

In *Man's Search for Meaning* Frankl writes that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the greatest of all human freedoms, the ability to choose how to respond to any given circumstance. Frankl said that we retain the freedom to choose our attitudes and actions in response to whatever life deals us.

Coach spoke: "Psalm 118, verse 24. 'This is the day that the Lord has made, so rejoice and be glad in it.'"

Sports are meant to be enjoyed regardless of the score. Sports are a gift, an honor to play. Sports foster a satisfying sense of community. And when you enjoy what you're doing and enjoy who you're doing it with, team performance automatically improves.

The Oz fable is a dream (remember: Dorothy gets hit on the head and knocked out). All the characters she encounters are projected parts of herself that she has not integrated. Oz and the Wicked Witch are her rejecting parents; the Good Witch is an idealized mother; and the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion are the various parts of Dorothy that she sees as deficient.

This report makes the case that young people have three basic needs. One, they need someone to believe in them and to affirm and validate their inherent value and potential. Two, they need a belief system. According to the study, our youth are seeking some kind of spirituality to help them find meaning and purpose in life. Third, they need a place to belong—a community built on well-defined principles with expectations and boundaries that provide structure and safeguards in the treacherous journey to adulthood.

But today technology and the media have sexualized youth culture to a greater degree than ever.

answering these four key questions: Why do I coach? Why do I coach the way I do? What does it feel like to be coached by me? How do I define success?

Frankl's internment in Nazi death camps led him to a startling observation: It was not the strongest, most vibrant, or even smartest inmates who survived. It was those who had meaning, purpose, or a WHY to live who survived. He saw that

people who had hope of being reunited with loved ones or had projects they were impassioned to complete or those with great faith tended to have a better chance than those who had lost hope. Frankl concluded that humankind's search for meaning is the foundation for living a passion-filled, effective life. He wrote: "It did not really matter what we expected from life but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life—daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct."

If you were on your deathbed today and you wanted to measure your success in life, if you wanted to measure the kind of man or woman you were, it would come down to two things and only two things. First: Life is about relationships. It's about the capacity to love and to be loved. What does it mean to be a man? It means having the capacity to look somebody directly in the eyes and say, "I love you." And then being able to receive that love back.

On their deathbeds evaluating their lives, the second thing people want to know is what kind of difference they made in the lives of others, their community, and their country. People want to know that they lived for a reason, a cause, and a purpose that was bigger than themselves. I call this a transcendent cause; transcendent in the sense that it motivates one to get up every day with a vision that is bigger than one's own personal goals, desires, and ambitions, a vision that serves the needs of our teammates, community, and society and recognizes and enables a spirit of brotherhood, sisterhood, and the responsibility we have to each other.

In turn, this led me to study the social and cultural concepts that defined masculinity and femininity. I began to understand that most of us are imprisoned by false ideas and concepts of what it means to be a human being.

In my faith tradition, part of my job as a pastor has been to sit at the deathbed of dying people to help prepare them for their passing. And here's what I know to be true. I know it to be true for me and I know it to be true for everyone.

The questions that will matter most on your deathbed are the questions related to your relationships. What kind of husband was I? What kind of wife? What kind of partner? What kind of mother? What kind of father? What kind of son? What kind of daughter? What kind of friend? What kind of member of the community? What kind of coach? Who did I love and who loved me? Now, think about that. Think about how we raise boys in this country. We don't raise boys to be successful in their relationships. We tell them to be independent and be their own men, to take pride in individual accomplishments, compare and compete with other men, and earn their manhood.

Fifteen million children live in the shadow of domestic violence—many more in homes with drug- and alcohol-addicted parents. Approximately one in four girls and one in eight boys will be sexually abused by the time they reach adulthood. I coach knowing that children come onto my field every season carrying backpacks loaded with hurtful or harmful life experiences. When young people are “acting out,” I don't just label, judge, and exile them. I know I can't judge them based on their current behavior or personality. Children behave the way they do for specific reasons.

From my addiction, I learned players will self-medicate their insecurities, doubts, pain, and problems. When young men are hurt, confused, or don't feel they measure up to the false definitions of masculinity, they will medicate their sense of not being man enough. They will self-medicate on alcohol, drugs, sex, pornography, and a host of other meds, including playing sports. I coach the way I do to help them create their own life narratives to understand the source of their pain and find healthier solutions for their healing.

So I started with my three highest values as a coach: empathy, kindness, and service to others.

My second-highest value is kindness. Kindness encompasses a vast range of words and actions, and I often tell players that kindness has a ten-word vocabulary. One word—“please.” Two words—“thank you.” Three words—“I love you.” Four words—“Can I help you?” I stand with the Dalai Lama, who said, “My religion is

very simple—it is kindness.” My coaching is very simple—it is kindness built on empathy.

Third, I value service to others. Service to others is empathy and kindness put into acts and actions. It gives meaning to life and helps sustain and dignify the lives of others. It is the opposite of self-service. Service to others is never a quid pro quo—doing a deed to receive an equal or similar deed in return. It means selflessly putting the best interests of my players and team first. It teaches them how to serve their teammates, school, and community and that service to others ennobles one’s life.

What I’ve come to learn is that success is often a journey. It has multiple peaks and valleys instead of one ultimate pinnacle. One success often builds on another. Success is not a one-dimensional tug-of-war between winning and losing. Setbacks, losses, and mistakes also help to build success.

These pillars are community, cocurricular lesson plans that integrate our school’s educational philosophy onto the playing field, collaborative communication, honorable competition, and ceremonies that emphasize the spirituality of sports and celebrate the player’s transition into manhood.

In fact, the further up the competition chain we get, the less important integrity and character become.

Again the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to mind: “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

We didn’t want insiders and outsiders or starters and scrubs. We wanted to include every boy who desired to be a member of the team and make him feel wanted, needed, and valuable. We felt that any player who wants to belong shouldn’t be on the outside looking in.

Paula had studied Erik Erikson’s stages of social and emotional development in young people. His writings informed the five questions Biff and I agreed to strive to help each of our players answer during his time with us. Identity: Who am I?

Integrity: What do I stand for? Intimacy: Who will love me and whom will I love?
Interdependence: Whom will I stand with? Industry: What can I do with my life?
Think of all the ways that a coach with power, platform, and position can help
players discover the answers to those questions. I

Team means every individual is inextricably bound to the others and to the
success of the whole community. No player, no matter how talented, has ever
won a game by playing alone.

In the same way, creating and sustaining a healthy team requires honest truth-
telling, perseverance, and courage.

As Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he
stands in moments of comfort and convenience but where he stands at times of
challenge and controversy.”

This paradox is at the heart of sports—structure allows for freedom. And there is
another factor: We need relationships, support, and community to be free. My
best teams always felt like families.

a liberating program around three basic realities of a great team: We belong to
each other; we need each other; we affect each other. 1. We belong to each
other. Everyone on a team belongs on that team: stars, starters, substitute
players, and managers alike.

Full acceptance is the rule.

2. We need each other.

A sense of inferiority or a display of superiority is cancerous to a team. We start
eliminating the potential for that cancer the first day of practice.

Another impediment to liberty is a sense of superiority, a sense of arrogance: I
have no need for you or the team; the team needs me. This is a player who thinks
the team is there for his self-aggrandizement. This is a player shackled by his
distorted sense of self, one who keeps his teammates from the liberating
possibilities of community.

3. We affect each other.

We demand that team members be as deeply committed to one another's growth and success as they are to their own.

Any young person who is willing to commit the time, energy, and discipline of playing a sport and being part of a team is displaying courage.

We define moral courage as doing what you believe is right, even if others disagree; doing what is morally right even in the face of criticism, ridicule, rejection, or retaliation. This means standing up and speaking out on behalf of your moral and ethical values and showing up to put them into action while encouraging others to do the same.

Sports should be viewed as cocurricular, not extracurricular. The term "extracurricular" implies that sports and coaching take place after the end of the academic day. The term "cocurricular" designates sports as an educational activity with the potential to develop the academic, social, emotional, moral, and civic competency of every player.

Since we define masculinity (and femininity) in terms of relationships and commitment to a cause, we

They embrace what Mahatma Gandhi said: "Be the change you want to see in the world."

Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's capacity to change and adapt as a result of a person's experiences and relationships.

It is never too late to change who we think we are. We needn't be chained to who we have become. We can change our minds and thereby transform ourselves and our lives.

Most of our athletes and parents are grateful for this explicitness. We live in a world in which insinuation, suggestion, and consequently misunderstanding all too often characterize our communication.

This is all the more true in coaching culture. So when we establish at the outset that clarity is a virtue, communication becomes a tool that lessens chaos, minimizes misunderstandings, and helps build patience as well as collective peace.

I read a survey conducted by the Gallup organization that said 74 percent of all employees are either indifferent to their work or actively disengaged. I thought about the average high school team. How many players are fully engaged and how many disengaged?

Here are three habits we strive to develop to ensure that contact, connection, and communication take place every practice with every player. • Welcome each and every player onto the field, letting them know we value and appreciate their presence, contribution, and commitment to the team. • Commit to making sure every player is personally addressed at every practice. (People often ask about the proper number of coaches to have on a staff. I say you need enough to let every player feel a personal connection.) • Engage the student-athletes with questions related to the players' interests and problems off the field and develop conversations that affirm the worth of each student-athlete.

“What is one thing I don't know about you that you'd like me to know?” It is always amazing to me what players will share once you build a relationship based on clear communication with them.

I ask parents the same question I ask their sons: “What is one thing I should know about your son that will help me coach him?”

I validate their point of view. I may say, “I can see how you might think or feel that way.” Once I validate their perspective, I have earned the right to challenge them on their thoughts and perspectives and can suggest an alternative way of looking at the issue.

When we came to this play, Biff asked everyone to watch it and then turned off the projector and turned on the lights. “Imagine that young man's family in the stands. Imagine how he felt—getting beat, giving up a touchdown, and feeling like he let his teammates down. Imagine lying there, feeling all these emotions, and

you add humiliation by your actions. What do you think that feels like? Now, imagine yourself in his place. You're competing, doing the best you can on behalf of your team and yourself. Your family and friends are in the stands supporting you on every play. Now tell me how you would feel if that was done to you? If that was done to your brother? Your teammate?"

In other words, your focus should be on attempting to demonstrate excellence in all the ways the game calls for." Competition when defined as a mutual quest for excellence and when immersed in empathy is a pathway to human excellence. Aristotle wrote: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act but a habit."

"You want to know what I make? I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could. I make them push through self-imposed limitations, athletically and academically. I make them strive together and for each other. You want to know what I make? I make boys into men. I make them question. I make them self-critique. I make them aware of their social responsibility to build a better world. I make them competitive and teach them how to win with humility and lose with honor. I make them understand that if you follow your heart and someone ever tries to judge you by what you make, you must pay no attention because they just don't get it." Bob paused and then continued. "You want to know what I make? I MAKE A DIFFERENCE. What do you make?"

All young people need to know three things before they graduate from high school. One, they are loved. Two, they are loved and accepted for who they are, not what they do. Three, they need to know that they have something of importance and significance to offer to the world.