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FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

“Champions don’t beat themselves. If you want to win, do the ordinary things better than anyone else does – day in and day out. We’re not going to fool people or out-scheme them. We’re just going to outplay them. Because we’ll know what we’re doing. When we get into a critical situation, we won’t have to think. We’ll play fast and fundamentally sound.”

– Chuck Noll

“Ninety-nine percent of leadership failures are failures of character.”

– General Norman Schwarzkopf

“To win it all, a team has to be obsessive about the fundamentals and the little things.”

– Joe Gibbs

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act but a habit.”

– Aristotle

“I have no choice about whether or not I have Parkinson’s Disease; I have nothing but a choice about how I react to it.”

– Michael J. Fox

Every well-built house starts with a solid foundation. Every player should start off learning the fundamentals of their sport. It is the same way with leadership. Leadership is influence. In order to have a positive influence on yourself and others, you must have a foundation. You need some core principles and values that you live by and internalize. This foundation must become part of you or else you will fall short of reaching your potential as a player and as a leader.

SUCCESS IS A CHOICE

Most choices that we have in life are simple. Knowing the right thing to do is not the hard part, choosing to do the right thing is the difficult part. I love Diet Dr. Pepper, Kit Kats, and Twizzlers. These are my favorite snacks. However, a bottle of water, granola bar, and apple are better for me and will help me have more lasting energy. Most choices we have in life are not real tricky. Good sleep, not good sleep, hydration, watching film, not drinking, not smoking or working out – we know whether these are good choices or not.

Success is a choice. Do you want to be successful? Success is a choice. Unfortunately, so is failure. Every choice that we make in life either complicates or simplifies our life – usually in the area of fulfilling our goals and aspirations. Sometimes you’ve got to do some things you don’t want to do so that you can accomplish things that you want to accomplish.

Remember, knowing the right thing to do is not the hard part, choosing to do the right thing is the difficult part. The choices you make today affect you tomorrow, next month, next year. Your results during the season will be a direct result of what you did during those months leading up to the season. Your results in a game will have more to do with the practices in the previous week than the actual game.

Your daily choices lead to daily habits which lead to success or failure. Who you want to be in the future and what you want to accomplish is determined by what you do today, tomorrow, next month, and next year. This is the same with us when it comes to our daily choices shaping our habits. Eventually, we will have either winning habits or losing habits. It is up to you. Your choice.

INTEGRITY

Integrity is the building block and most basic tenet to all other traits. If you are not an ethical person with a solid foundation of doing the right thing consistently, then you will not be a person of integrity. Integrity is the sum total of all our everyday choices. The more consistent we are with our everyday choices, the more integrity we have. Take the story of golfer Bobby Jones.

From 1923-1930, Bobby Jones won 13 major championships in golf. His record was unmatched until 1973 when it was finally broken by Jack Nicklaus. In a championship match that he was playing in, Jones drove the ball into the woods. As he was looking for the ball, he accidentally nudged it. Although no one saw him move the ball, he penalized himself one stroke (according to the rules), which caused him to lose the match by that margin. Afterward, when reporters praised him for his integrity, he responded that they might as well praise him and congratulate him for not robbing a bank.

In Martin Luther King's famous *I Have a Dream* speech, he talks about people being judged by the content of their character. The true measure of a person's character is what they would do if they knew that no one would ever find out. The West Point honor code states,

“A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do.”

Your integrity is the most valuable thing that you possess. Here is an older poem from Dale Wimbrow, entitled *The Man in the Glass* about your integrity and how ultimately, you know whether you have it or don't

The Man in the Glass

When you get what you want in your struggle for self
and the world makes you king for a day.
Just go to the mirror and look at yourself
And see what that man has to say.

For it isn't your father or mother or wife
Whose judgment upon you must pass,
The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life
Is the one staring back from the glass.

You may be like Jack Horner and chisel a plum
And think you're a wonderful guy,
But the man in the glass says you're only a bum
If you can't look him straight in the eyes.

He's the fellow to please -- never mind all the rest,
For he's with you clear to the end;
And you've passed your most dangerous, difficult test
If the man in the glass is your friend.

You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years
And get pats on the back as you pass,
But your final reward will be heartache and tears
If you've cheated the man in the glass"

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

The cliché goes that your attitude determines your altitude. This is true more often than not. Your outlook on life determines much of your success. Positive people are positive because they choose to be. It is often said that whether you think you can or can't, you are probably right. Every action – big or small – begins as a thought. Having positive thoughts will lead to a positive attitude which will lead to positive actions. Being positive does not mean ignoring the negative. Being positive means overcoming the negative. This reminds me of the great Italian violinist Niccolò Paganini when he encountered difficulty at one of his concerts.

Paganini was playing a difficult piece of music before a large audience. Suddenly one string on his violin snapped, yet he continued to play, improvising beautifully. Then two more strings broke, and he completed the song playing with only one string. The crowd applauded wildly when he finished. However, he wasn't finished. He proceeded to play an encore with only one string.

Paganini didn't let something that seemed to be a deal-breaker interfere with his attitude and outlook on what he needed to do. The violinist was supposed to play and that is what he was going to do – and do it to the best of his ability. When it comes to life, we truly are about as happy as we decide we will be. It is up to us to determine our attitude. No situation - or person can make us feel a certain way unless we allow it. Life

is less about what happens to us and more about how we react to the stuff that happens to us.

We are in charge of our actions and our attitude. We can't control whether we are faced with having only one-string, but we can certainly decide how we will play that one-string. This is similar to what the great philosopher and scholar Captain Jack Sparrow said in *The Pirates of the Caribbean* when he remarked, "The problem is not the problem. The problem is our attitude toward the problem."

If you have a positive mindset and an optimistic outlook on life, you can achieve just about anything. This attitude can also rub off on others. Enthusiasm is contagious. Mark Twain wrote about enthusiasm and turning a negative into a positive in his book *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* when he talked about Tom getting in trouble and having to paint the fence. He acted as if he was having so much fun that he tricked his friends into not only painting the fence for him but paying him to do so. That was definitely an early case of enthusiasm being contagious. Jon Gordon, a leadership expert and author of many best-sellers agrees strongly with the power of positivity as he says,

"The great thing about positivity is that it never decreases when you share it. When you share positivity with others it grows and expands in their lives and yours."

DISCIPLINE

A good definition of discipline is doing what has to be done; when it has to be done; as well as you can possibly do it, and then doing it that way all of the time. Having the discipline to do what you are supposed to do is hard work but is worth it in the long run. Self-discipline is a matter of how hard you are willing to work when no one is watching. Self-discipline is not the path to instant gratification. The reward is much farther down the road, and not always obvious. Do the next right thing whether anyone is looking or whether or not you'll be rewarded for it.

Discipline gets you out of bed in the morning. Discipline reminds you of your goals. Discipline wants you to do what you don't want to do so that you can accomplish what you want to accomplish. Discipline helps you to stay focused and build mental toughness because it helps you develop daily habits. It helps you develop repetition so that success becomes automatic.

Here is a quick story from Pat Williams in his book *Be Like Mike*,

“Once I asked Michael (Jordan) what he was thinking about when he took the final shot in Game Six in 1998,” said Jordan’s business partner and Washington Capitals owner Ted Leonsis. “Michael said, “I wasn’t thinking about anything because I’d taken that shot a million times in practice. If I hadn’t taken that shot a million times, then I would have had something to think about.”

During Navy Seals training, they emphasize intense and extreme training so that your actions become automatic. They believe that when you are under pressure, you don’t rise to the occasion, you sink to the level of your training. Hockey’s greatest player ever, Wayne Gretzky echoed the Navy Seals philosophy when he said,

“No matter who you are, no matter how good an athlete you are, we’re creatures of habit. The better your habits are, the better they’ll be in pressure situations.”

Jerry West is one of the all-time great basketball players who played for the Los Angeles Lakers. In fact, his dribbling silhouette is what is used as the NBA’s official logo. You don’t get to be representative of the NBA and respected worldwide if you take too many days off or are unreliable. In fact, West once said,

“You can’t get much done in life if you only work on days that you feel good.”

One would wonder if Baseball Hall of Famer Cal Ripken, Jr. saw that quote when he was younger because Ripken became the textbook example of dependability. The Baltimore Orioles’ iron man played in 2,632 straight games spanning more than 16 years. This record broke the 56-year-old mark held by Lou Gehrig. Ripken went on to be inducted into baseball’s Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility on January 9, 2007. He probably had some days that he didn’t feel good, but he pressed on. He was already talented, but his dependability took his game to the highest level.

Mediocre players are the ones always pointing out the times they do something good. However, good players expect to perform certain tasks over and over again routinely. Good players remember the times that they fail to do something. Consistency involves good habits. It involves a sense of dependability. Dependability is the ability to be relied upon. It is not only about being there physically but being there at your best. It is about loyalty and commitment, about being someone on whom your teammates can count on. To be this kind of teammate, you need to develop discipline.

RESPONSIBILITY

If you develop the habits of success, you'll make success a habit. These habits lead to being a responsible person. The legendary Tennessee Women's Basketball Coach Pat Summitt described responsibility equaling accountability equaling ownership, meaning that those words were synonymous and necessary. She said that a sense of ownership is the most powerful weapon a team or organization can have.

Every person has control over their choices and their behaviors. Responsible athletes own their choices and actions. They don't look for excuses. In fact, think for a minute as to what is in the middle of excuses? The answer is "u". You make hundreds of choices daily. Those choices are solely yours. It is not the coach's fault that you didn't put forth the effort, were selfish or had a bad attitude. As the old saying goes, excuses don't exist on great teams – it was raining for both teams.

One of Abraham Lincoln's favorite stories to tell was that of a man who killed both of his parents. When that man's trial came and he had to take the witness stand, he argued for mercy because he was an orphan. Take responsibility for your actions. This also reminds me of the story of two brothers whose lives took completely different paths. One became a successful businessman; the other, a homeless alcoholic.

A newspaper reporter asked the homeless brother why his life had turned out as it had. The downtrodden brother complained that his father had been a drunk and verbally abused them growing up. After this, the reporter went to the successful brother and asked the same question. The thriving sibling responded enthusiastically that he had been motivated to make a better life because of his father's drunken, abusive tirades. One of those brothers let the circumstances of his life hold him back. The other had used those same circumstances as the fuel to propel him toward

success.

These two brothers experienced the same set of circumstances but made two different choices. How often do we blame others for our present situation? As an athletic director, I once had an athlete that got arrested for shoplifting and was subsequently suspended per the school's written policies. The parents and the athlete were upset and used any excuse that they could think of. However, they never once said that she didn't steal the items. They admitted that she stole the items, they just didn't want any consequences. You are free to make choices, but you are not free from the consequences of those decisions.

Coach Mike Krzyzewski at Duke likes to talk about collective responsibility. If you are in a sinking boat, you should not be glad that the hole isn't on your end of the boat. In the end, the hole at the other end of the boat is going to end up sinking everybody. With collective responsibility, we are all accountable to each other. When a player hits a double, that is our double. When a player scores a touchdown, that is our touchdown. When a player misses a shot, that is our miss. Collectively, as a team, we are responsible to one another. You are your brother's keeper. What one teammate does affects everybody. What you do affects others.

In the 1997 NBA Finals, Michael Jordan was sick with a stomach virus. There was concern that he might not play in Game 5 against the Utah Jazz. However, it was a big game and his teammates were relying on him. Jordan would not disappoint as he was committed to winning his 5th championship that year. Jordan scored 38 points that night playing 44 of the 48 possible minutes.

The effort he came out and showed us was incredible. He's not only the greatest player ever, but he's the greatest leader ever." It is probably not likely that the Bulls would have won that game that night against Hall of Famers Karl Malone and John Stockton. A loss might have swung the momentum in the Jazz's favor and ultimately cost the Bulls their championship.

Michael felt an obligation and a responsibility to his team. He was committed to his team. But his commitment began years earlier. If he hadn't made daily decisions in the years leading up to this game, he wouldn't have had the strength of conviction to sacrifice as much as he did physically that night. He wouldn't have had the mental toughness of a champion. This reminds me of another story of commitment that Kevin

Templeton tells about in his book *To The Hilt*,

Hernando Cortez was a Spanish conquistador who went to Mexico in 1519. Cortez had six hundred soldiers and eleven ships. He introduced horses to a new continent. Many other conquerors with superior resources had attempted to colonize the Yucatan Peninsula without success. The powerful Aztecs ruled the central valley of Mexico with a mighty empire that plundered weaker tribes and hoarded vast amounts of gold, silver, and jewelry. The Aztecs were feared and hated by the other tribes. Cortez needed a way to energize and motivate his men.

After landing, Cortez's men were probably more than a little fearful and nervous about the unknown challenges they might face in this new land. The men expected their leader to inspire and reassure them that their mission would be a success. Visions of riches no doubt danced in their heads. They were eager to hear Cortez's instructions. The first thing Cortez told the men was, "Burn the boats. All of them."

Would you have done that? Not me! I'd keep one ship just in case the enemies were too tough. The Spaniards had gunpowder weapons, but what if the Aztecs had lasers? What if there were monsters/dinosaurs/zombies/diseases that were too numerous or difficult to deal with? Hey, the unknown can be a very frightening prospect. Cortez answered his crew's fears and maybe his own doubts by burning all the ships. It was his way of pushing all his chips into the center of the table. They were all-in. They were committed to the mission and to each other. They would be wildly successful or die in the attempt. We could say Cortez lived to the hilt. Defeat was never an option.

Kevin Templeton pretty much summed up commitment and taking true ownership in what you are doing. If you are on a team, then you should be all-in with your training and your coachability.

RESPECT

Respect is essentially being selfless and valuing others. Having humility doesn't mean that you think less of yourself, rather that it means you think of yourself less. Think about when you have a conversation with a person – are you listening so that you can understand what they are saying or are you listening with the intent to reply?

Dale Carnegie wrote one of the most read books of all-time called *How to Make Friends and Influence People*. He summed up how we should deal with others when he said,

“There is one all-important law of human conduct. If we obey that law, we shall almost never get into trouble. In fact, that law, if obeyed, will bring us countless friends and constant happiness. But the very instant we break the law, we shall get into endless trouble. The law is this: Always make the other person feel important.”

No matter who you are working with or interacting with, respect is important. We are all in this together whether it as teammates or in everyday life. Everybody has value as a person. Jesse Jackson, the famous civil rights activist once said, “Never look down on anybody unless you're helping them up.”

You should be treating people the way that you want to be treated. Everybody has a story. We can learn something from everybody that we meet. Treat everyone with kindness, not necessarily because they are kindhearted but because you are. Instead of judging people by their past, help them to create a positive future.

Do you thank your teachers for their hard work and sacrifice? Do you publicly applaud your teammates when they do something that largely goes unnoticed? Do you put your lunch tray away so that the lunch lady doesn't have to? Do you greet the custodian with a smile and a hello? In fact, do you know the custodian's name that keeps your school from being a messy heap of trash? Do you make eye contact with people that are talking with you? Do you respect your coach's game plan?

We have differences as people. We listen to different music, we have different backgrounds, we grew up in different cultures, we have different

preferences and we even have different opinions. That doesn't make us right and someone else wrong. It just makes us different. If you are going to maximize your potential for success in life, you have to understand how to work with others and respect others.

Usain Bolt is one of the most accomplished track athletes ever. He was the first person to ever hold the world record in the 100 meter and 200-meter sprints at the same time. After winning a race at the 2012 Olympics, the Jamaican-born Bolt was being interviewed on television when he stopped the interview to stand at attention while the U.S. national anthem was being played as Sanya Richards-Ross was on the medal stand for winning the women's 400-meter race. This was an impressive sign of respect and sportsmanship.

Sportsmanship and respect is a great opportunity to demonstrate to the world what kind of person we are. It is a reflection of our character as much as it is the other person. Consider the example from an NCAA softball game.

In May of 2008, Western Oregon and Central Washington were playing a softball game that could determine which team went to the NCAA Division II playoffs. In the second inning, Western Oregon's Sara Tucholsky hit a home run. This was the senior's first-ever home run. In her excitement, she didn't touch first base and when she turned to go back, her knee buckled and she went down. She was in such pain that she couldn't continue running the bases.

Her team was told, however, that if any of the players or staff tried to help her around the bases, that Sara would be ruled out. If they sent in a pinch-runner then the home run wouldn't count and it would just be a single.

Central Washington's Mallory Holtman and teammate Liz Wallace proceeded to pick up Sara and carried her. As they approached each base, they carefully helped her touch each base. Like the injured Tucholsky, Holtman was a senior but unlike Tucholsky, she had hit many home runs in her career. In fact, she was Central Washington's all-time leader. Holtman and Wallace's sportsmanlike act allowed Tucholsky to earn her first home run ever. It is also contributed to their own team losing that game and not going to the playoffs.

Holtman's Central Washington teammates agreed with her that it was the right thing to do. In fact, the crowd even gave them a standing ovation

as they crossed home plate. That was the ultimate form of respect for another person and respect for the game.

GROWTH

Leaders are learners. If you want to maximize your potential, then you must continue to grow. The University of Michigan football coach Jim Harbaugh likes to say that his team is trying to be better today than they were yesterday and be better tomorrow than they are today. There is no such thing as staying the same. You are either getting better or getting worse. Change is inevitable, but growth is optional. You get to choose whether you want to improve or slide backward.

Are you coachable? Are you open to correction? We can learn something from everyone that we meet and from every situation that we are in. It has been said that wise men learn from other men's failures, but fools learn only by their own failures. Do you learn by watching others? When you are on the bench do you clown around, or do you pay attention? We might already have experienced a lot of success in life, but we can still continue to grow. As John Wooden said,

“It is what you learn after you know it all that counts.”

As humans, we don't like change and we don't like growth because it takes work and is sometimes painful. However, if there is no irritation or effort, then it is difficult for growth to take place.

Consider how we get a valuable pearl. It is because of irritation that leads to something special. A grain of sand or some other small object slips into the shell of the oyster. Because of the irritating nature of the sand, the oyster releases some fluid (I think of it like when we get something in our eye and our eye waters) and surrounds the irritant, eventually encapsulating it in layers of secretion.

Thus, we end up with a beautiful round pearl that was started by some irritant. Through our challenges and experiences – and through others' challenges and experiences – valuable lessons can be learned and growth can be realized.

Many of us do not honestly evaluate ourselves. We make a basket or get a hit and we think everything is okay and don't continually strive to get better. Did we get lucky? Was our competition weak? You should be in a

constant mindset of trying to improve yourself so that your team can improve. How do you evaluate yourself? It is said that we judge ourselves based on our intentions, but we judge others based on their actions. Also, are you honest with your assessments about yourself? If you are not playing as much as you'd like, do you blame your coach (or the politics involved)? If a game is lost, do you blame others (officials, coach, other players, etc...)? What if you didn't even play. It can't be your fault, right?

That reminds me of a story about a coach that I knew. "Coach B" was always talking to his basketball teams about turnovers. They would often discuss whether it was the passer or the receiver's fault on various turnovers. One day during a game, there was a turnover off of a pass. He leaned forward on the bench and asked a couple of his reserves who was at fault for that last turnover? One of them said the passer and one of them said the receiver. He paused for a moment and then yelled, "Wrong! It's your fault. You haven't worked on your game and haven't improved enough so I have to play those guys out there."

That story might be a little harsh but it does make you think. Coaches typically want to play the players that give them the best chance of winning. If coaches lose, it might cost them their jobs. But at the very least, losses cause coaches all kinds of frustrations and headaches. They are competitors, also and don't like to lose. They want to play the players that give them the best chance to win. This doesn't mean a basketball coach will always put out the five most talented players on the floor, but they will try to put the right five players on the floor that fit and work together best. If you are not out there, then you need to honestly evaluate why. Unfortunately, too many athletes take an approach that I saw played out in an unexpected way on the television show, *Shark Tank*.

The rich investors were pitched an idea called "The Skinny Mirror". The concept of this mirror was to make a person feel better about what they look like. However, a flaw in its concept was that the mirror was not an accurate reflection. The Skinny Mirror would be placed in dressing rooms of clothing stores. Customers would try on the clothes and like what they saw in the reflection. They would then buy the clothes because they felt good about how the clothes make them look. The reality is that the mirror did not change the person. It just merely communicated a false reality to them.

If the only feedback that you are wanting to listen to is that of people

not willing to tell you the truth, then you will struggle to maximize your potential. If you only want to hear positive things about you then you will fall short in the growth department. Just because a friend tells you that you should be starting because you are “really good”, doesn’t mean that the friend is correct. Your coach is probably a more accurate mirror than friends or family unless they are willing to hold you accountable for those things that you need to improve upon. At the end of the day, the best way to improve the team is to improve yourself. The best way to improve yourself is to put your pride and ego (The Skinny Mirror) aside and look at yourself objectively.