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# INTRODUCTION

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*“A year from now, you’ll wish you started today.”*

**– Karen Lamb**

*“There is a choice you have to make in everything you do. So keep in mind that in the end, the choice you make makes you.”*

**– John Wooden**

*“You cannot change your destination overnight, but you can your direction overnight.”*

**– Jim Rohn**

**T**his book is written with the student-athlete in mind. It is designed to help student-athletes understand how they can help their team achieve more success regardless of their role on the team. Whether a player is a freshman or senior, reserve or starter, the examples and insights in the following chapters will help walk them through the situations that they will encounter as a member of a team. Student-athletes can read the book straight through or pick out specific chapters that they are most curious about.

Even though the book is for student-athletes, coaches can gain a great deal by reading it, as well. In fact, a team’s results are optimized if a coach is reinforcing and revisiting the themes and insights contained in this book throughout the season. Coaches feel free to put the quotes that start each chapter on your bulletin board in the locker room. I love quotes and intentionally included more than normal at the start of each chapter.

Leadership training is not a one-time event. It is a continual process that a coaching staff should make an intentional part of the regular

schedule. Leadership is a skill that student-athletes should be learning and practicing daily just as if they are taking batting practice or shooting free throws.

The topic of leadership oftentimes becomes cliché and boring because we treat it either as something that most people can't obtain or don't need to obtain. Sportscasters and coaches say all the time that this team had great leadership or that team struggled with leadership, but they rarely expand upon those opinions. In fact, those statements are oftentimes rooted in results-oriented thinking. We are to believe that good teams have good leadership and bad teams have poor leadership. This is neither true nor false. Sometimes talented teams win despite their tangibles and strong character teams lose because of their lack of talent.

Our goal for developing leadership is to maximize an individual's and a team's potential. Talented teams might win but they don't always maximize their potential. The talented student-athletes on winning teams also don't always develop their student-athletes to be successful in life, which is a far bigger and more crucial game. A talented team can be defeated. A talented team with strong character and positive leadership is nearly unbeatable. More importantly, those individual members will have a greater likelihood to be successful in whatever they set their mind to because they have built a strong foundation and have developed positive daily habits.

If you have an average team, we want to help make you good. If you already have a good team, we want to help you become great. If you have a championship-level team, then we want you to develop even more consistency. Always improving. Continually striving for perfection, even though it is not attainable, should lead to a level of excellence that is seen in teams such as the New England Patriots, Golden State Warriors, or the University of Connecticut women's basketball team.

## **PERSPECTIVE**

To become the leader that you were meant to be, you must look at things from a different point of view. Two stories come to my mind when thinking about perspective. The first is a little boy that is playing baseball by himself,

"I'm the greatest baseball player in the world," a little boy boasted as he strutted around his backyard. Shouldering his

bat, he tossed a baseball up, swung, and missed. "I am the greatest ball player ever," he reiterated. He picked up the ball again, swung, and missed again. Stopping a moment to examine his bat, he stooped and picked up his ball. "I am the greatest baseball player who ever lived!" The momentum of his swing nearly knocked him down. But the ball plopped, unscathed, at his feet. "Wow!" he exclaimed. "What a pitcher!"

Mark McCormack, author of *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*, wrote a story detailing the issue of varying points of view for Entrepreneur magazine,

"A few years ago, I was standing in an airport ticket line. In front of me were two children fighting over an ice cream cone. In front of them was a woman in a mink coat. I could see this was an accident waiting to happen. Should I interfere? I was still pondering this when I heard the girl tell the boy, 'If you don't stop, Charlie, you'll get hairs from that lady's coat on your cone.'"

For most of us, the traditional way of looking at leadership is not the most effective way. Relying solely on the coach, captain(s), senior(s) or star player to be the leader will potentially leave you with an overall leadership void on your team. Positional leadership can only take a team so far. Yes, there is a need for positional leadership, but there is just as much a need for non-traditional leaders on a team. Think about any team that you have been a member of. Chances are that not every member of the team liked or respected the traditional, positional leader. If that was the case, then who was it that was leading those team members?

A team that is fully maximizing their potential has as many team members as possible that are all going in the same direction. Ideally, a team wants every member to be rowing the boat in the same direction. This is hard to accomplish if the only leaders on a team are positional leaders because they do not always earn that position with unanimous approval.

Therefore, what you will be reading in this book and getting with the free online resources are proven strategies and insights on leadership that

might be different than you are used to. That is okay. If you truly want to maximize your success, then you need to be willing to do things better. Part of being better and improving is honest self-evaluation and part of self-evaluation is looking at things from a different point of view.

For example, your coach will typically give you a scouting report on the opponent prior to the next game. This is so that you can see things from a different perspective and understand your opponent. The same is true for the concepts in this book. If you want to be prepared for your next season, then you must look at things differently in order to solidify your strengths and find your weaknesses. Leadership is no different. “The way it has always been done” is what is normally said by teams and individuals that refuse to reach their potential. Their thoughts seal their fate long before their actions do.

If you want to be more successful and ultimately help your team have more success, then you need to see yourself as a leader. Your team will probably have captains but that doesn’t mean that you can’t be the captain of you. If you are leading yourself – which really is just doing what you are supposed to do, then you will give yourself a chance to be successful. When you are successful at leading yourself, then you make it more possible to influence your teammates.

This is when you become your team’s Most Valuable Leader. When your team has lots of players doing what is necessary to be the MVL, then the sky is the limit for your team’s success.