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## LEADING REGARDLESS OF YOUR ROLE

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*“Not every player can be a star player, but every player must be a star at their role.”*

**– Jay Bilas**

*“I tell our guys every day: Every person on the roster can help us win a game by making just one play.”*

**– Steve Kerr**

*“A life isn’t significant except for its impact on other lives.”*

**– Jackie Robinson**

*“Everybody can be great because anyone can serve.”*

**– Martin Luther King, Jr.**

*“You have a choice to make when you’re not playing. Either you’re invested and a great teammate or you’re not.”*

**– Brad Stevens**

*“The assumption that change has to start at the top is wrong. Start where you are.”*

**– Jessi Lynn Stoner**

**L**eadership is merely influence, nothing more nothing less. Anyone can have influence. Your team is going to have a coach. Your team is going to have captains. Your team is going to have upperclassmen. Your team is probably going to have stars. However, the majority of players on a team do not have traditional leadership status.

Even though the army has ranks and positions, they still teach the concept that everyone is a leader, no matter how far down the totem pole that they function. The lowliest privates are leaders. If they do their job and do it well, they have a positive influence on those around them—they're leaders

Role players win and lose more games than the “stars”. The stars often cancel each other out. The team whose role players help on defense, hit the glass relentlessly, set the tough screens, get the loose balls, stick to their man, and hustle back in transition is usually the team that wins a basketball game.

It is the same with a team that has leaders willing to do the little things. A team with captains willing to do the little things will probably have a championship culture resulting in winning seasons. However, the majority of players on the team are not captains. These players will perform leadership roles that help the team win. The more that they embrace these roles, then the more they increase their opportunities for success.

## **EVERYONE CAN DO THESE THINGS**

Early in my career as a coach, I met with some respected coaches and some of my players and we came up with a list of characteristics that make up a good captain. Once we finalized this one sheet of expectations, my staff realized that it really wasn't specific to captains. Nearly everything that we were asking of our captains, we were also expecting out of our other players. Additionally, there wasn't really anything on the list that a non-captain couldn't own for themselves. This is the not the complete list, but regardless of your role, you can do the following things on your team...

- Committed to teammates and program.
- Represent the program, team, and university on and off the court.
- Enthusiastic and passionate about our basketball program.
- Do not have to be vocal but must be willing to verbalize something when necessary.

- Communicate respectfully and effectively.
- Must value the team's success as much as their own.
- Build and maintain the confidence of their teammates.
- Constructively confront teammates when necessary.
- Maintain poise and composure during stress and adversity.
- Willing to consistently do the right thing.

## **THE 5 LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP**

In John C. Maxwell's 100 books, he has provided leadership insights and principles that have shaped millions. Perhaps none have been as impactful than his concept of *The 5 Levels of Leadership*. It really provided a different perspective on leadership. You don't have to be a captain or a coach to be a leader. Anyone can be a leader. Here are Maxwell's 5 Levels of Leadership with number one being the most basic and least effective,

1. Position (rights) – People follow you because they have to.
2. Permission (relationships) – People follow you because they want to.
3. Production (results) – People follow because of what you have done for the organization.
4. People Development (reproduction) – People follow because of what you have done for them.
5. Pinnacle (respect) – People follow because of who you are and what you represent.

Your goal shouldn't be to get selected as your team's captain. That alone would only put you as a level 1 leader. Your goal is to become a level-5 leader that has influence because you are so well-respected and have the character of someone that people can believe in. Certainly, you can be a level-5 leader as a captain, but a position or title is not necessary for having true influence on your team.

## **RUNNING SPRINTS FOR TURNOVERS**

One of the teams that I coached decided that they would run sprints for every turnover that they committed in the previous game. They did this for the first game. However, after having a number of turnovers in the second game, the captains decided they didn't want to run anymore. I asked a

freshman after the game why she didn't run even though she had committed to doing so. Her response was as you would expect...no one else was doing it so why should she?

She went on to say that she was only a freshman and had no pull with the other girls. I then pointed out that her two best friends were on the team and that surely, they would have run with her. One of those girls also is close with another team member, who might be good friends with another team member and so on. The law of influence multiplied out might have affected the majority of the team. Doing what is right has to start somewhere. Why not be the one to start it.

### **HARRIET TUBMAN**

Anyone can lead regardless of their role because everyone has the ability to influence. If people respect you and believe in you, then your opportunities to influence increase exponentially. Consider the case of Harriet Tubman. She was a very small, black woman living in the middle 1800s. It is nearly impossible to be further from a traditional leadership position than she was.

Yet, she is one of the greatest leaders of all-time because she was so greatly respected and elicited hope in her followers. Because of her ability to influence others, she saved many lives. She was barely five feet tall yet she commanded the attention of everyone that she came into contact. She wasn't educated but was smart, savvy and wise. She didn't have an official title but became the most well-known conductor of the Underground Railroad. She took great pride in the work that she did to free slaves.

“I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say; I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”

She inspired or helped hundreds of southern slaves find their freedom in the North during the Civil War. Tubman was affectionately called “Moses” because she went into the land of captivity and broke the chains of slavery for so many people. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Treasury announced that she would replace former President Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill.

How does someone with a small physical stature and no position of authority end up leaving such a legacy? Tubman found a cause and

sacrificed everything to make the world a better place for the people that she could impact. She couldn't save everyone but she could do her part.

## **MONMOUTH BENCH**

You are a talented player, but you are not starting. What do you do? When you are part of a team, you are faced with the choice each and every day as to whether you will put yourself first or the team first. This is very obvious when you are “riding the pine”. Watch a player's body language and you can see where their thoughts are and what is occupying their focus. The reserves on any team are a big part of the success or failure of that team. The bench can energize and inspire those that are out there playing. The bench players can also bring a team down. As a bench player, you are either an energy-giver or an energy-taker.

One great example of a bunch of guys turning their situation into a positive is the 2015 version of the Monmouth University men's basketball team. Monmouth might not be Duke or Kentucky, but they are still an NCAA Division I team filled with talented players who have worked hard, are proud and want to play. In November of 2015, Monmouth pulled off a huge upset when they defeated Notre Dame. This helped them earn the program's first-ever Top-25 ranking. Head Coach King Rice, who was a starting point guard for the North Carolina Tarheels, had this to say in an ESPN interview,

“I tell everybody on our team that everybody's role is as important as everyone else's, whether you're the last guy or the first guy. That's their role, to get us going on the bench and having the bench involved in the game. This is a new age, how kids are and they're having a blast. I truly think it helps our team.”

Deon Jones, one of the best players in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference who eventually played professionally overseas, said this in a Washington Post interview,

“It is bringing us even more together. We're always talking about it after the game. It shows how everybody is on board

for the team, whether you're playing or on the bench. Because those guys are doing it for us. They didn't do that just to get media attention. They were doing it just to pump us up. And it happened to blow up like this, which is awesome."

On a special aired on the CBS evening news, Steve Noack, who appeared in 27 games as a freshman but would sit out the entire 2015-16 season with an injury said that the bench energy helped the players on the court,

"Absolutely, it's fun for everyone that is involved. So they are on the other side of it, they are playing and they're grinding. But if they look over at the bench and see that we're in the game, we are energized and try and feed energy to them. They are going to be like "Wow if they are in it how can I not be in it?"

## **THE MAN WHO THINKS HE CAN**

Too many athletes look at their situation and don't step up to be a leader because they are not the star. They are not the captain. Maybe they have self-confidence issues or feel that it isn't their place because they are only a freshman, only a reserve or a newcomer on the team. These are just excuses that distract us from doing what is right and using who we are to influence others in a positive way.

Zig Zigler, the great salesman and motivational speaker used to talk about having a positive mindset and that whether you thought you could do something or thought you couldn't do something, then you probably were right. He might have been inspired in his way of thinking from a poem by Walter D. Wintle,

If you think you are beaten, you are  
If you think you dare not, you don't,  
If you like to win, but you think you can't  
It is almost certain you won't.  
If you think you'll lose, you're lost  
For out of the world we find,  
Success begins with a fellow's will

It's all in the state of mind.  
If you think you are outclassed, you are  
You've got to think high to rise,  
You've got to be sure of yourself before  
You can ever win a prize.  
Life's battles don't always go  
To the stronger or faster man,  
But sooner or later the man who wins  
Is the man WHO THINKS HE CAN!

### **A SIMPLE GESTURE**

You don't have to be a coach, a star player or a captain to have a positive influence on someone. Here is a story that I read in Jim Tressel's *The Winner's Manual*. It was originally written by John W. Schlatter,

Mark was walking home from school one day when he noticed the boy ahead of him had tripped and dropped all of the books he was carrying along with two sweaters, a baseball bat, a glove, and a small tape recorder. Mark knelt down and helped the boy pick up the scattered articles. Since they were going the same way, he helped to carry the burden.

As they walked Mark discovered the boy's name was Bill, that he loved video games, baseball, and history, that he was having a lot of trouble with his other subjects and that he had just broken up with his girlfriend. They arrived at Bill's home first and Mark was invited in for a Coke and to watch some t.v. The afternoon passed pleasantly with a few laughs and some shared small talk, then Mark went home.

They continued to see each other around school, had lunch together once or twice. They ended up at the same High school where they had brief contacts over the years. Finally, the long awaited senior year came, and three weeks before graduation, Bill asked Mark if they could talk. Bill reminded him of the day years ago when they had first met.

"Do you ever wonder why I was carrying so many things from school that day?" asked Bill. "You see, I cleaned out my locker because I didn't want to leave a mess for anyone else. I had stored away some of my mother's pills and I was going home to commit suicide. But after we spent some time together I realized that if I had, I would have missed that time and so many others that might follow. So you see, Mark, when you picked up my books for me that day, you did a lot more. You saved my life."

Just a little bit of kindness and concern for people saved a life. Mark had no role in this kid's life. Mark wasn't a star football player or student council president. He wasn't out to save the world. Mark was just a boy that wanted to do the right thing. That right thing led to a friendship. What he didn't know at the time was that doing the right thing would influence another person to continue living life.

We might not encounter as serious of a situation during our life, but how about the teammate that is thinking about quitting but hasn't told anyone? Maybe an encouraging word will be just they need to hear. Maybe a player is a selfish teammate but they see your kindness and start to wonder about your attitude and that eventually changes them? You never know how great an effect you can have when you care about people and do the right thing.

### **EMMITT SMITH HALL OF FAME SPEECH**

Statistically speaking, Emmitt Smith is the best running back to ever play in the NFL. In his 15 seasons, he gained 18,355 rushing yards and scored 164 rushing touchdowns. Both of these are records and will most likely never be broken. Smith also won three Super Bowls with the Dallas Cowboys. During his induction speech to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio on August 7, 2010, he highlighted what true leadership is all about when he called out his former teammate, Daryl "Moose" Johnston,

"Daryl Johnston, where are you? Will you please stand? You mean the world to me (tearing up) not just because we shared the same backfield, but because you sacrificed so



much for me. People don't understand what it took to be a fullback in our system, the sacrifices you made not simply with your body but your whole spirit. You took care of me as though you were taking care of your little brother. Without you, without you, I know today would not have been possible. I love you from the bottom of my heart.”

Johnston was an All-American running back at Syracuse that would be drafted in the second round by the Cowboys in 1989. He became the first fullback to ever get selected to the NFL Pro Bowl. He played all ten seasons with the Cowboys. “Moose” played in 149 straight games from the time he was drafted until he got injured in 1997.

In today’s NFL, the fullback position has gone the way of the dinosaur. There was a time, however, when many teams utilize the fullback to be the lead blocker for their star tailback. If they were lucky they would get one or two carries per game. Their main purpose was to sacrifice their body and create a better hole for the star to run through. An offensive lineman would often time be matched up nose-to-nose with a defender. However, the fullback would have a 5-10 yard running start and then crash into a defender that was typically bigger. This violent collision was repeated over and over again, especially with Johnston and the Cowboys since no one in NFL history carried the ball more than Emmitt Smith.

It was a tremendous gesture by Smith to praise Johnston during his Hall of Fame speech. He understood that role players are the key to a team’s success. Darryl Johnston will probably never be inducted into the Hall of Fame as a player but he definitely was a Hall of Fame teammate. Even though he was not a superstar player for the Cowboys, he played his role to the best of his ability and have a tremendously positive impact on his teammates. Even though he was a role player, he was definitely one of the Dallas Cowboys’ Most Valuable Leaders!

## **I WANT TO WIN MORE THAN ANYTHING**

At the end of one of my years of coaching, I was conducting individual meetings with players. As I was meeting with Julie, one of our more mature and respected players, she was telling me how all she wanted to do was win a championship the next year. We had the potential because we had a bunch of talented newcomers returning. Julie said that she was willing to do

whatever it took to win because that meant the world to her. She even mentioned that she was willing to sacrifice her playing time or role on the team to make that happen. I was happy to hear that.

As we continued to talk, Julie told me that I needed to do something in the off-season to curb some of the alcohol and drug use that was going on with some of her team members. This was a surprise to me. Once she told me some more details and who the players were, it made more sense to me because they had been very inconsistent toward the end of the year. As more details came out, I became more and more disappointed because there were a number of teammates that knew about this use and had even been at the parties but didn't do anything to stop them. Julie told me that a couple of them had even talked about it but were worried that if they said anything to me that they'd be considered snitches but if they said anything to the girls with the problems, that they might have their friendship questioned. Julie admitted that she also felt this way.

This kind of thing happens often with friends. They are scared to confront or hold their friend accountable because it is either uncomfortable or that they are afraid of losing the friendship. However, if you truly are a friend then you want the best for your friend. Julie wasn't the best player on the team. Julie wasn't a star or even a starter. Julie wasn't even a team captain, but she was a friend. But at the end of the day, she chose her feelings and her comfort level over the welfare of her friends. She was more concerned about herself than she was in trying to help her friends. Sometimes your role on the team is to be a friend that acts like a true friend.

Additionally, from a pure basketball standpoint, Julie had said that her number one priority was to win a championship. If that was truly the case then I would be very upset at my "friends" for sabotaging that goal through their poor choices and bad behavior. Winning a championship wasn't as important to Julie as her desire to hang out and have fun with her teammates – who were costing her a chance at a championship.

### **CHAMPIONSHIP INFLUENCED BY WALK-ON**

When John Calipari left the University of Memphis to coach men's basketball at the University of Kentucky, his replacement was Josh Pastner. Pastner would eventually move to the ACC to lead Georgia Tech. Pastner has had success as a big-time NCAA Division I basketball coach but he didn't always have a glamorous leadership position. Yes, he has an NCAA

championship ring from his playing days at the University of Arizona but he wasn't the one scoring the baskets or dishing out the assists. However, as a player, Pastner may have been just as valuable as some of his more famous teammates, including Jason Terry, Mike Bibby, Michael Dickerson, and Miles Simon.

Pastner was a walk-on who averaged 0.9 points per game in his four-year career for the Wildcats, but what he did as a freshman would prove to be valuable. He had a key to the McKale Center so he would get the stars together and they would shoot nightly at the arena. This was key to a season that would eventually see the Wildcats knock off three #1 seeds in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Kansas on their way to winning the 1997 National Championship. This was even more remarkable when you consider that Arizona only finished 5<sup>th</sup> in their conference that year and entered the NCAA Tournament as a 4<sup>th</sup> seed. Here is how Doug Haller of the *Arizona Republic* would describe it,

Freshmen Josh Pastner and Mike Bibby began shooting at night. Just the two of them. At the university's McKale Center if it were available, but if not, then at a middle school or at a court near the football stadium. Three hundred shots. Over and over.

...Over time, the group grew. Junior wing Michael Dickerson joined the freshmen, and then junior guard Miles Simon. One night, Pastner, optimistic by nature, told his teammates that they had no limits.

...“Man, I think we can win a national championship,” he said, according to Simon's memory.

...“Josh, shut up, man, you don't know what you're talking about,” Simon replied. “Dude, you're not even going to play. What are you doing?”

...Simon didn't realize it then, but he would soon. The 1996-97 Wildcats had something special. A poised freshman

in Bibby. Seasoned vets in Dickerson and Simon. A versatile guard in sophomore Jason Terry.

...“I tell people this all the time: It’s the greatest run in the history of the NCAA Tournament,” Pastner said with conviction. “It doesn’t get enough credit. I don’t want to hear about the '85 Villanova team. This run by the Arizona Wildcats in 1997 was the greatest NCAA Tournament run in history.”

...Joked Pastner: “I’m the all-time leading rebounder in the history of Arizona.”

How many of us would have that kind of optimism and attitude when we weren’t playing? How many of us could stay upbeat and help the very teammates that were keeping us from getting playing time? In an article for *Sports Illustrated*, John O’Keefe further highlighted Pastner’s team-first attitude and the influence he had on the team’s stars,

At his first team meeting, Pastner stood up and preached the value of hard work to All--Pac-10 guard Miles Simon and future NBAers Mike Bibby, Michael Dickerson, and Jason Terry. The players laughed. Soon, though, Simon started doing the drills Pastner had recommended to help his stroke. Bibby joined the workouts, and then Terry and forward Bennett Davidson. Says Bibby, now a point guard with the Sacramento Kings, "A lot of those drills I still use today." By season's end, Bibby and Pastner had become roommates.

During his time as a player at Arizona, Hall of Fame coach Lute Olson allowed Pastner to help out with scouting and film break down. He was also in charge of the scout team and continued to push his teammates every day to get better. Here was a guy that started out as a walk-on that became friends with future NBA guys and helped them develop their game even though he was their peer. They valued his maturity and his insights.

## NEAL BESHEARS LEADS PURDUE

Going into the 2014-15 season, the Purdue University men's basketball team was coming off of a losing season and to make matters worse, they only had one senior. Neal Beshears was the Boilermakers only senior and until coach Matt Painter gave him a scholarship in August of that year, he was also a walk-on.

However, Beshears' leadership skills were evident and he played a big part in helping their heralded freshman class transition to college. The Boilermakers won 21 games that year and went to the NCAA Tournament. Combining his playing ability with a hand injury, Beshears only played in one game his senior year, but he was still a valuable leader. Nathan Baird of the *Journal & Courier* wrote about Beshears' influence on the team,

"Most (walk-ons), because they don't play a lot, they're afraid that if they say something, the guys that play a lot aren't going to respond to them," Beshears said. "I think a lot of the guys respect us and respect the walk-ons. If we're doing what we're supposed to it helps us influence them as far as doing the right things and playing the right way."

..."The walk-ons that we have, they have a lot of knowledge and a lot of good input," sophomore guard Kendall Stephens said. "We as players, we look to that and we accept it and we realize they know what they're talking about. They're great athletes and they can contribute. They're teammates just like us."

...Over the summer, Beshears and the other walk-ons (Stephen Toyra and Raphael Davis) organized workouts to help integrate the five incoming freshmen into the Purdue system.

...Beshears said "Giving them a transition period in the summer where we can teach them, where it's a non-confrontational environment and you don't have any coaches yelling at you and it's a slower pace where they can learn, I think that's going to be a good thing for them."

... "He's been in our program four years and done a good job," Purdue coach Matt Painter said. "He practices hard, he knows what's going on. The guy shows up and plays hard every single day."

... "He's working really hard, whether it be in the weight room or in practice," Davis said. "He's a guy that guys look up to just because of his work ethic. He shows how to work hard.

"I'd rather us win than get playing time," Beshears said. "If that's the trade-off, I'm fine with that."

In an interview with Kyle Rowland of the *Journal Gazette*, Purdue coach Matt Painter had high praise for Beshears and how his influence helped the team be successful when he said about Beshears,

"Neal has been very consistent. He's worked hard. He's quiet so it's hard for him to speak up, but he has. Leadership sometimes is showing up every day, working hard and doing your best. People ultimately respect others who do things the right way and work hard, and he fits into that category."

Anyone can earn the respect of their teammates and coaches by leading themselves. Once you earn this respect, then the sky is the limit in terms of how much influence you have on your teammates. When they respect you, they will listen to you.