

You Win in the Locker Room First: The 7 C's to Build a Winning Team in Business, Sports, and Life (Gordon, Jon;Smith, Mike)

Culture drives expectations and beliefs; expectations and beliefs drive behavior; behavior drives habits; and habits create the future. It all starts with culture.

I've always believed that culture is defined and created from the top down, but it comes to life from the bottom up.

We wanted to have team members who were going to positively represent the organization on and off the field. It was important that we had players who were going to be good teammates and citizens.

Culture consists of the shared purpose, attitudes, values, goals, practices, behaviors, and habits that define a team or organization. Many coaches focus only on the culture shared by the players, but the fact is that everyone in an organization shapes the culture. To be successful, you need everyone in your organization thinking, believing, talking, and behaving in sync. You need everyone to be aligned with the same beliefs, expectations, behaviors, and habits.

However, the most overlooked aspect in team sports, and what most coaches and leaders fail to grasp, is the fact that it is your culture that will determine whether your strategy works and is sustainable. It is the culture you create that is going to determine whether your players perform and execute.

In the face of all this, it is your culture that will be the driving force to create the resiliency, toughness, passion, and attitude to overcome the obstacles in your way.

Culture will. You must spend more time on building your culture than on everything else. Culture is what produces wins over time.

“What do we stand for?” and “What do we want to be known for?”

“We know who our people are. We know who fits our culture.” Jeff built a culture that was defined by a blue-collar work ethic (symbolized by a

hard hat), as well as selflessness, teamwork, relentless effort, and continuous improvement.

It's a great example that once you know what you stand for, decisions are easy to make.

The seven responsibilities everyone had were to: Have fun, work hard, and enjoy the journey. Show respect for every person you have contact with in the organization. Put the team first. Successful teams have teammates that are unselfish and willing to put their individual goals behind the team's goals. Do your job. It is defined, but you must always be prepared for it to change (especially if you're a player). Appropriately handle victory and defeat, adulation and humiliation. Do not get too high in victory or too low in defeat. Be the same person every day. Understand that all organizational decisions aim to make the team better, stronger, and more efficient. Have a positive attitude. Use positive language (both verbal and body language).

We were not going to concern ourselves with our overall record; instead, we were going to focus on mastering the skills to be the absolute best team we could be in 2008.

Monday meeting prior to the start of the season that I told our team that we were not going to have any goals in the traditional sense, and that we all knew how we were going to be evaluated at the end of the season. I told them that we were going to focus on milestones and that after we accomplished one, we would be presented with the next. The first milestone was to win a game and we were going to get that chance the coming Sunday. They were also told the importance of first impressions. You only get one chance at a first impression and that moment, good or bad, usually sets the tone for the season. We definitely took advantage of leaving a great first impression.

After that, we went on to win the game. First milestone accomplished. The next milestone was to start a streak and win on the road. Despite the positive energy that remained after our first-game win, we lost the next game, and our milestone shifted. Now instead of starting a winning streak, we aimed to avoid back-to-back losses. I let the team know that if we could go the entire season without losing back-to-back games and

put together at least one two-game winning streak, we were going to like where we were in November. After that, we made it a milestone to beat our division opponents because winning our division would be the most direct path to the playoffs (or as some call it, the second season). After each new game, I presented a new milestone to attempt to accomplish. I told them that the more milestones we were able to reach, the better our standing would be at the end of the season. In 2008, our focus was on the journey, not the destination.

Jon had often told me that if you focus on the fruit and ignore the root, the tree will die, but if you continue to care for the root and focus on your culture, process, people, and purpose, then you'll always have a great supply of fruit.

Leadership is a transfer of purpose, passion, optimism, and belief.

Research from the HeartMath Institute (heartmath.org) shows that when you have a feeling in your heart, it goes to every cell in the body, then outward—and other people up to 10 feet away can sense feelings transmitted by your heart. This means that each day you are broadcasting to your team how you feel. You are either broadcasting positive energy or negative energy, apathy or passion, indifference or purpose. Research from Harvard University also supports that idea that the emotions you feel are contagious and affect the people around you. Your team is just as likely to catch your bad mood as the swine flu, and on the flip side, they will catch your good mood as well.

Great cultures are built with positive contagious energy so it's essential that you and your team share it.

Will you infuse your team with positive energy or be an energy vampire and suck the life out of them?

Great leaders and teams are positively contagious with a vision and purpose that drives them, positive thoughts that fuel them, and emotions that energize them. Great leaders and teammates realize that their overall attitudes affect everyone in the locker room and the building.

Your vision and mission should be simple, clear, bold, and compelling.

Research shows that people are most energized when they are contributing to a bigger cause beyond themselves

As a leader, you want to inspire your team to move beyond their own selfish desires and concerns and contribute to a cause bigger than them. When your team has a greater vision and purpose they will play with greater passion and energy.

“The world trains people to be pessimistic...one of the most important things I must do here is to make sure my players and staff believe that tomorrow will be better than today.”

The research supports this and actually shows that optimism is a competitive advantage. Manju Puri and David Robinson at Duke University found that optimistic people work harder, get paid more, win at sports more regularly, get elected to office more often, and live longer! It turns out that being positive is not just a nice, feel-good way to live but is, in fact, the way to live if you want better health, more meaningful relationships, and greater individual and team success.

Every meeting with his team is an opportunity for him to tell them what they can achieve if they truly believe.

Shortly after I was hired in Atlanta I wrote down the expectations I had for myself. The first one that I wrote in my notes was “Never a bad day, only bad moments.”

This was a commitment to never let myself have a bad day. It did not matter how many bad or challenging moments would occur; at the end of the day, I would make sure to identify enough good and uplifting moments to declare it a good day. It is so much easier to deal with and overcome the bad moments when you think about how fortunate you are to have an opportunity to impact and lead others. So instead of allowing myself to focus on the negative, I created moments of gratitude and focused on the positive. Sure there were days when I had to really work to find the good, but I still found it and did my best to share a positive attitude with everyone in the building.

discovered that when I approached the challenges of the day with a positive, helpful attitude to serve others, it not only uplifted my spirits, but also set the tone for the entire organization and helped everyone perform at their highest levels.

First, he was always accountable to himself and then to the guy that lined up next to him. He always made sure that every member of the team understood that we were all relying on each other to be successful.

Make sure you have the right team members to strengthen your culture instead of people who suck the energy out of it. You can do everything right as a leader and coach, but if you don't have positive mentors and team members in the locker room your culture and team will fall apart.

While it's obvious who your energy vampires are, complaining can often grow undetected beneath the surface and, if left to breed and grow, it can have disastrous effects on your team as well.

If they had a complaint they could bring it to me if they also had a suggested solution to the complaint.

Guys would catch themselves complaining and stop. They realized that complaining is toxic to the team and locker room. I have found that a positive locker room helps create positive performance on the field.

The character you possess during the drought is what your team will remember during the harvest.

“My greatest challenge right now is to be consistent myself. I must be the ‘same guy’ all the time. I must be relentless in my pursuit of being consistent. I must discipline myself to be fully present so I can be in the moment with each person or player. Then we have a chance to maximize the moment together. My challenge is to be so consistent and optimistic, that every person in the organization feels that tomorrow will be better than today and we expect it to be.”

When you are moody, people around you don't know what to expect from you and this causes them to lose trust in you. I told them that no

matter what is going on with school or your personal life, when you walk into the locker room you have to decide to impact your teammates in a positive way.

You cannot blame it on factors outside of your control (e.g., injuries, bad breaks, etc.). Instead of allowing the guys to think they were going to automatically get back to the playoffs, the NFC Championship game, and even the Super Bowl, I should have done what I had done in previous years: create more urgency, focus on our desire to be great, identify what we need to do to improve, and most importantly focus on the process, not the outcome.

Doc Rivers, the head coach of the Los Angeles Clippers, and I asked him what was the most important thing he does as a coach. He said, "I communicate to my team. Not just collectively as a team but individually. I have to know where each person is in order to lead them where I need them to be. Since I communicate often with them, I know who is struggling with a personal issue. I know who needs encouragement. I know who needs to be challenged."

I have found that where there is a void in communication, negativity will fill it.

Research says that you can't be stressed and thankful at the same time. So breathe, practice gratitude, and in the midst of busyness find mindful moments of calm to make communication and connection happen. You and your team will be glad you did.

We have so many different ways that we can communicate with one another, but unfortunately we are connecting less meaningfully.

I have seen a change over the last couple of years in regard to face-to-face interaction in the locker room. More guys are connecting with their devices than with each other.

This became alarming as I saw team members missing opportunities to cultivate relationships. The best teams I have been around were teams that enjoyed being around each other.

You might have a no-phone zone, or a no-phone time during road trips to encourage conversation.

As a leader, you have to be intentional about connecting with your team and creating ways for team members to connect with each other.

One of my favorite exercises is “Hero, Hardship, and Highlight.” This is where team members share who their hero is, a highlight (great moment) in their life, and a hardship they had to face.

I also love the “Defining Moment” exercise. This is where you go around the room and people share a defining moment in their life. When you learn about someone's defining moment, you get to know him or her a whole lot better.

Of course you have to make sure you create a safe place where everyone knows that everything shared is confidential and not to be shared with anyone outside of the team.

These moments of connection really made a difference. When your team is connected, you will see and feel it in the way they treat each other. You will see players and staff interacting on many different levels. You will see players' and coaches' respect for one another grow, and the other people within the organization will tear down the proverbial walls in which people and departments typically operate. This is one of the leading indicators that you have a connected team. When you are a truly connected team you will see players participating together in the functions outside of the locker room.

It's not about you. It's about committing yourself to your team.

If you commit to helping each member of your team be the best version of him- or herself, over time this will lead to greater individual and team performance.

The players may have understood the concept of service and sacrifice before, but after seeing the graves of the fallen soldiers, listening to personal stories of service and sacrifice, and feeling the loss of the family members, they truly got it. It's also a powerful lesson for all of us. Feeling is more powerful than hearing. Your team must feel your commitment. Not just hear it. When we hear from a leader, we will learn; but when we feel a leader's commitment, we will be transformed.

With expectations comes pressure and stress that drives a leader to survive, which leads to self-preservation rather than serving the team.

When leaders become focused on the fruit instead of the root and worry about the outcome instead of the process of developing team members, they may survive in the short run, but they will not thrive in the long run.

After all, humility doesn't mean you think less of yourself. It just means you think of yourself less and your team more (to paraphrase C.S. Lewis).

They worry about what successes and failures look like to the world outside the locker room.

Our rule of thumb is that you have to care more about what your team thinks about you than what the forces outside the locker room think of you.

As the great NBA coach Chuck Daly would say, shout praise in public and whisper criticism in private.

Never underestimate the importance of making time to make someone feel special.

Every person, no matter how successful, wants to be appreciated, respected, and valued. Everyone wants to feel cared about. Everyone, ultimately, wants to be loved.

As a parent, I was doing the same to my children. Their performance was all about how it made me look and feel, not about how playing a sport helped them develop as people. I changed and became a transformational parent and everything changed for the better.

True leaders don't create followers. They create more leaders.

We believe in giving every person a chance to become a high character person.

The difference between the two is that passion involves a belief about something. Emotions involve feelings about something.

Emotions are hard to control and they are usually self-serving and illogical, weakening your leadership. Passion, on the other hand, is the engine that drives you to be a great leader and build a winning team.

You want to be a passionate leader who makes decisions that are based on belief and principle over those that are based on feeling. After all, you won't always feel like doing the right thing, but if you live based on belief and principle you will do what needs to be done. Sometimes you don't feel like working hard, but your belief in improvement and growth moves you to do it. When you have a belief in something, there is a process that you have gone through to form that belief. When you are passionate about a subject, you are well versed in it and the decisions that you make are going to be well thought out and studied. Emotion, on the other hand, causes you to act in illogical ways more often than not. An emotional decision is usually a spur-of-the-moment, by-the-seat-of-your-pants decision that has not been well thought out and often leads to poor outcomes. Emotions are hard to control and they are usually self-serving and illogical, weakening your leadership. Passion, on the other hand, is the engine that drives you to be a great leader and build a winning team.

The reason for failure is that new leaders come into a team or organization and attempt to mimic the leadership style of the head coach or CEO from their previous jobs instead of being the person they truly are. They believe that if they do it exactly the same way, they will have the same amount of success.

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Even though we may have disagreed, once the final decision was made, we united and every coach in that meeting adopted the plan and sold it to the players.

I would strongly suggest you have a media-training program in place to teach your team members how to handle the challenging questions they will be asked. It should also cover the pitfalls of irresponsible postings on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media outlets.