



## LEAVING THE RESTAURANT

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As the players left the restaurant most of them showed some appreciation or at least acknowledged Coach with a quick head nod as he held the door open for all of them.

“Thanks,” said Drew.

“You’re welcome,” said Coach.

“Don’t you mean, ‘My Pleasure’?” joked Drew.

“Well-played,” Coach Dunn said. “Now get on the bus. You were just about the last one.”

“Lucky for me James and Antonio are still my teammates. With them around, I’ll never have to worry about being last,” said Drew as he boarded the bus.

Coach smiled as James and Antonio finally sauntered past him, and as usual, were the last players to board the bus.

“Hey coach, now that you finally decided to join us, everybody’s on the bus. Time to make moves,” said James as Coach got on the bus.

“Very funny,” Coach snapped back.

Antonio fist-bumped James and said, “We’re just messing with you, Coach. We saw you practicing for your next date with your wife by holding the door open for everybody. But seriously, why were you doing that?”

“It’s just the right thing to do,” Coach Dunn replied. “I don’t always do what’s right, unfortunately, but I still try to be a servant leader whenever I can.”

“Servant leader? What’s that mean?” asked Antonio.

“It really just means that I’m leading by serving others,” said Coach Dunn.

“That sounds like one of those oxymorons. How can you lead and serve at the same time?” James asked.

“Serving others just means that I’m trying to help others. It means that I’m trying to take care of you and your needs. Holding the door isn’t a big deal but it’s something I could do to be nice,” Coach Dunn pointed out.

Drew was listening to the conversation and spoke up, “Hey Coach, it’s funny you should say that. Do you remember when they didn’t give me the right sandwich?”

“Yes, you seemed a little frustrated by the whole thing. But they apologized and seemed to have patience even though you were a little short with them,” said Coach Dunn.

“It actually was my mistake, after all,” admitted Drew. “I ended up apologizing to the checkout clerk. What’s weird is that she said some of the same stuff you just said about serving and trying to make things better for others.”

Coach Dunn said, “Drew, that lady wasn’t just some checkout clerk. She’s the restaurant’s owner.”

“Wait, what? They had like a million people working in there. Why was she still taking our orders and refilling our drinks? What’s that all about?” Drew asked.

“As I said, servant leadership,” Coach Dunn replied. “It’s not about what she can get out of the customers or her employees but rather how can she enrich their lives. Magic Johnson once said, ‘ask not what your teammates can do for you but what you can do for your teammates’. When a team is more concerned about each other then

they are more likely to go farther together than they could by themselves.”

Coach Dunn couldn't believe he was having this conversation with Drew, of all people. Drew tended to be self-focused. He might have been the most gifted basketball player on the team after James and Antonio, but he also knew it and too often, acted the part of a prima donna. The fact that he was still listening and asking questions gave Coach Dunn hope.

“Serving others doesn't mean that you think less of yourself,” Coach Dunn continued. “It doesn't mean that you put yourself down. Instead, it means that you think of yourself less. You put the needs of others before your own. In turn, you make their life better, which ultimately will make your life better. You guys share the load. You share the burdens. It's much better to go through life together with friends who have each other's backs rather than worrying about your own agendas.”

So far so good, Coach thought. Drew was still paying attention. Coach Dunn didn't know how much longer they'd have a conversation, but he was going to throw out some more nuggets for Drew to consider.

Coach Dunn said, “There was a study done that actually found that we're healthier, both physically and psychologically, when we give to others and help others. It reminds me of the classic song lyrics that say, *'Lean on me when you're not strong. And I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on. For it won't be long, 'til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on.'*”

Antonio and James gave Coach Dunn quite the look as he recited the song lyrics but wisely, didn't offer an opinion on his singing voice.

“As a basketball player, you can volunteer to rebound for a teammate,” he continued. “You can go over plays with a teammate. You can work on ball-handling together. You can watch film together. You can hold each other accountable. Keep each other out of trouble.

Find ways to help your teammates be better. This will make you better as well. No matter your age or status in life, you can always help others out. You can lean on each other.”

“That’s deep coach. But I can respect that,” said Drew. “Is that why you sweep the floor and put out all of the cones before practice. I thought we have managers and custodians to do that stuff.”

Coach Dunn said, “I try to do whatever helps move our team forward and if I can help out somebody in the process, then I try to do that. As you mentioned, managers and custodians, for example, have a lot of things to do. If I can take something off their plate, then I try to do that. At the end of the day, somebody has to do all of these things. From a traditional way of thinking, I have certainly paid my dues and shouldn’t have to do these things, but I just think it’s the right thing to do.”

Sitting in a nearby seat, Angela was enjoying this conversation. Not only did she want the players to be physically healthy but mentally healthy, as well. She felt that Drew was learning something, and she was glad that Coach Dunn was taking the time to talk with him.

When there was a slight pause in the conversation between Drew and Coach Dunn, Angela said, “Even though I was a biology major, I had to take some business classes. I had this one professor that gave us a test. Before giving the test, the professor said, ‘I’ve taught you everything that I can teach you about business in the last ten weeks, but the most important message or question that I could ask would be what’s the name of the lady that cleans this building during the day. That is the only question on this test’. Even though I knew the material from the chapter, I failed that test. I think of that story often. Everybody I come in contact with is important. Everyone has a story. If I can be a small help to them in some way or if I can treat them with kindness in some way, then I’m passing that test so to speak. I figure that if we all help each other then it’s like iron sharpening iron. It’s like Coach and the old song says about leaning on me when you’re not strong.”

Coach Dunn added, “I know that every time you scroll through your social media feeds, it seems that you’re flooded with negativity. We see people being mean. We see people being selfish. But the world is still full of people doing great things. Gandhi used to say, ‘*Be the change you want to see in the world*’. Just because other people are negative doesn’t mean we have to be. We should be kind to others, not because we get rewarded or because the other person is kind, but because we’re kind.”

“Absolutely. Coach is right,” said Angela. “Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream that people would be judged by the content of their character. The world still isn’t perfect, nor will it ever be. We can’t help everyone, but we can help someone. We can’t do everything, but we can do something. Instead of throwing up my hands and saying that things are hopeless, I want to be the change I want to see in the world. I want to do what I can do where I’m at.”

Coach Dunn looked at Drew and said, “Angela had some great thoughts about helping others. She does that every day as our trainer. I try to be a servant leader as a coach. If that means helping others by putting out cones or even carrying bags, then that is what I want to do. MLK also said that ‘It’s always the right time to do what it’s right’. I figure that it’s always the right time to help out a custodian or a manager, or anyone for that matter.”

It was quiet and for a moment, Coach Dunn was concerned that he and Angela had gone too far with Drew and lost him.

“Dunn’s deep thoughts,” Drew said, breaking the silence. “What you guys say makes a lot of sense. Now, I just need to find out the name of our custodian.”

The comment eased Coach’s fears. He was relieved that Drew was responsive to their talk. Coach smiled and replied, “It’s Tom but everyone calls him Woody.”