

LEADERSHIP IN ATHLETIC COACHING

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the question: "What must coaches do, and how must they be, if they are to maximize the probability that their players and assistants will follow them with commitment and dedication?" A comprehensive answer to this question is provided in terms of (a) the creation, communication, and renewal of a meaningful mission; (b) the possession of certain critical personal characteristics by the coach; and (c) the ongoing engagement by the coach in certain actions that create and maintain relationships consistent with followership.

"The chief object of leadership is the creation of a human community held together by the work bond for a common purpose."

—Peter Drucker

The central question of leadership for the athletic coach is this: "What must I do, and how must I be as a person, if I am to maximize the likelihood that those under me will commit themselves to following my lead in the pursuit of a shared

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mission?" The purpose of this chapter is to propose a comprehensive answer to this question.

Consider the following situation. One person, a player on an athletic team, makes an appraisal of a second person, the head coach of that team, and comes to the following conclusion: "If I follow the lead of this coach to the best of my ability, I have an excellent chance to achieve some things that are very important and valuable to me; if I elect not to do so, it seems doubtful that I can achieve these things." We may call this the "desired conclusion." It is the precise conclusion that every serious coach would like his or her players to draw: that they have a valuable opportunity to realize very desirable personal objectives if they dedicate themselves to following the lead of the coach. This chapter is about how coaches must *be* and how they must *behave* if they are to maximize the probability that the members of their teams will draw this conclusion and subsequently act upon it by following them with commitment and enthusiasm.

There are three general requirements that, in the ideal case, athletic coaches would fulfill in order to promote dedicated followership. Few, if any, coaches will be successful at all of them. However, the closer they can come to meeting these requirements, and can avoid going seriously wrong with respect to any of them, the more effective their leadership will be. These three general requirements are the following:

1. To establish an effective *mission* for the team; i.e., one that fully engages the hearts and minds of team members in the pursuit of a common purpose.
2. To possess *personal characteristics* that establish the coach's credibility as a person who is capable of leading the team to the accomplishment of this mission, and that do not create ethical or practical barriers to followership on the part of players and assistants.
3. To engage in *actions* that establish and maintain relationships with followers that are conducive to cooperation and followership; to avoid actions that establish relationships that are conducive to rebellion, refusal, and other oppositional reactions.

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to providing a detailed and practical picture of what coaches would ideally achieve in these three regards if they are to elicit the strongest possible commitment from their players and assistants.

Requirement #1: to Establish an Effective Mission

"Most importantly, they [leaders] can conceive and articulate goals that lift people out of their petty preoccupations, carry them above the conflicts that tear a society apart, and unite them in pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts."

—John Gardner

"No man is good enough to govern another man without the other man's consent."

—Abraham Lincoln

Peter Drucker has stated that "The first task of leadership is to define the mission" (Bennis, 1989, p. 192; cf. Putman, 1990). Consistent with his designation of this as the first task, our central concern in this section will be with the establishment and the communication of the team mission by the athletic coach.

Vision of Some "Better World"

The first requirement for head coaches, as for all other leaders, is that they possess a *vision* of some "better world." For the political or the organizational leader, this vision may be one of developing a great country, creating a thriving organization, or accomplishing a worthy social cause (Conger, 1988). For the athletic coach, this vision will be one of building a great athletic team. It is the realization of this vision—its translation from a dream into a reality—that then becomes the *mission* of the team.

The following is an example of such a vision and such a mission. It is presented here in the form of an extended excerpt from a mission statement delivered by the author to his adolescent girls' soccer team at the initial team meeting. While it is custom-tailored to this audience of young women, it is similar in its basic themes to the visions of three coaches who have most influenced the author, John Wooden, Joe Paterno, and William Warren. It is different from the visions of others such as Vince Lombardi and Bear Bryant, though not as different as the public reputations of those coaches might suggest:

"Good evening and welcome...The first thing that I would like to talk about tonight is the goals for this team. Right now, these goals are *my* goals. They are things that I believe would be very good for us to accomplish together. I hope that, when you hear them, you will think so too. I hope that you'll get the feeling that 'Yeah, that's something that I would really like too.'

"There are three of these goals. The first of them is individual development. That's just a fancy way of saying that our goal is for each of you to become the best soccer player that you are capable of becoming—the best dribbler, the best passer, the best defender, the best shooter, the best decision maker in the heat of battle. It's my experience over the past eleven years that most players don't know how good they can be. Whether they are good players to begin with, or whether they are not so good, they tend to underestimate how good they *can* be. I have seen players who, when they were young, were some of the clumsiest players on the team. Through hard work on their basic skills, they developed into highly skilled players who amazed their parents and their teammates by becoming so good that they made their high school teams and, in one case that I know of, earned a college scholarship to play soccer. I believe that most of you would be surprised to see how

good you can become if you work hard on your fundamental soccer skills. We will spend more time on these skills than probably any other team in the league. I'd love to see all of you amaze your parents, your teammates, and even yourselves by how good you become.

"Our second goal is that we become the best *team* that we have the ability to become. There are eleven positions in soccer. Every single one of them is extremely important. Being the best team that we can be means that we don't have a situation where a few stars make all the contributions and get all the glory, but that every player at every position makes an important contribution. Being the best team that we can be also means that we play unselfishly: if we have the shot, we take it; if we don't, we look for an open teammate to pass to. More than anything else, however, and this may surprise you, being the best team that we can be means that we root for each other and that we treat each other with respect. Each and every one of you has feelings. Suppose you went to school and someone said that they thought you were a "geek," or that your clothes were "dorky," or that you were "too fat" or "too skinny" or "ugly" or "dumb," or this person ridiculed you for your religion or the color of your skin; or this person walked right past you in the hall as if you didn't even exist. All of these things, if you're a normal person with normal feelings, would hurt you. They might also make you very angry and maybe even cause you to feel hate toward that person. We don't want people hurt on this team and we don't want people hating each other. We can't really be a team if there are those kinds of feelings going around. So our goal, if we are to be the best team that we can be, must be for each of us to treat our teammates with respect. Each of you has a right to come to practices and games and not be hurt. And each of you has a duty to not hurt anybody else by name-calling, excluding them, or any other sort of abuse. Each of you, when you do something good, would like others to notice it and maybe say "nice pass," or "nice shot," or "nice save," or to give you a high five. If we're to be the best team we can be, each of you should think about doing the same for your teammates.

"Our third goal is to have fun. We will work hard, but I can guarantee you that you will have more fun than you've had on any team where you just went out and they let you screw around and scrimmage the whole time and didn't take it very seriously. It will be more fun in part because we will beat the great majority of those teams. We will work hard, but one of the things you'll learn, if you don't already know it, is that the right kind of hard work can be a lot of fun. Just think of playing the game of soccer: it's hard, it's demanding, it takes a lot out of you—but it's fun!

"I haven't said much about winning. That's because our number one concern here is with you doing your best to meet the three goals I just mentioned. And you have my word that, if you do your best at working hard on your skills and treating your teammates right, and we lose every single game, you will never hear a harsh word from me. In fact I will be extremely proud of you and happy with you.

However, going back to winning, in my experience here is what will happen if each of you works hard on the goals I just stated. We will almost always defeat the teams that have worse talent than we do. We will usually defeat the teams that have equal talent. And we'll probably pull off an upset or two over teams that have more talent than we do. If it turns out we have the best talent, or close to the best, we'll be awfully hard to beat.

"Here's the feeling that I'd like each and every one of you to have by the end of the season: 'I'm an important part of a very good soccer team. I've worked very hard on my skills and I've become a good soccer player who makes a very important contribution to my team. I know it, my coaches know it, my parents know it, and my teammates know it. I feel good about my teammates and they feel good about me. We've all worked hard to accomplish something together—we've all pulled together to be the best team that we could be'."

The above is just one possible version of the sort of "better world" that a coach might envision. Though custom-tailored for a specific age group and gender and sport, it incorporates a vision of what the expression "great team" means that draws upon the ideals of John Wooden, Joe Paterno, William Warren, and others. Its content aside, the central point in presenting this extended excerpt is to convey how a mission statement, whatever its content, represents an effort to pull such a vision together into one coherent statement and to communicate this to team members. In the remainder of this section, our focus will be on how such team missions can be made truly effective and unifying ones for the team.

Vision Must be Meaningful to Potential Followers

Upon hearing Vince Lombardi's initial mission statement to the Green Bay Packers, future Hall of Fame quarterback Bart Starr stated that his first reaction to Lombardi was, "Where have you been all my life?" Lombardi's speech, with its exhortations to hard work and sacrifice in the service of perfect execution and winning, spoke to Starr's own deepest hopes and aspirations as a football player.

If others are to follow any leader, that leader's vision must fulfill an absolutely essential requirement: It must be meaningful and desirable to followers. It must, as Lombardi's did for Starr, tap into their values, hopes, aspirations, and dreams. It must be of something of such value to them that they will see it as worthy of their commitment and best efforts (Burns, 1978; Conger, 1988; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Putman, 1990). If the leader's vision leaves them cold, there is little reason to follow.

James MacGregor Burns, in his classic 1978 book on leadership in American politics, states the following: "The leader's fundamental act is to induce people to be aware or conscious of what *they feel*—to feel *their* true needs so strongly, to define *their* values so meaningfully, that they can be moved to purposeful action" (p. 152). They must hear the vision and the mission and, like Bart Starr, greet it with the fundamental reaction that "This is what *I* deeply want; this speaks to me

and my deepest desires and aspirations and hopes." If the vision is merely what the leader wants—if it cannot be owned and pledged to by both leader and followers—then these vital personal interests that conduce to the best sort of commitment are lacking. Followers may go on and do what is called for in order to be a member of the team, or to get to play a game they love, or even just because they have nothing better to do. But their deepest motivations and commitments have not been engaged.

Thus, coaches who would lead, and not seek to influence through intimidation, appeasement, manipulation, or other means, must understand human beings and their deepest longings, and must comprehend the particular values and aspirations of those whom they would lead. While this is the matter for another chapter in this volume, some of the more universal and important of such desires, most of which are invoked in the mission statement quoted earlier, are desires for the following:

- The achievement of personal excellence as a player.
- The opportunity to display this acquired excellence before others—to shine, to excel, before an admiring audience.
- The chance to be an important, contributing member of a team—to have a vital role in the success of that team.
- The opportunity to be a member of a great team, and to take pride in that association.
- The chance to belong—to be a personally included, valued, liked, respected member of a team community regardless of one's race, religion, athletic ability, physical attractiveness, or possession of the currently vogueish social characteristics.
- The opportunity to have in one's life a highly meaningful cause to which one can dedicate oneself.
- The opportunity to strive together with others in the pursuit of this highly meaningful cause—to have it be a common cause.
- The opportunity to become a better person—to acquire highly valued personal characteristics such as unselfishness, supportiveness toward others, cooperativeness, respect, racial and religious tolerance, and the ability to work long and hard in the pursuit of personally cherished goals.

Thus, coaches who would be leaders are well-advised to hold out to their teams a mission that embodies such human values and desires. The majority of athletes, and virtually all of those who will prove to be the cooperative, hard-working, unselfish, mutually supportive ones so dear to the hearts of coaches, will listen to a mission statement that holds out such possibilities and find it worthy of their best efforts and commitments. For in it is not just the obvious value of winning, but many deeper values and needs of human beings that may engage them at deeper levels of their being. Such missions also illustrate the possibility that athletics does not have to be "just a game." At a higher level of significance, it is one of the

possible ways that human beings can do one of the most meaningful things that they can do: come together in mutual support, respect, and effort, and form a community where they immerse themselves in striving to accomplish a commonly valued purpose.

Leader Must Communicate the Mission Effectively

It is not enough for a head coach, or any other leader, to possess a meaningful and desirable mission. He or she must be able to express this mission in such a way that potential followers can see clearly its value and meaningfulness for them personally (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Putman, 1990). The initial, and therefore critical, articulation of this typically occurs in the sorts of mission statements exemplified above. If such statements are to be successful, if they are to enlist strong personal commitments from players and assistants right from the start, it is vital that they be delivered in the most effective form possible. It is therefore strongly in coaches' best interests to ensure that all of the key elements of the mission are present in the mission statement, and to craft all of its constituent messages in such a way that they are likely to enlist the existing motivations of players in the team cause. Time spent by coaches in preparing and rehearsing this statement to be as effective as possible is time well spent.

Leader Must Continually Renew the Mission

Organizational expert Anthony Putman (1990) has said that "Mission renewal is, I believe, the most critical factor in ensuring the long term success and continuity of an organization" (p. 43). A team mission is not the sort of thing that can be stated once and then forgotten. It must be kept alive (Phillips, 1992). Coaches must continually restate and reaffirm the mission if it is to remain a clear, present, and motivating guide star for team members. They must come back to it again and again in various ways such as reminding the team of the mission, punishing behavior contrary to it, and strongly and publicly rewarding actions consistent with it. Most importantly, they must themselves act in pursuit of the mission with the utmost consistency, and thereby demonstrate their own deep commitment to it.

Requirement # 2: Essential Characteristics for Leaders

"What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

"One ambitious young lawyer asked how one went about winning trust, and the senior partner said dryly, 'Try being trustworthy'."

—John Gardner

The focus in this section is on what are often referred to as “leadership qualities.” These are essentially personal characteristics that, if possessed by a leader and recognized by a follower, would give the latter reason to follow the former. These personal characteristics are not a willy-nilly collection with no organizing principle. Rather, they are all essential precisely because they relate to two central issues. The first of these is the *credibility* of the leader—especially, his or her credibility as someone who can and likely will bring about the accomplishment of the mission. If individuals are to follow, they must believe, not only that the leader possesses a meaningful mission, but also that he or she has what it takes to lead them to its achievement.

The second issue regarding leadership qualities has to do with the *personal acceptability* of the leader to followers. A potential follower might be exposed to a potential leader, and come away from the experience with the following reaction: “Yes, I believe that she has a very worthy mission, and I believe that she has the ability to achieve it, *but I could never follow that sort of person.*” The basis for rejecting the leader in such cases is usually that he or she is judged to be an unethical person and/or one who is potentially injurious to the follower. For example, an athlete might evaluate a prospective coach and make the following summary appraisal: “I have seen him develop excellent teams time and again; I’m pretty sure he will do so again and I would like to be a part of that; but I also know that he is an extremely callous, insensitive, and degrading person who rules with fear and abuse, and I know that he cheats in order to win, and I don’t want to be involved with that sort of person.”

All of the personal characteristics advanced in the literature as associated with effective leadership meet these twin requirements of conveying credibility and personal acceptability for most persons. All of them may be, and often are, faked or impersonated by persons desirous of leadership power such as politicians, chief executive officers, movement leaders—and head coaches. Here, however, we will discuss the ideal case where the coach is seen as being, and in fact is, the possessor of the following seven personal characteristics: (1) personal integrity, (2) faith that the mission can be accomplished, (3) competence, (4) self-confidence, (5) tenacity, (6) emotional stability, and (7) the ability to maintain command. In this section, each of these personal characteristics will be defined, and the reasons why its possession would constitute grounds for others to follow will be clarified.

1. Personal Integrity

It is very difficult to follow others with strong and enduring commitment if one cannot be sure that they are who they present themselves to be. The political office seeker presents himself as a family man with strong religious beliefs, but there are persistent reports of his engagement in sexual harassment of his office staff members. The religious leader presents herself as a selfless servant of the Lord, but has amassed a huge fortune from the contributions of her flock. In the wake of such

revelations, most followers will inevitably have serious questions about whether they can trust the self-presentations of the leader. Even when the questionable activities do not bear directly on the leader's conduct of his or her leadership role, the logical question for followers becomes: "If he (or she) has deceived me in this way, might he not also deceive me when he says he stands for certain things as a leader?"

Therefore, coaches, like other leaders, need to be, and to be seen as being, persons of honesty and integrity whose deeds match their words (Covey, 1991; Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Phillips, 1992). If they say they stand for some principle, their actions must be consistent with that principle. If they make a promise or commitment, they must follow through. They must be seen as "straight shooters" and "genuine articles," and not as slippery, manipulative, deceitful, falsely promising, or in other ways lacking integrity.

Such personal integrity is an essential *general* characteristic in a leader-coach. However, there is one particular area where such integrity is especially important. The leader is, in Putman's phrase, the "keeper of the mission" (1990, p. 20). As such, he or she must have, and must be seen as having, a true personal commitment to its accomplishment, and the coincidence between words and deeds becomes especially critical in this regard. For example, supposing that a coach proclaims, as many coaches do, that "our goal is to prepare you to be the best possible persons after your athletic careers are over." However, he then teaches players how to cheat, exploits them, and discards them when they have outlived their usefulness. Such a coach's mission statement emerges as a cynical lie, and one likely to promote hatred against him on the part of players. His ability to engage players in the pursuit of this "mission" is severely undermined.

The mission statement is, among other things, a *promise* from the head coach. It is a promise to the effect that he or she is, and will continue to be, personally dedicated and committed to its fulfillment. The players, if they are to follow with full commitment, must observe that this promise is being kept—that the mission is as much the leader's selfless guide star as it is everyone else's on the team. When this is the case, the players' perception will be that a shared commitment or covenant exists between the coach and themselves to accomplish the mission.

2. Faith That the Mission Can Be Accomplished

Players must believe that the coach believes (Conger, 1988). They must believe that the coach truly believes that the mission can be accomplished. If they perceive that their leader lacks such faith, they have reason to lose faith themselves and to cease following. After all, why would one work hard and long to achieve a mission when one's leader as well as oneself no longer believe that it can be achieved? Thus, the coach must set high but realizable goals for the team and communicate that he or she fully believes in the true possibility that, with the player's best

efforts, they can be achieved. Above all, the coach should never communicate despair.

3. *Competence*

To be effective leaders, coaches must be, and must be seen as being, competent (Hogan, Cnrphy, & Hogan, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). It is critical that players believe their coaches have a strong knowledge of the game, a command of its requisite skills and strategies, and the ability to teach what they know effectively to players. Few team members will follow a coach, no matter how appealing the mission, if they do not believe that he or she has the knowledge and skills required to lead them to its achievement.

4. *Self-confidence*

To be a leader, coaches must have, and be seen as having, self-confidence (Conger, 1988; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). They must believe in their own capabilities, methods, judgments, and decisions, and in the worth of what they are trying to accomplish. Coaches who communicate a great deal of self-doubt ("Well, I'm not sure this is the right decision." ... "Gee, I'm not sure I really understand this") are unlikely to engender strong belief in their players and assistants. It's hard to believe in leaders who don't believe in themselves. Furthermore, the possession of self-confidence helps coaches to act decisively and well, which in turn inspires confidence in their subordinates.

5. *Tenacity*

To be leaders, coaches must be, and must be seen as being, doggedly tenacious in the pursuit of the mission. Team members must believe that they will persist in the face of inevitable hardships, obstacles, opposition, criticism, and failures, in their steadfast pursuit of the mission. Few are willing to follow a leader whom they believe might abandon them when the going gets rough.

6. *Emotional Stability*

To be a leader, a coach must be, and must be seen as being, someone who can engage in sound, rational decision making both in ordinary circumstances and in the face of crises (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). If subordinates believe that their coach will become highly anxious, panicked, enraged, confused, or otherwise problematically disturbed; and that he or she will thereby be rendered unable to make sound, rational decisions at critical times, they will have less reason to follow the lead of this coach.

7. Ability to Maintain Command

To be a leader, a coach must be, and be seen as being, a person who has the ability and the will to set reasonable rules and limits for followers, and to enforce them consistently. As Joe Paterno, the highly successful Penn State football coach, observed, "If I backed off (from enforcing an important rule with significant consequences), the message was clear as a bell: I'm afraid of you guys. Ignore this rule. Ignore any rule that itches as much as this one does" (1988, p. 115). Such a failure, he argued, was an open invitation to repeated rule violations, a loss of team discipline, and a loss of control on the part of the coach over his or her team. The ultimate form that such limit-setting takes is expulsion of a member from the team, and it is vitally important that a coach be willing to take this drastic step when a player has been given a fair chance to mend his or her ways and has proven unable or unwilling to do so.

Ability to maintain command also means that the leader-coach will not permit others such as assistant coaches or players to make decisions or otherwise take control of the team in ways that are the head coach's responsibility (cf. Phillips, 1992). In this connection, Abraham Lincoln once advocated that "Some single mind must be master, else there will be no agreement in anything." While it is important for coaches to delegate certain responsibilities to others, and to be receptive to the input of others regarding alternative ways of doing things, it is critical that they not tolerate usurpations of power or anything else that would serve to undermine the unity of the team.

Once again here, the rationale for the necessity of this personal characteristic comes back to the credibility of the coach as someone who can accomplish the mission. If it becomes clear that the coach cannot control his or her followers, then *ipso facto* it becomes doubtful that he or she can direct them to the accomplishment of the team mission.

A Final Comment on Leadership Characteristics

Like any human being, a leader's ability to choose his or her personal characteristics is limited. It would make little sense, for example, to say to a coach, "When a critical situation occurs in a game, stop being so emotional; just set your feelings aside and think clearly;" or "Stop doubting yourself; have perfect confidence in yourself." One does not just decide to shed one's self-doubts or one's debilitating emotions in critical situations as one might decide to flip off a light switch.

Virtually every head coach will have personal weaknesses with respect to one or more of the leadership qualities outlined above. While an in-depth discussion of how to overcome such weaknesses is beyond the scope of this chapter, several brief suggestions may be offered. All of them require the preliminary step of the coach determining precisely what his or her weaknesses are. Once they are

determined, coaches are in a position to do three constructive things. First, knowing what their personal weaknesses are, they may target some personal efforts toward overcoming them, whether this be through personal thought, advice seeking, new behavior, or even personal counseling. Second, and more immediately implementable, coaches may devise ways to compensate for their weaknesses. For example, a coach might have a tendency to become so emotionally caught up in a game that adequate observation, and therefore effective decision making, are impaired. Such a coach might secure the aid of a highly trusted and more emotionally detached assistant coach to watch games, provide important observations, and make suggestions for adjustments based on these observations. Third, coaches might at times need to heed the old suggestion to "fake it 'til you make it" in selected ways. For example, they might express a greater self-confidence or a greater faith in some positive outcome than they in fact feel, in the interests of helping their teams.

ACTIONS TOWARD FOLLOWERS

"If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend. Therein is a drop of honey that catches his heart which, say what he will, is the great high road to his reason, and which when once gained, you will find but little trouble in convincing his judgment of the justice of your cause, if indeed that cause really be a just one. On the contrary, assume to dictate to his judgment, or to command his action, or to mark him as one to be shunned and despised, and he will retreat within himself, close all the avenues to his head and his heart, and though your cause be naked truth itself... you shall no more be able to (reach) him, than to penetrate the hard shell of a tortoise with a rye straw...Such is man, and so must he be understood by those who would lead him, even to his own best interest."

—Abraham Lincoln

If they are to be effective leaders, how should coaches *behave* in relation to those under their authority? Again our answer here shall not be an ad hoc list, but one that has a rational, unifying principle behind it. Let us first develop the logic of this principle.

Every action of a coach toward a player is an act in a relationship. In the beginning, the coach's actions will be instrumental in establishing the nature of that relationship. Later, these actions will tend to maintain or deepen the relationship that currently exists, or they will tend to change it in the direction of a new relationship. For example, if a new player comes onto a team and the coach is warmly welcoming and takes pains to hook the player up with his new teammates, the coach's behaviors will tend to establish an amicable relationship with the

player. Later, if the coach supports this player in a time of personal need, this action will tend to maintain or to deepen the initial relationship. On the other hand, if the coach engages in favoritism that disadvantages the player, such behavior will tend to change the relationship in the direction of a different, less amicable one (cf. Ossorio, 1982/1998).

From a related but slightly different perspective, every action of a coach toward a player is also a case of treating that player as someone of greater or of lesser worth and value. If the coach tells a player to sit out and not risk injuring herself permanently, this is a case of treating her as someone whose physical well-being counts for more than winning a game. On the other hand, telling her to play under such circumstances is a case of treating her as someone whose physical well-being is less important than winning that game. For the most part, players are sensitive to what sort of place and value they have in the coach's eyes, which may range all the way from an athletic resource to be used and discarded when no longer useful, to a valued person whose best interests are placed before all other considerations.

The unifying principle for leadership actions becomes this: Leaders should act in such a way that the relationships they establish with their players through their actions, and the places of value they assign through these same actions, are ones that are conducive to cooperation and followership. Their behaviors should be expressive of relationships that are consistent with cooperation, and should be cases of treating a subordinate as an individual of high worth and value. A head coach may have an extremely desirable mission, and possess the utmost credibility as someone who can accomplish it, but can negate both of these if he or she engages in actions that turn followers against him or her, and thereby against the accomplishment of the mission. As Lao Tzu warned many centuries ago, "Fail to honor people, they fail to honor you."

In this section, eight behavioral policies of coaches towards their team members, all of which are consistent with the general principles just advanced, will be discussed. These policies are the following: (1) act in team members' best interests; (2) assign meaningful roles; (3) provide access to influence; (4) keep followers informed; (5) acknowledge contributions; (6) correct without degrading; (7) avoid unnecessary provocation; and (8) avoid unnecessary coercion.

1. Act in Player's Best Interests

The poet Robert Bly has said that "The old male initiators—King Arthur would be one—were interested in the soul of the young man. That's what the young men are missing today; there aren't any older men who are interested in their souls." Interest in their "souls"—interest in players becoming good people before all else—is the most critical thing that is implied by the notion of acting in players' best interests. Disciplining them even when this involves a loss of their talents to the team, not sacrificing their physical well being to win, and being there for them in times of personal need independently of what they can contribute to the team are

all ways that coaches can, and great coaches do, treat their players. Letting the infraction slide so that they can play, risking their physical well-being to win, and ignoring their human needs in times of trouble are all ways of saying, "I place winning before your soul—before your deepest personal interest." The former actions say to the player, "In relation to me, you are a valued person." The latter actions say, "In relation to me, you are only a means to my ends."

Why should coaches do this? Aside from the fact that it is first and foremost the moral way to treat human beings, it is in the long run one of the most effective things that a coach can do to enhance his or her ability to lead. To whom are players more likely to give their full devotion: someone who seems genuinely caring and interested in them as human beings; or someone who seems to value them only insofar as they can function athletically, and cares nothing for them as persons? In the short term, the former coach may lose some games. In the long term, he or she wins the dedication of players who, in the words of William Warren, are willing to "run through walls" for him or her.

Whatever their failings, it is a common theme in the biographies of great coaches like Lombardi, Bryant, Knight, and Paterno that they were there for their players as persons, and they remained there for them even when these players were no longer of any use to them as team members. And it is the highest tribute and testimony to their dedication when players say in the end, as Bart Starr did about Lombardi, that "More than anything else, he wanted us to be great men after we left football."

2. *Assign Meaningful Roles*

Other things being equal, who are players more likely to follow? A coach who gives them an insignificant role on the team? Or a coach who has taken the trouble to find out what their talents and interests are, and based on these has assigned them a vital, meaningful role in the accomplishment of the team mission? The former coach's message is, in effect, "You are nobody here, and I can't see any contribution you can make." The latter coach's message is: "You are somebody here; somebody worthy of being entrusted with a vital, meaningful role in the accomplishment of our mission; somebody whom I see as capable of making an important contribution to our team" (cf. Putman, 1990)

Goethe once said: "Treat a man as he is, and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be, and he will become as he can and should be." Much empirical work confirms Goethe's surmise that higher expectations often result in higher performance, and lower expectations in lower performance (see, for example, Rosenthal's classical 1974 work on the effects of teacher expectations on student performance). When judiciously entrusting a player (or an assistant) with a meaningful role, the coach is simultaneously conveying such an expectation. He or she is saying in effect: "This is a role vital to our team mission, and I see you as someone who can handle it." In so doing, the coach is conveying high expectations

and a vote of confidence, and thus enhancing the probability of eliciting the best performance from that player. (As always in human affairs, there are exceptions to the general rule, and judgment is required. For example, in the face of being so entrusted, some especially unconfident players might be so convinced of their lack of ability as to panic at the coach's assignment of responsibility. In such circumstances, other approaches to this player may be called for.)

Max DePree, in his excellent 1989 work on leadership in organizations has said that, "To make a commitment, any employee should be able to answer 'yes' to the following question: Is this a place where they will let me do my best? How can leaders expect a commitment from the people they lead, if those people feel thwarted and hindered?" (p. 42). One of the enduring lessons of America's quality debacle of the 1980's was that the old idea of asking a competent adult to screw in the same bolt all day was a recipe for disaster. Human beings need more. They need opportunities to employ fully their intellectual and physical skills—and ideally to be creative, innovative, and self-expressive in the bargain—in the accomplishment of meaningful tasks. Under conditions where this occurs, they can give themselves to their work. Under conditions where their roles seem trivial and meaningless, there is simply very little there to which they may give themselves.

3. Provide Access to Influence

Joe Paterno has said that "People usually don't mind not getting their way, but they always resent not getting their say" (1988, p. 72). Players and assistants need the opportunity to have their "say," i.e., to provide input to the coach knowing that it will always be given genuine consideration even if the coach does not in the end always act on it (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). If this opportunity is denied, players have been cut off from having their voices heard in their organization. The basic message to them is that their desires, ideas, and grievances do not count. They have been encouraged to make this their team and to embrace its mission, but then informed that what they think and feel and want doesn't really matter to the leadership. Such players may come to feel that it is not *really* their team and their mission, and will have strong reason to resent the leader. Resentment, it goes without saying, is not an emotion conducive to following. It sets the follower against the leader.

Thus, it becomes important for coaches to let subordinates know that their input is welcome and that it will always be given due consideration. If players or assistant coaches have dissatisfactions, ideas, problems, or any other important matter that they need to discuss with the coach, they should be encouraged to do so. Further, when they do communicate such matters, care should be taken to see that it is a positive experience for them—that the coach listens carefully and patiently to them, attempts to understand precisely what they are saying, thanks them sincerely for their input, and demonstrates genuine consideration of their position. Finally, if the coach acts on a player's input, he or she should publicly

credit that player's contribution; if the coach decides not to act on the input, he or she should explain the reasons for this decision to the player.

Aside from the benefits already mentioned, actively soliciting and carefully considering the input of team members will be helpful to the coach in a further way. As keeper of the mission, he or she must stay in touch with the needs, desires, and dissatisfactions of followers. If subordinates should become less committed to the mission, it is only by virtue of being in touch with them that appropriate changes and adjustments can be made. For example, if a coaching decision is perceived as unfair, this may cause resentment against the coach and resistance to his or her agendas—i.e., to the mission. In such a situation, it is absolutely essential that the coach become aware of these barriers to mission fulfillment so that he or she has the opportunity to address the problem and to restore full dedication to the mission.

4. Keep Followers Informed

Leaders need to keep their followers as informed as possible about what key decisions will be made and, once they have been made, why they have taken the form that they have. They also need to keep them informed about important developments affecting the team and its mission. Again, it is the players' and assistants' team and mission, and they are being asked to make a substantial personal commitment. Therefore, they have a right to know. Furthermore, being highly secretive tends to elicit paranoia. Keeping followers uninformed about such matters provides a fertile ground for mistrust, suspicion, and the attribution of all sorts of unsavory motivations to the head coach. Obviously, the existence of such conditions is not conducive to following that coach.

5. Acknowledge Contributions

To lead effectively, it is important for coaches to acknowledge team members' contributions to the organizational mission—their cooperation, their achievements, and their efforts. These should be acknowledged with recognition, praise, advancement, appreciation, and in any other way that is in keeping with the character of the specific team (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). Both the reception of appreciation and recognition, as well as the fact that such acknowledgments are "news" that what one is doing is successful, give followers stronger reason to continue. In the vernacular of the behaviorists, these can be powerful "reinforcements" with important motivational and informational implications. In fact, it is a general finding of research on leadership that leaders who are highly rewarding get better results and higher satisfaction on the part of followers (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994).

How does this relate to our central concern in this chapter, which is with articulating the conditions under which leaders are maximally likely to receive

committed followership? The simple answer to this is given by the question, "Whom will most people follow? The coach who takes their hard work, achievements, and contributions for granted, and barely seems to notice them? Or the coach who notices and praises their efforts and achievements, who broadcasts their wonderful contributions far and wide, and who in the end says 'thank you'?"

6. Correct Without Degrading

John Wooden, the coach who led UCLA to an unprecedented 11 national championships in college basketball, once stated that a coach should never "cause a player to lose his dignity before his fellows." As a teacher of a game and as a maintainer of team discipline, it is frequently necessary for coaches to correct. Wooden's admonition is to be extremely careful about how one goes about doing this. Two rules of thumb are apropos. The first of these is to correct mistakes and misbehaviors without degrading persons. One coach might say after a mistake: "You clumsy oaf, Jones, have you got two left feet or something?" Another, confronted with the same mistake, might say, "Hold on, Pat—look, here's what you're doing—now watch me—try it this way." The former coach has degraded the player, and in the bargain has run the risk of destroying the player's confidence. The danger here is precisely that the player will believe the coach's appraisal that he (the player) is in fact an incompetent "clumsy oaf" and its obvious implication that he will never be able to succeed. The latter coach has corrected without degrading and without incurring such damaging consequences. The second rule of thumb is that any significant corrections or disciplinary actions should not be conducted publicly in front of other team members, but privately and in such a way that the player's dignity is preserved.

Aside from the counterproductive quality of public, degrading criticism, it gives the player strong reason to resent and, depending on the particular circumstances, even to hate the coach. These are reactions, as Abraham Lincoln pointed out in the quote at the beginning of this section, that often cause people to "retreat within themselves" and to become "unreachable." On the other hand, most players will appreciate constructive criticism that seems offered in a spirit of benefitting them, and will appreciate that any potentially embarrassing disciplinary actions have been handled privately. Such players have reason to feel positively toward the coach, and to cooperate with him or her.

7. Avoid Unnecessary Provocation

Provocation elicits hostility (Ossorio, 1976). Hostility on the part of players toward their head coach is a motivation that sets them against that coach (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). While some degree of anger or animosity will inevitably occur between players and coaches at times, the engendering of such hostility is something that should be avoided to the degree possible. Unfortunate coaching

behaviors that often prove provocative include tyrannical abusiveness, favoritism, exploitation, neglect, manipulation, deceit, and excessive resort to harsh threats.

8. *Avoid Unnecessary Coercion*

Coercion elicits resistance (Ossorio, 1976). Resistance of followers to leaders is obviously the diametric opposite of committed cooperation with that leader in pursuit of the team mission, and is therefore to be avoided to the degree possible (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). By the term "coercion" here is meant resort to forms of pressure that are perceived by players as excessively punitive, unfair, or illegitimate. Examples of such coerciveness include unwarranted resort to severe threats to control players, the excessive use of fear as a motivator, and the degrading barking of orders to followers when respectful directions and requests would do the job.

Max DePree (1989) has offered a helpful suggestion in this regard. He contends that leaders are well-advised to regard and to treat their followers as *volunteers*. The notion here is that leaders minimize their utilization of all of the "big sticks" that they possess (e.g., the power to bench, dismiss, or otherwise punish a player) to the degree possible. Instead, they would treat their followers as what, from a different vantage point, they are: persons who are there voluntarily—persons who have freely made a commitment to the team and its mission, and who could revoke that commitment at any time. The recommended attitude toward followers is: "This person has volunteered to go with me; I'd better hold up my end of the covenant as a leader in such a way as to maintain or enhance that free pledge of theirs." Realistically, there will be times when coaches must resort to the threat and the use of the "big sticks" alluded to above. The recommended policy here is to minimize such resort to the degree possible.

Leader "Possessions"

Before concluding this chapter, there is one final category of leader attributes that must be considered. It seems not to fall neatly under the categories that have been discussed thus far, those of mission, personal characteristics, or leader actions. The most apt label that I can think of to characterize this final category is "leader possessions," for these are things leaders ideally would have or possess in order to maximize belief and commitment on the part of followers. There are two of these possessions, those of (a) a credible plan for accomplishing the mission and (b) access to resources vital to this accomplishment.

1. *Credible Plan for Accomplishing the Mission*

In athletics, unless one is a coach whose reputation for success is firmly established, it is important to convey in the initial address to the team that one possesses an excellent plan for accomplishing the team mission (Kirkpatrick &

Locke, 1991). While it would not be feasible to communicate the entire plan, enough needs to be said about it that subordinates get a glimpse of its existence and its soundness. The particulars of the coach's plans and methods then emerge day by day and week by week. It is critical that, as they unfold, these plans and methods be demonstrably good ones and that their relationship to team success be made crystal clear to all subordinates. Players need to look at what is being done and draw the conclusion: "Yes, I see how following these methods and this overall plan will give us an excellent chance to succeed."

2. Access to Vital Resources

In general, leaders who are perceived as having access to vital resources relevant to the accomplishment of the mission become thereby more credible. They have the best minds at their disposal, or access to powerful political allies, or vast monetary resources. The extreme case of this is where the leader is perceived to be receiving some inanner of divine assistance. In fact, this is the original meaning of the term "charisma" in the traditional notion of "charismatic leadership" (Conger, 1988).

Where coaching is concerned, therefore, it can be highly beneficial for coaches to possess access to such vital resources, and for team members to observe that this is the case. Such resources might include having (a) highly reputable fellow coaches available to speak to the team, to help with special practices, or to consult with the coach; (b) access to the fruits of scientific research in sports psychology; and (c) excellent training facilities and equipment, especially ones that might convey an advantage over other teams. All such resources, in addition to being helpful in their own right, enable the coach to gain further credibility as someone who can lead committed followers to the accomplishment of the team mission.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, the question has been raised: "What must coaches do, and how must they be, if they are to maximize the probability that their players and assistants will follow them with commitment and dedication?" The position that has been taken, based on the author's experience and his review of a vast literature on this question, is the following. First, coaches must possess a mission that taps into the deepest values and desires of their team members, must communicate this mission to them in the most effective ways possible, and must continually renew this mission. Second, they must have, and must be seen as having, certain personal characteristics that give them both high credibility and personal acceptability in the eyes of team members. These personal characteristics include personal integrity, faith in the achievability of the mission, competence, self-confidence, tenacity, emotional stability, and the ability to maintain command. Third, they must engage