were blank.

And the professor said, ‘I’ve taught you everything I can teach you about business in the last 10 weeks, but the most important message, the most important question, is this: What’s the name of the lady who cleans this building?’

And that had a powerful impact. It was the only test I ever failed, and I got the “B” I deserved. Her name was Dottie, and I didn’t know Dottie. I’d seen her, but I’d never taken the time to ask her name. I’ve tried to know every Dottie I’ve worked with ever since.

It was just a great reminder of what really matters in life, and

that you should never lose sight of people who do the real work.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson provided a great perspective on this very matter when he said,

“Every man that I meet is in some way my superior and in that way, I learn from him.”

Imagine how much can be accomplished and how much you can impact someone else’s life for the positive just by thinking about others a little more. What if you were the starting quarterback who got hurt but never took an interest in your backup. The team will suffer because you were only focused on you. Imagine what kind of a reputation you could develop for both you and your team if you did some unselfish things?

### **QUARTERBACK’S BROKEN JAW**

How do you conduct yourself in the locker room? Do you have the team’s respect? Going into the 2015 NFL season, Geno Smith was the projected starting quarterback for the New York Jets. They had high hopes as they had a great defense and had some explosive veteran playmakers such as Brandon Marshall and Eric Decker. Smith, the 39<sup>th</sup> pick of the 2013 draft was highly regarded coming out of West Virginia. The season changed on August 11, 2015, when Smith got into an altercation in the locker room with IK Enemkpli. Smith was punched so hard that his jaw was broken.

The Jets season wouldn’t be the same as Smith only appeared in one game during that season. In this one instance, Smith, the team’s quarterback did not provide the leadership that the team needed. In this one instance, he didn’t appear to know how to get along with at least one teammate and didn’t understand his role and responsibility to be above any pettiness. His lack of focus on what was most important for both himself and his team would end up costing the Jets their hopes of a playoff season.

### **BROTHER GOT IN TROUBLE ON THE BUS.**

Basketball was everything to me. It was my number one sport. When I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I was riding the bus home after school. My brother, who was three years younger than me was acting up quite a bit on the bus that



particular day. He was pestering many kids around him, as well as talking back to the bus driver. Eventually, he would receive a pink slip and be suspended for a time from having bus-riding privileges. I thought it was funny because my annoying little brother got in trouble.

This humor would soon be turned to frustration as my parents told me that I would not be allowed to play in any basketball games while my brother was suspended from the bus. They told me that I was my brother's keeper and could have kept him from getting in trouble. I thought that this was unfair. However, they were right in the fact I could have stopped this. My little brother looked up to me and I could have influenced him and deescalated the situation. I wasn't trying to do the right thing or make a positive impact, I was just being mean and not helping the situation.

### **THE TRAVEL BAG**

When you are the captain or best player on the team, more people will watch you based upon your positional leadership. Everyone can be a leader because everyone can have influence, however, if you have positional leadership then you automatically have a larger scope of influence. Alan Williams was a walk-on at Wake Forest University a few years after Tim Duncan graduated. The new star was Robert O'Kelley, who ended up being a Top-10 scorer in Wake Forest history. In Williams' book "Walk On", he told a great story of O'Kelley that highlights how a positional leader can have a positive influence on his teammates

In the book, Williams recalls how everyone got a brand new Nike travel bag except for the walk-on. However, when the player came into the locker room after practice, there was a bag in Williams locker. The stitching on the page said #4, which was O'Kelley's number. Everyone can be a leader because everyone can influence somebody else. However, if you have someone in a position of leadership like Robert O'Kelley then you have increased opportunities to make a larger impact.

### **I PAID MY DUES**

I once took over a team that had some seniors that were very talented but also subscribed to the traditional philosophy of leadership in that seniors, especially senior starters should be served. They had "paid their dues" in the past and now it was time for others to pay their dues. During the preseason, our travel suits arrived but unfortunately the vendor had messed

up and sent some incorrect sizes.

The replacement travel suits would arrive a few days later. We were not playing games yet and picture day was still a few weeks away. We would be doing no team functions that required the team to dress uniformly. Since they would be only wearing them around campus and it would only be a couple of days anyway, I decided to make sure that the freshmen had the proper sizes since they didn't have any travel suits. This would mean that some of the seniors would go without a new travel suit for a couple of days.

I explained my rationale to them but unfortunately, one of the seniors vehemently disagreed with the decision and ended up quitting the next day. This player was the top-returning scorer and she had said that she had "paid her dues" and no freshmen should get something before she did. Not only did she fail to grasp the idea of servant leadership and thinking about the team, but she also demonstrated a lack of respect toward others. In most situations, if you want respect, then you must first, be worthy of that respect and second, be willing to give it.

## **JACKIE ROBINSON**

Many of you have probably seen the movie *42* depicting Jackie Robinson's life. Jackie Robinson was the first African-American to play major-league baseball when he suited up for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. There is a scene in the movie that actually happened in real life, though there is some debate as to whether it happened when the movie said that it did according to an ESPN.com article by Brian Cronin. Regardless, it is a great story of how a person's influence can make a difference.

In breaking the color barrier, Robinson faced all kinds of abuse, both physically and verbally. One day when the Dodgers were playing at home, he committed an error while playing second base. The crowd began to get nasty. Even his own fans were being rude and loud. All of a sudden, Brooklyn's shortstop Pee Wee Reese came over to Jackie and put his arm around him. Reese was a beloved Dodger and the fans couldn't bring themselves to ridicule him. The fans stopped booing and yelling. Robinson would later say that the moment Reese stood next to him was the day his career was saved. Reese would later say,

"I was just trying to make the world a little bit better. That's what you're supposed to do with your life, isn't it?"

If you are a player that is in a positional role (captain, senior, starter), imagine how much influence you can have on your team and those around you. Your words and actions are powerful. You might never do something as monumental as Pee Wee Reese did for Jackie Robinson, but you can still use your positional authority to improve whatever situation you find yourself in.

## **TOM BRADY**

Celebrating and sharing successes with your teammates in a great way to earn their respect and increase your potential for influence. There is no question that Tom Brady is the on-field leader of the New England Patriots. Arguably the greatest quarterback in NFL history, Brady seems to understand that the Patriots' prolonged dominance is not just because of an accurate arm, quick decision-making skills or ability to elude rushers. The quarterback is almost always the on-field leader because of their position. Every team in America has a starting quarterback, however, not every team has a true person of influence at that position.

When the New England Patriots went 16-0 during the 2007 regular season, Brady gave each of his starting offensive linemen Audi SUVs. Later on, he made headlines when he won a truck for earning the Super Bowl 49 MVP award but subsequently gave the prize to defensive back Malcolm Butler, whose pass break up on the final play sealed the victory. He even has done things midseason for the entire team. In 2016, he gave every teammate a pair of Uggs after the eighth game of the season.

Talent is just one part of being a team leader. A quarterback that doesn't have the respect of his teammates will never be able to maximize their physical abilities. You want to have enough time to find open receivers then you better be a person whose linemen care enough about to protect.

Oftentimes, the easiest way to get respect is to get respect. Celebrate the successes of others. Tom Brady has learned through the years how to celebrate and share his success with others. Individuals who excel in team sports can't do it alone. Brady understands this.

## HEAVY LIFTING

The best leaders are also very good at serving. Dr. Martin Luther King once said,

“Everybody can be great because anybody can serve.”

To serve just means to render assistance, be of use or to help in some way. It doesn't mean that you are less than somebody else. It just means that you are helpful. Here is a story from the American Revolutionary War that highlights this premise of serving,

Many years ago during the Revolutionary War, a rider on horseback came across a group of soldiers under the command of a corporal who was out to show he was in charge.

They were building a tall log fortification alongside a road and the corporal kept barking orders. Trying with all their might to push the final log in place up top, they couldn't do it. Every time the last log would come crashing down. The corporal would shout out again, “Up with it! Push harder! What's your problem?”

Once more they would attempt to give it the heave-ho and lift the last log only to have the log fall again. Dismounting his horse, the stranger carefully took his place alongside the soldiers.

“Now, all together boys – heave!” he said. And the big piece of timber slid into place.

Before the men could thank the stranger, he got back on his horse.

The quiet man asked the corporal, “Why didn't you help your men with the heavy lifting?”

He said, “Don’t you see? I’m a corporal!”

The stranger replied, “Pardon me. I didn’t realize that you were so important.”

He then opened up his coat revealing his uniform, and he said, “I am just a mere Commander-in-Chief. George Washington, at your service Corporal. The next time you have a log too heavy for your men to lift, send for me!”

George Washington was a great leader because he wasn’t afraid of serving. He was willing to do some heavy lifting. The best leaders are servants. Servant leaders don’t focus on rank or position. When they serve, they are not thinking about their rank. They are just trying to help.

### **CAPTAIN’S LETTER**

One of the best books that I have ever read that is applicable for both coaches and players is Dick Devenzio’s *Runnin’ the Show*. It contains hundreds of practical tips and insights to help improve players and a team. One of the sections deals with leadership and captains. Dick Devenzio was the top-rated guard in the country coming out of high school before becoming an all-conference player in the ACC for Duke University in the 1970s. After his playing days were over, he founded the Point Guard College, which is genuinely regarded as the top instructional basketball camp in the country. In the book, Devenzio published a letter from a player at a small school in Oregon. This is a good example of what you can do for your team if you are in a positional leadership role:

To the Future Linfield National Champions Hoops Team,

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." (Jim Elliott)

I hope that your two months of vacation time have been the best ever. As for me, I have been working my tail off looking forward to our upcoming season. Six days ago

Aaron Lee and I began lifting and shooting for (around) two hours a day. (My position of head toilet cleaner on campus has given me the wonderful privilege of gym key use).

Summer for all of you should be over. It's time to begin paying the price for a National Championship, for which the cost is not a small one. We need to be putting more time in than any other team in the nation. We have the talent, we have the character, all we have to do is now pay the price in the weight room, on the court, and in our minds.

"Anything the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve." (Larry Southern)

Do you believe that we can win the NC baby? What are you doing to match your beliefs? If you truly believe that we can win the National Championship, your life will be changed.

Work out at top speed, push yourself beyond anything you have ever known, and dream of the days to come.

The only thing that we lack to this point right now is playing together and knowing each other, which is a big ingredient to being a championship caliber team. In order to offset this problem, we are going to have to be very exclusive in our play. To win big, we must sacrifice big. I have gone ahead and made some preliminary plans for the fall and I would like to bounce them off you guys as soon as the school year starts.

The varsity team will be meeting at Coach Doty's house the first three days of school - Wednesday, Thursday, Friday - for BBQ's up there to go over our fall game plan and pre-season discussion. Begin putting the time in now with extra running, shooting, and lifting so that we can get a phat jump on becoming the first National Championship team Linfield hoops has ever had.

God bless all you guys. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Dy #23

What a great letter. If you are in a position of leadership, have you sent a note, letter, email or Facebook message to your teammates inspiring them for the upcoming season? The coach can only do so much but when a positional leader takes on the role of key influencer then the sky is the limit. Coaches want players to step up and make suggestions that make sense. I bet that Matt's coach loved that he took initiative and was committed to making his team as good as it could be. What are you doing to be the best leader and captain that you can be?