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CHAMPIONSHIP PERFORMANCE

Coaches Corner

Urban Meyer: 21st Century Leadership Leads UF to Title

University of Florida head football coach Urban Meyer previously turned around Bowling Green (2001-02) and Utah (2003-04) which finished undefeated in his second year. Now he's won the national title in only his second season with the Gators. We profile Meyer's motivational methods this month.

Urban Meyer's list of motivational tactics may be more intricate than his playbook. The Florida Gator coach uses countless methods to encourage, energize and entice players to improve every aspect of their lives. He has the 'Champions Club', 'Circle of Life and Mat Drills', 'Hell Lifts', 'Rookie Stripes' and 'The Pit.'

When Meyer took over, his first goal was to familiarize himself with players and see if they were "living right." He hosted several cookouts and began dropping by players' apartments and dormitories with little or no warning.

Assistants put together detailed lists about their players. Meyer wanted his coaches to know names of girlfriends, friends, parents, majors, grade point averages, projected graduation dates and important phone numbers.

"You get so tight with your players that they can't let you down," associate head coach Doc Holliday says. "They don't want to let you down. They're going to play for you. That's why we do all we do."

The hands-on approach allowed Meyer to learn a lot about his players early. He even broke them down into three academic categories: scarlet, red and gold. Scarlet players are monitored constantly to make sure they're attending classes. This player needs to re-examine his priorities.

Red players are watched, but not as closely. This player needs some supervision.

Gold players aren't checked and don't have to attend study hall. A gold player has proven himself unlikely to skip class, fail a test, or get arrested.

For a player who isn't holding up their end of the bargain, Meyer gets creative in his punishments. For example, if a running back doesn't show up for class, Meyer might order all the running backs, the running backs coach and his whole family to show up for a compensatory study hall on a Friday night.

"If you feel responsible for letting down your whole position group, your position coach and his family – that's pretty strong," Meyer said. "I've had my six year old son come with me to a study hall and then tell the guilty player, 'You want to explain to this six year old boy why he's sitting here on a Friday night.' Having to explain to a six year old why you missed class can be a much more powerful punishment that running stadium steps."

Practices are all about daily competitions. If the defense wins a certain drill by point total (goal line scrimmages for instance), they retire early to the locker room and a hot meal. The offense remains on the field and stands behind a horizontal line. At the coaches' command, players have to do sprints.

Every day, every practice, every drill has a winner and a loser. Winners get rewarded. Losers get punished. Meyer knows that it's human nature to avoid the shame of losing.

The way a player lines up turns into a competition. For example, running backs are each graded by coaches on how well they execute a 3-point stance. The one with the best stance can move on while the player with the ugly stance has to sweat through more drills.

Even fun stuff like locker room tug of wars have winners and losers. According to linebacker Brandon Siler: "You don't really concentrate on how hard you are working because you just want to beat the dude in front of you."

The drill called 'Circle of Life' stages one player against another in a ring formed by teammates. The players square off in a battle of toughness, with each trying to knock the other to the ground. One player grabs the other player somewhere near the joint of the elbow, then they push as their teammates circle around them and yell like hell rooting them on. The winner is celebrated, the loser humbled.

They have 'Mat Drills' with groups of eight where they do wrestling type maneuvers where one player lays down and the other gets on top of him and holds him down. The object is for the one underneath to get up and off the mat. They have a champion of each group.

"The Pit' is much more demanding. It's an area of the practice field where strength coaches supervise drills designed to encourage players to practice through nagging aches and pains. Players there sometimes carry rocks and sandbags, run stadium steps and endure seemingly endless repetitions of sit-ups and push-ups.

Meyer also implemented "hell lifts," weightlifting sessions that usually begin late Friday night and last into the wee hours.

'Rookie stripes' are black stripes that are put on the helmet of each year's

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Concentration

13 Ways to Concentrate and Achieve Mental Focus

Athletes must learn how to regulate their own pre-game anxiety levels. Here are 13 tips to manage their pre-game jitters.

1) *Teach pre-game psyching starting the first day of the season*. Mental toughness training should not be a crisis intervention thing. Teach your athletes to focus, block out distractions, rebound from mistakes and to handle pressure right from the start.

2) *Practice how to concentrate properly*. Concentration is the heart of pre game psyching and peak performance. It is the foundation of mental toughness. Concentration is the ability to focus in on what is important and block out everything else.

This involves 2 mini-skills: A) Recognize when he or she is drifting from a proper focus.

B) Catch themselves and quickly bring themselves back to that performance focus.

3) *Be careful when you accuse your athletes of not concentrating*. Every athlete concentrates before performance. The issue is on what? If your athlete chokes or falls apart, then he/she was concentrating – but on the wrong things. Don't tell your athletes, "concentrate" unless you follow that by exactly what you want them to concentrate on.

4) *Integrate concentration into your daily workouts*. Get your athletes to regularly practice developing an awareness of when they start to drift from a proper focus, and getting themselves back. Throughout practice routinely call their awareness to this mental skill.

5) *Make athletes aware of the mind/body connection*. Help your athletes understand that the main difference between their best and worst performances has to do with their pre-performance self-talk and thoughts. That what they think goes into their bodies and can tighten their muscles and rob them of their coordination, reflexes and speed.

6) *Teach the difference from a practice and game mentality*. Peak performance is about trusting and letting the performance happen. The athlete is not thinking and is on autopilot - utilizing effortless effort. Poor performance is about doubting, over-thinking, analyzing, evaluating and trying too hard.

7) *Before games or meets, remind your athletes that they have paid their dues and should just let performance happen*. You accomplish this by giving them one or two specific things to focus on for the event. By narrowing concentration, the athlete has more of a chance to slip into an auto pilot mentality.

8) *Be alert to the athlete's "Have To's", "Gottas" and "Musts"*. This kind of self-talk will signal you that the athlete is about to self-destruct into trying too hard.

9) *Eliminate the 2 main causes of pre-game stress*. 1) The athlete's self-talk about the game, competition, magnitude or importance of the event in the standings, crowd size, etc. 2) Focus on the uncontrollables. Examples include thinking about past events, winning and losing before the game even starts, opponents' skill level, parents, game conditions, etc.

10) *Have athletes focus pre-game on the one thing they can control*. He can always learn to control his or her reaction to all the other uncontrollables listed above.

11) *Teach the athlete the here and now rule for peak performance*. Athletes will better handle stress and avoid psych-outs if they can mentally learn to stay in the "here" and "now" of the performance. Negative past thoughts will bring you down and uncontrollable future thoughts of the outcome will do the same. The athlete only has power, speed and control in the "here and now". What time is it when you compete? The "now". What place is it? The "here".

12) *Have athletes control their eyes*. Focus visually only on those things that keep you calm, composed and confident. If a focus makes you uptight, deliberately switch to something neutral or calming. (For many athletes, spending too much time looking at the audience in the stands is sure to diminish performance.)

13) *Encourage the use of pre-game rituals*. Help the athlete develop a ritual that is controllable, easy to repeat and compact. The ritual can then help the athlete both control their eyes and ears and stay in the "here and now" of the performance. Rituals also help athletes bind anxiety because they are familiar and can be done no matter where the athlete competes.

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Meyer profile, continued

newcomer, who gets it removed when he "becomes a Gator."

"Joining the team doesn't make you a Gator," Meyer says. "It's much harder than that. You have to earn it."

During summer workouts last year, Meyer even kicked players out of the locker room and told them they couldn't wear orange and blue or anything with the Gators logo on it.

"That was a big deal to us," player Tate Casey said. "It was his way of sending us a message that we were taking everything for granted. This is the University of Florida. It's privilege to be here and to play football here. Some guys might have lost sight of that, but he has that instilled into everyone now."

Meyer requires his assistants to know everything about the players they are coaching. The coaches literally possess a written account that has every bit of personal information about the players they can muster.

"I had better not walk into a coach's meeting with Urban and not know a kid's mom's name, his girlfriend's name, the kid's cell-phone number, his likes, dislikes - everything," Holliday said.

When you know every nugget about a kid, you can see the problems coming long before they arrive.

Whatever chance he gets, Meyer tells his players the same message, over and over and over again: "Keep your mind and body clean."

"Kids want discipline," Holliday said. "They want people involved in their lives."

Like other schools, the Florida program has a team leadership committee that consists of 5 seniors, 4 juniors, 3 sophomores, 2 freshmen, and one walk on. The goal of the group is for the players to take ownership of the team. Players need to feel they have some stake in the team and some control over what happens.

"You have a tendency to complain less when it's your decision. When there is a problem, they will come to me with it," Meyer said.

One of Meyer's most unique motivational tactics is what he calls the Champion's Club program that he started at Bowling Green. According to Meyer: "John Wooden once said that you treat your players the way they deserve to be treated. You don't treat them all the same way. Our champion's club is for athletes who go to class, live their life the right way and contribute to the success of Florida football. If you do those three things, you get some nice gear as a reward – t-shirts, shorts, and hats - the whole deal.

We have a champion's banquet at the end of each quarter of the year. When I started the club at Bowling Green, I had a small budget so I met with the dining staff and told them I wanted a nice prime rib dinner with fine linen and china and real nice tables in the nicest room on campus. We'll be doing that for 15 to 20 people. For the other 80, I want to order a really poor meal. For example, I wanted them to have some really bad hot dogs and half cooked hamburgers with stale buns served on paper plates.

During the banquets members of the champions club get hugs and high fives and congratulations for making the club. You go sit down and take a seat with your laminated nameplate over there. Players that don't make it go sit over on the bleachers and eat their meal and watch the other guys. For the champions, if their prime rib isn't cooked right they can send it back. We make sure their meal is fantastic.

The other guys get to think about their poor decisions. Those not in the club end up cleaning up for those who are. The guys who don't make the club get the idea of what they need to do and we usually get more champions every quarter.

Ultimately, it's all about investment in the team. I've been part of football teams that have won in the fourth quarter and those that have lost in the forth quarter. There is a common denominator – the team that is most invested usually wins."

■ Winning Ways

■ Tom Brady's Tenacity

New England Patriot quarterback Tom Brady could easily rest on his laurels after winning 3 Super Bowls. Instead, he leads the team by example. Coach Bill Belichick awards a prime parking spot to the player who is the most dedicated to the team's off-season conditioning program. Brady won that coveted parking space for the last five years.

He has had to work harder than his peers simply to get a chance at playing time since his days at Michigan. When he was a sophomore, he considered transferring because of a lack of playing time. Head Coach Lloyd Carr told him: **"Go out there and do everything you can to control what you can control and stop worrying about how many reps you get or the other quarterbacks and what skills they have and you don't. Concentrate on the things you do well."**

What Brady does well is use his intelligence and work ethic to master each week's game plan. His knowledge of defenses allows him to almost immediately recognize whatever look is presented and quickly make adjustments.

Brady is fanatical about his preparation: "I don't want any unknowns or guesswork. When I take the field, I want to know exactly what we are going to do vs every defense we could face. When I feel like I'm prepared mentally, I can just go out and execute."

■ Herbstreit on Kicker Woes

ESPN analyst Kirk Herbstreit was talking about kickers and why they so often cave under the pressure of a big kick to win a game.

To help them prevent choking, he recommended the following: "Make them do drills with the rest of the team. Don't separate them off in their own little world where they just practice kicks. When they are made to feel like they are an integral part of the team, they are less likely to struggle when the pressure is on to make a big kick."

Team Building

Team Dinners Enhance Camaraderie

Before the start of every season you will be bringing in new players that will have to blend in with the veterans already there. A great way to kick things off in the summer before the season starts is by hosting a team dinner. The goal of the dinner is to encourage teamwork, communication and trust.

All you need is enough to feed the entire team and a backyard or park big enough to house everyone.

Game plan: Plan at least one dinner during the off-season where the team can get to know you as a person outside your role as coach. You can have one dinner for the entire team and possibly more where you break into smaller sub-groups if you have a large roster. This allows more one to one interaction with the athletes. It is important to spend time discussing topics other than the team or sport.

Variations: Here are some added twists to this team building event: 1) Have the team cook the meal instead of having it catered or your spouse prepare it. You may want to divide the team into sub-units and have each unit responsible for a portion of the meal.

2) Require the sub-units to work together on every aspect of preparing their portion of the meal. This could include buying the ingredients at the grocery, preparing the food, and traveling together to the dinner.

3) Another variation is to eat out at a restaurant with athletes from different classes (all the sophomores, juniors, etc) or different sub-groups within the team. For example, all the lines that play together from a hockey team or all the linemen on a football team, or midfielders on a soccer team etc.

Wrap up: You can find out how effective this activity is by simply asking the athletes for informal feedback. You may also want to probe deeper in a more formal end of the year evaluation.

Excerpted from the Book 101 Team Building Activities by Greg Dale, Ph.D. and Scott Conant. To order a copy call: 919-401-9640 or visit: www.excellenceinperformance.com

Coaching Style

Pete Carroll's Most Important Lesson

Pete Carroll says he learned one of his most important lessons about coaching college football in his first season, in his first big rivalry game.

Hard to imagine now, but the Southern California Trojans were reeling back in 2001 — 2-4 and headed to South Bend, Ind., to face Notre Dame and try for some redemption.

Carroll built up the game all week to his players. This game is special, he said. This is the time for your best effort. Turned out to be the time for the Trojans to fall flat on their faces, losing 27-16.

“Classic mistake,” Carroll says of his approach to that game. “I knew I screwed it up. I knew I blew it. I could tell during the week, but I went with it. I just had to learn.

“It’s more fun probably to talk up these kinds of old historic ‘this and that’s.’ But it doesn’t serve the preparation of the athletes and the coaches. You don’t need that.”

That lesson helped Carroll build the winningest era in USC football history.

Big games. Special games. Time to pump up the troops for a special effort?

“We don’t need extra incentives,” he says. “If you understand that every game is a championship game and you’re going to give everything you possibly can in the preparation and participation of that game, then when would you ever decide when to (go all out) and when not to?

That’s the whole point. It’s the same philosophy that goes through everything that we do in football. When are you going to decide that a play is more important than another play? When do I need to go full speed? When do I need to try my best? So you get out of that mentality. You don’t allow for that kind of thinking in any phase.

We’re real hard about any indications of that being displayed by our guys. That’s why we practice so fast and so hard every single day, every day of the year for six years.”

> “ I would rather be around a bunch of guys with less talent who are willing to come together as a team than guys who consider themselves 'stars' and are not willing to sacrifice. ”
>
> **Michael Jordan**

Motivation

Motivation During Rough Times

When your team is facing uncertainty or in the middle of a losing streak, you may need to tighten discipline to keep the team on track. Here are 5 strategies to consider:

1) *Set high standards*. Then defend them valiantly. Aim for excellence because quality and overall performance can slip in times of change.

2) *Insist on organization*. Don't allow team members to drift into their old routines and roles. Hold them accountable for their assigned tasks and keep their feet to the fire when it comes to timetables and deadlines.

3) *Send a clear message*. When you're re-organizing the team, members need consistency and definite limits. Don't be vague or offer wishy-washy explanations.

4) *Tell team members how you'll keep score*. Let them know how you will hold them accountable.

5) *Back up words with action*. If someone flouts the rules or refuses to get on board, you may need to make an example of him or her. If you demote one non-performer to the bench, you'll probably fire up a bunch of others who suddenly see an opportunity to shine.

Goal Setting

The C.R.I.M.E. Goal Setting Model

Use the word "CRIME" as an acronym to help you and your squad more effectively set both individual and team goals.

• **C**lear. Can the whole team understand the goal?

• **R**easonable. Make sure your goal is challenging, but within the realm of possibility of being accomplished within a reasonable time frame.

• **I**mportant. Does your goal describe an outcome your team can all agree on without reservation? Of course, every team wants to finish first in their division. For that to happen, what specifically must happen first to make that a reality?

• **M**easurable. Does the goal include built in mechanisms to measure your progress? You must be able to gauge whether you are near, far, or somewhere in between.

• **E**xpiration dated. Both personal and team goals must come to a close at some point. By setting sub goals within the over-all big goal helps challenge athletes to push themselves along the way.

Example: Let's say an athlete wants to increase his bench press 50 pounds. This won't happen in a week. But if he says, "I want to add 10 pounds to my bench press every two or three weeks. They can see exactly where they are over a 16 week expiration time period."

Avoid Coaching Cliches by Getting Creative

A common complaint athletes make of coaches' behavior is predictability. Here are some typical examples of athletes' complaints: "I know the pep talks by heart." or "When I come off the field, I know what the coach is going to say." or "The coach always says the same old thing."

Being creative when coaching, giving advise or encouraging athletes is not easy. If the same words or phrases are used too often, they lose impact. If an athlete can predict what a coach is going to say, chances are he will not benefit as much from the advice simply because he is not listening.

Recommendation: Examine your language. A simple technique is to write down an often said statement to athletes. Now, write down five different ways you can communicate this same statement or make the same point. One way to get an athlete's attention is to use a paradox statement. Requesting an athlete to perform just the opposite of a desired outcome often results in improved performance.

For example, if you continually tell an athlete to "give 100% in practice", soon 100% has no true meaning because of its overuse. Try telling athletes to give 50% effort for the first 10 minutes of practice. After 10 minutes, stop play and ask them to go all out for the remainder of practice. In the athlete's mind, this will draw a clear distinction between 100% and something less. The athlete will be more likely to give a greater effort after the 50% time, having made a distinction and giving meaning back to 100%.

Game Preparation

Preparing Seniors for Excellence

Having been through your program longer than the rest of the team, your seniors should be thoroughly familiar with the intricacies of your system, style of play, and expectations of behavior on and off the field.

Naturally, you want this group to provide leadership to their younger, less experienced teammates. You want them to set an example in both attitude and behavior.

If you are coming into a new coaching situation, you may have to deal with players who are loyal to their former coach and may face resentment from the upperclassmen who are not pleased with the coaching change. This resentment can undermine everything you try to do with the team and can cause dissention. What often happens is that some players will form cliques of those loyal to the former coach while others who like you will rally together in support.

Whether you have been at your program a while or just hired, there is one speech that my players never heard but once, since they will only be seniors one time. It's what I call my cozy "fire-side" chat that takes place sometime after the end of their junior year and start of their senior season.

I begin by telling them how much I (or the school or team if I am a new hire) appreciate their hard work over the past few years. I express my belief that we are going to have a great year - working and playing together with the seniors leading the way. We can't have the kind of year that all of us want unless they – the senior class – show the younger players how **real** athletes go about improving themselves and the team. I know they can do it because I know they want this year to be special. It is, after all, their last time around, so all of us have to work extra hard to make a year that we can look back on fondly with pride for years to come.

Next, I tell them: "You are a great bunch of kids and the team and the school owes you a lot. I wish we could have you on the team for 4 more years, but we can't. So you need to understand one thing: my job is to do what is best for the team. Team needs are always more important than the needs of any one individual.

This means two things for you. First, the team needs your leadership in terms of spirit, dedication, and hustle. Whether you are in the game or on the sidelines, the younger players will be watching how you behave. Because you are seniors and have been through the ropes before, I expect more from you than them in regards to positive attitude and enthusiasm.

Second, I won't start or give you playing time just because you are a senior. If you were a starter at the end of last season, the job is still yours, but you have to prove that you are better than the younger players to keep that job. It's nothing personal, but I have to think of what is best for the team. You must out-perform (him or her) or I will have no choice but to go with the younger player.

The seniors don't always like what I've just told them, but they can't argue with the logic involved.

Excerpted from the book "Coaching and Control" by William Warren, Ed.D. Prentice Hall Books. Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632.

This book can be purchased online at amazon.com

■ Peak Performance Bullets

■ Film Review Practice Questions

Whether you are questioning a player in practice or in the film room, here are some key general questions you can ask to make sure your players are understanding what you want from them.

These types of questions will lead them to build on their strengths, and develop areas of weakness as they explore various options to improve their performance:

* "What do you need to do to make that happen?"

* "How could you capitalize on that?"

*"What did you have the hardest time with?"

* "If you could do it over again, what would you do differently?"

* "What did you do that worked well?"

* "What will you do if x or y play doesn't work?"

* "What will happen if you continue to do what you are doing?"

* "What other options could you pursue?"

■ Subtle Changes for Big Results

The words we say and how we address each other can have a powerful impact.

Check out the difference in this sentence: "Guys, we've got a problem with turnovers that we really need to work on."

"Guys, one of our biggest challenges is to find ways to cut down on our turnovers."

Substituting 'challenge' for 'problem' can make a big difference in how your communication is perceived by the team.

Motivating leaders use the word challenge often because it implies that you believe the team can overcome setbacks and reach their goals.

Coaches Corner 2

Interview with 11 Time Illinois Football State Title Winner Frank Lenti

This month we interviewed Mt. Carmel (IL) high school football coach Frank Lenti. In his 20 years as head coach, the team has played for 11 state titles and won 9. They were named the Illinois team of the decade in the 1990s.

Discuss how you motivate your team.

I think first of motivating the individual, then the team. We try to appeal to their individual pride. 'What do you want to be remembered for?' There is no sense being part of our program unless you are going to contribute in some way. This doesn't mean being a starter or a star, but that you get something back from your investment. We tell kids, "when you spend a dollar, you don't get much back. Invest a dollar and you'll see some return on that investment." We want the kids to invest their time in their education and athletic career. This way they are assured of getting something back from their efforts.

We have a program called the 4 E's. In everything they do while in our program we stress the following: **Great Effort. Great Execution. Great Endurance. Great Enthusiasm**. These principles apply to school, social and athletic situations.

Giving great effort and endurance speaks for themselves. Execution means doing the fundamentals well, whether it be in football or in school.

Regarding enthusiasm, we have a slogan painted on the locker room wall: "Fun is doing something well." School is fun when you are getting A's and B's, yet it's a real pain when you get D's and F's. It's fun if a kid does well in practice. We are always talking to kids about raising their standards.

Another saying we tell kids is: "If it is to be, it's up to me." We want the kids to take responsibility for their success. The key motivating factor for the kids comes from Zig Ziglar: "You can get anything in this world you want if you are willing to help enough other people get what they want."

The reason we have been so successful at Mt. Carmel is that our coaching staff has helped the guys get what they want - which is to be a success as people, students, and athletes.

Could you describe some motivational approaches you have used with individual athletes or the entire team that weren't successful.

The one thing we have done wrong over the years was to get the kids too high for a certain game. We don't want them so excited that they lose track of their fundamentals and assignments. When the emotional high wears off after the first few moments of the game, they sometimes get into a fog. At times, we got the guys too emotionally invested in one particular game. The remedy for this is to eliminate any "red letter" or one certain "game of the year." We want our kids thinking that the most important game of the year is the next one - regardless of the opponent. This falls in line with another principle we try to teach: 'consistency is more importance than greatness.'

It's no good for the team if a guy is great for a quarter and then falls asleep at the switch for the rest of the game. I'd rather see a kid play good and consistent all game long. This way we know we can count on him.

Do you work with kids from broken families? Is there any advice you can give to coaches who are in a similar situation?

The number one issue here is building trust. It's a two way street. Later on, some of these kids will come back and say that we were like the father they never had. When they need a male figure to talk to, we as coaches have to be available. You might have to invest a little more time in these type of kids. Whether it's a one to one in the coaches office, in the classroom, or on the field before or after practice. You have to find out some personal information about what is going on in their lives.

Example: Two days a week we like to bring in our offensive kids early to watch film before school. We had a two year starter who could not come in early because he had to take his younger brother to school because his grandmother left for work already and there were no mom and dad around. If I make things difficult for that kid, we'll end up losing him. Since he has a tough home situation, we'll be flexible and have him watch tape with the defense at another time. It's now up to you to make it to the lunch time film session. There is always give and take in these situations.

What is your general approach to team discipline? Do you believe in a strict adherence to rules? Do high school athletes need more rules than a college athlete? Our philosophy in this area is really simple. The heart and soul of the rule I got from Coach Lou Holtz. We tell them to 'do what's right.' We break that down into doing what's right as a person, as a student and as an athlete. That's the order of importance for us.

Example: Let's say one of the players is hanging out at the mall with a Mount Carmel lettermans jacket on and he acts like a nit wit. Guess what? Eventually we're going to find out about that. I'd much rather get a call that says a player held the door open for some nice little old lady rather than finding out he tried to run her over.

I tell our kids that they are leaders of the school. They help set the tempo each year by their actions. I don't want to have a teacher come into my office and tell me that "one of your players was misbehaving". They won't say Johnny so and so was misbehaving, they'll say one of the football players was misbehaving.

Do you want them to see that the consequences will be forced upon then? Right. Someone else is going to choose the consequences for them. For example, if you choose to be late for school or you choose not to behave in class, you're going to end up with a detention. You don't get to choose when to serve that detention. It may make you miss something very important. We also talk about forcing the kids to measure up. Every decision you make is going to affect you, your family, and your teammates either positively or negatively. If you make the decision to be a goof in class and you get a detention, that doesn't just affect you. It now affects everyone in practice because you can't be there to do your fair share and you can't be there to get better.

Team Building II

Rick Pitino's Team Building Story

Louisville basketball coach Rick Pitino tells this story about building a winning team:

"When I became the coach of Providence College, I was inheriting a program that had been languishing near the bottom of the Big East Conference.

In one of my first meetings with the team, I listed four categories on the blackboard: Basketball, school, work ethic, and family. The four supposedly most important parts of my new players' lives. 'How many of you want to be professional basketball players someday?' I asked.

Virtually every hand in the room went up in the air.

'Well, since you had a losing season last year and no one in this room averaged at least 10 points a game, it's obvious you are not a success in the basketball part of your lives.' I then erased one quarter of the blackboard. 'And since I've seen your grade-point averages, it's also obvious you aren't successful in school either.'

The room was silent as I erased another quarter of the blackboard. Then I asked the trainer how many players had been in the gym every day since the season ended to work on their games.

'No one, Coach,' the trainer said.

'So it's obvious you don't work hard either,' I said, erasing another quarter of the blackboard.

Then I started raising my voice. 'Let's see,' I said. 'You aren't successful in basketball; you aren't successful in school; and you don't work hard. What's left?' I paused for emphasis.

'Well, hopefully, you're a close team,' I finally said.

'Hopefully, you care about each other.'

'Oh, we do, Coach,' said a player named Harold Starks.

'We're a close team.'

I pretended to think for a minute.

'OK, Harold, how many brothers does Steve Wright have?'

Starks slowly shook his head.

'What does Billy Donovan's father do for a living?'

Harold now looked like a deer stuck in headlights.

'So you really don't know anything about each other, do you?' I asked.

No one spoke.

I made each player stand up and talk about himself and his family. Then something wonderful happened. What had been 12 individuals suddenly had the makings of a cohesive unit. Twenty-two months later that collection of individuals—now a team—would be in the Final Four. The message I tried to communicate had started the players on the road to becoming a cohesive group of people whose change in attitude about themselves had made all the difference."

Coaching and Communication

Selling an Unpopular Idea to Your Team

You have just decided to change the practice schedule and now everyone must be here at 6 am instead of 7:30 am. You can bet more than a few team members aren't thrilled with this new arrangement. How can you make this "medicine" go down a little smoother and actually gain support for an unpopular idea? Here are some suggestions: 1) *Choose a surrogate*: Part of the resistance may be a direct response to you or the way you present the information. If that's the case, you may be better off getting an assistant to be the first "bearer of bad news".

2) *Choose the best time and place to announce the news*. If your team tends to get angry or frustrated as a group, don't present the information to them all at once. A series of one to one meetings will allow you to address individual concerns while defusing emotional group responses. **Bonus: This will also allow you to be prepared for group objections that may surface down the road.**

3) *Begin on a positive note*. Praise the group on something they do well, before going in to why you are making changes.

4) *Trade minor concessions for major support*. You may be able to secure support if you're willing to make minor adjustments to your overall plan.

For example, instead of saying "starting next week, practice will begin at 6 a.m.," adjust your timetable to give the team members some time to digest the news.

P.S. Find your biggest team leader and sell the unpopular idea to him or her first, so they can sell the idea to everyone else.