

NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD; INDEED, IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS. —Margaret Mead

The Hard Hat: 21 Ways to Be a Great Teammate (Gordon, Jon)

There was the selflessness, the work ethic, the kindness, the gentlemanliness, and a total lack of arrogance or sense of entitlement. He seemed to be exactly the kind of person we could all respect—

We tell them that if they come here, we will provide them with an opportunity to train hard and be one of the hardest-working teams in the country with no illusion of wins and losses. If you don't like to work hard for others, this is not the right place for you.

By weeding out the wrong people, we are able to zero in on the right guys that fit our culture and then partner with them as they develop into great teammates and a great team.”

We wanted our culture and program to be defined by our toughness, selflessness, and hard work.

Benjamin Franklin on it: “Well done is better than well said.”

He worked so hard and was so selfless that people gravitated to him as a leader. He had moral authority because he did everything the right way. He never slacked and never took a play off in practice or games.

Instead of complaining to his coaches and teammates, George focused on improving.

Guys worked hard because they knew George was working hard. He pushed everyone to work harder and get better without saying a word. He didn't have to. They saw how he went about his business. Even the older players on the team looked up to him.

She told them how much George had loved them—how much he loved this team. She told them that he had chosen Cornell because of them. She said, “This is a lesson to make sure you spend time with your friends, love your family, and look out for others. Tell your friends and family you love them.”

The words she wrote on that day, several years before George's passing, spoke to all of our hearts about how we felt about George and the light that he brought to us.

I came upon a room that was filled with a great light; I was drawn into it. As I looked at the statues in the room, I came upon a niche and a statue of Saint George. I sat in front of it and wrote: ‘You are young and beautiful and delicate, reflecting only peace. You watch over others in the soft light of the room. The darkness is gone. You may rest now, Saint George.’”

So, we decided to continue the season, but we decided we were not going to play to win for George. We would play to honor the man and teammate he was. That didn't mean winning at all costs. We were going to play the way he had played the game and honor him through our actions and spirit. From that moment on, everyone focused on being a great teammate—not on winning—and we all changed. We became the ultimate team: selfless, committed, united, hardworking, passionate, and relentless. Never before had I been part of a team like that. It was a defining moment for us and for our program.

It was all about playing hard, playing tough, and having the integrity to do things the right way all the time—not part of the time—and staying committed to each other and George's legacy.

As a result, Cornell's lacrosse team became a selfless and effort-driven program.

I wondered if my friends would be affected the same way if I had died on the same field as George. Would hundreds be gathering for a dinner years later to support my foundation? Would a program have been transformed because of me? The honest answer was no. I wasn't the kind of teammate George was. I was a hard worker and I hustled, but at 18, 19, 20 years old, I was more concerned about myself than others. There were times I didn't give 100 percent. I didn't practice as much as I should have. I wasn't always consistent and didn't always lead by example. I wondered exactly what George had done, besides what Jeff shared, that made him such a great teammate.

As a team member, one of the things you control every day is your effort. When you work harder and sweat more, you bring out the best in yourself and your team.

As a teammate, you speak most powerfully through your actions.

Set the example in all that you do, so when you speak, people will listen because you have earned their respect by what you have communicated with your actions.

Humble and hungry are a powerful combination. The minute you think you have arrived at the door of greatness, it will get slammed in your face. The key to success is to be a lifelong learner who continuously works hard to improve. When you stay humble and hungry and focus on the process, you will love what the process produces.

Each day, it's important to wake up and strive to be better today than you were yesterday. Identify what you need to work on to get better and focus on improving each day.

Don't settle for average. Instead, chase greatness.

To help yourself and your team, implement the 1 percent rule, which says that a little more time, energy, effort, practice, focus, and care can bring big results. If you can push yourself to give just 1 percent more during each practice, each game, each film session, each class, each homework assignment, and each project, over time you will see big results. 5.

As a team member, you not only control your effort but you also control your attitude. One of the most powerful things you can do to be a great teammate is to stay positive and share your positive energy with others.

I walked into my coach's office as a freshman and complained to him that I wasn't playing well. He walked me toward the office door and said, "Hey kid, we don't talk this game, we play it. Don't complain. Do it on the field."

There are moments when we feel like we have a right to complain. But complaining causes us to focus on everything but being our best.

But you can control how you respond and, so often, this determines the outcome.

And teammates told me that no one loved being part of a team more than George; everything he did was for the team, not for applause.

He loved making his teams better. He loved helping them win. He loved making an impact, and did so by always putting the team first.

Their motto is whatever it takes to make the team better.

It's not easy to put the team first, but if you want to be a great teammate like George, it's something you must work on. In today's self-consumed world, you have to work as hard to be a great teammate as you do to be a great performer. In the end, your team doesn't care if you are a superstar. They care if you are a super teammate.

If you want to be a great teammate, you can't just talk about how committed you are. You must demonstrate your commitment in all that you do.

And always remember: If you want commitment, be committed.

When you are inconsistent, your team doesn't know what to expect from you, and it makes it difficult for them to trust and count on you.

To be a great teammate, you want to be consistent in your attitude, effort, and actions.

Focus on becoming the best version of yourself every day.

To hold your team accountable, you first have to hold yourself accountable.

When you expect the best of yourself, you can expect the best from your team, and when you expect the best from your team, they will rise up to meet your expectations.

George is a great example of the impact you can have when you give all and take nothing.

To be a great teammate, it's essential to communicate with your team members collectively and individually. Communication builds trust.

Great communication requires one-on-one conversations that help build relationships. In this spirit, I want to encourage you to make time to communicate with your teammates.

When you connect, you move past superficial conversations and communication; really get to know your teammates and develop a stronger bond with them.

The message they receive from the world is that it's all about the individual, not the team. This creates a disconnect between personal and team goals, and it undermines shared success. I have found with the coaches and teams I have worked with, that when people focus on becoming a connected team, me dissolves into we. Bonds are strengthened. Relationships are developed and the team becomes much stronger. A connected team becomes a committed and powerful team.

If you want to be good, focus on making yourself better. If you want to be great, focus on making yourself and your team better.

He didn't focus on trying to make himself feel good. He always found ways to make his teammates feel better.

This doesn't mean they think less of themselves; it means they think of themselves less.

To be a great teammate, it's important to show your teammates that you care about them. You may not drive people home from practice, but you can find your own unique way (I call this a caring trademark)

The truth is, if you don't love your team, you can never be a great teammate. Don't wait for your team to love you; first commit to loving them.

You have to be willing to sacrifice what you want for what the team needs.

We live in a world where everyone wants to be great, but the truth is, only through service and sacrifice will anyone become great.

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George left the Cornell lacrosse program better than he found it. His selfless leadership, warrior competitiveness, joyful spirit, undeniable loyalty, love, compassion, and heart made his team and Cornell lacrosse better because of the way he led and lived.

“Two events in my life have transformed my coaching philosophy: 9/11 and George's passing. Losing George on the field that day taught me perspective and how to focus on relationships. I now let my team know I love them. I drive them to be their best, but let them know I care about them.