

THE CULTURE SYSTEM

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THE SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL TEAM CULTURES

All players are highly involved in service within the community and are known far and wide for their sportsmanship.

All they do is encourage each other! All they do is help one another!

Culture happens when the purpose is in place, the direction is clear, the standard is obvious and the players are held accountable to it.

Success comes from a series of interwoven actions done intentionally and consistently over time.

High standards and strong relationships

- Relationships and standards go hand in hand; both are dependant on one another
- Without relationships, standards of behaviors can only be so high

Research shows that people do not consciously make the vast majority of their decisions. Instead, your subconscious chooses for you, upwards of 95% of your decisions.

Leaders quickly become exhausted and stressed by the responsibility of constantly having to motivate others, engage in difficult conversations and hold people accountable.

It's helpful to think of creating a successful culture as less like building a house more like tending a garden. While a gardener uses a variety of mechanical tools, the process is very organic. A good gardener anticipates and prepares for changes in weather, and depending on the environment and what they are growing, they plant, cultivate and harvest at different times. It's systematic without being rigid; a system for operating that offers guidance while being flexible.

“The key to success was being organized. The less time you wasted, the better a coach you were.”

-Bill Belichick

MISSION STATEMENT

When coaches lead with an outward mindset, they see others as people with needs, desires and challenges just as legitimate as their own. Only when individuals see people as people can they truly empathize with others. They put people first, not results.

Transformational leaders are highly driven by a selfless ambition to serve others and are obsessed with the culture they are creating . . . They are open and vulnerable with their team, setting an example of not valuing perfection but instead of inviting athletes to join them on a journey of growth . . . Their athletes are more likely to have a healthy relationship with their sport and understand how it is preparing them for life.

Write a mission statement. ***WHY DO I COACH?***

See yourself as a mentor.

“The emphasis is not on the leader but is focused on those the mentor leads.”

-Tony Dungy

Mentors start by recognizing people’s strengths and competencies.

When mentees hit roadblocks, mentors don’t focus only on how an athlete’s behavior is a problem for the team and the coach. For example, if an athlete shows up late, their first reaction is not to blame but to find out why they struggle to be on time and help them take responsibility for their actions.

Taking responsibility for your actions isn’t just about admitting when you have made a mistake, it’s about taking action to become better. Mentor coaches help them to take that action.

Transformational coaches don’t just coach athletes; they coach people.

When coaches operate with an outward mindset, they are often more concerned with how their players are doing in life than on the field.

One of the special things about transformational leadership is that no matter how many mistakes a coach makes, they’ve never failed.

“The true measure of a man is how he treats someone who can do him absolutely no good.”

-Samuel Jackson

Truly transformational coaches are empathetic. Empathy is about recognizing what others are perceiving and feeling, and then acknowledging it and helping them feel seen.

Transformational coaches don't just put themselves in their shoes; they put themselves in their feet.

Think of an athlete on your team who you find to be very difficult. Write down their name. Next, write out the story you tell yourself about the athlete. For example, maybe you think they are entitled, never work hard and are always complaining. Then write out their real story; what are the challenges they face, their aspirations and the influences in their life? If you don't know their story, take time to learn about it. Lastly, write them a short note of appreciation or encouragement.

THE VISION STATEMENT

Not everyone ends up like Bill Walsh, but if you look around the coaching profession you will see plenty of broken leaders, not because of a lack of ambition or effort, but due (in the words of Jim Collins) to the "undisciplined pursuit of more."

"I essentially want Camelot in a soccer program."

-Messiah soccer

You want practice to be the best part of their day.

What is your greatest aspiration for your team?

How do you want people to feel as a result of achieving your vision?

We have fourteen guys on our team. Everyone of them has his own unique set of circumstances, and it's my job to understand what those circumstances are.

As a coach, I want every member of my team to feel they are seen, known and loved regardless of their performance.

I want my players to have such a memorable experience and meaningful relationships when the season is over that they don't want it to end.

Transformational leaders are on a mission to change their athletes' lives for the better.

CORE VALUES

Do NOT let coaching define your identity and self-worth

Determining and developing your guiding core values is a lifelong journey

What's important to you as core values?

-Steve Kerr: 1) Competitiveness 2) Joy 3) Mindfulness 4) Compassion

Like your mission statement and vision statement, core values can easily become cliché or forgotten.

When we share areas of our character we are working to grow, to inspire our team members to grow as well.

If you are willing to be vulnerable enough to grow with your team, it will accelerate your personal growth

PERSONAL DISCIPLINES

Personal development is a lifelong journey.

“What you give your attention to is the person you become. Put another way; the mind is a portal to the soul, and what you will your mind with will shape the trajectory of your character. In the end, your life is no more than the sum of what you gave your attention to.”

-John Mark Comer

“Solitude is a subjective state in which your mind is free from input from other minds.”

-Cal Newport

“Read 500 pages a like this every day. That's how knowledge works. It builds up like compound interest.”

-Warren Buffet

Research shows that the average time an American spends on social media every year equals the time it would take to read 200 books.

Create a book list so you always have plenty of ideas on what to read next.

Mentors help to illuminate these blind spots and knowledge gaps.

You should look to form a personal advisory board, a group of people who make you better by offering both support and perspective.

Before Edison's invention of the lightbulb, the average person slept 11 hours a night. Today , the average American sleeps seven hours a night.

Sleep is the single most effective thing you can do to reset your brain and body health. Sleep is a life support system, and it is Mother Nature's best effort at immortality.

The simplest habit tracker is a calendar.

Meditation and journaling.

People matter

ONBOARDING TO YOUR CULTURE

What do you like most about the program?

What do you like least about the program?

What would you change if you could?

Connection is why we're here

Being vulnerable doesn't mean sharing your deepest, darkest secrets

Make a monthly commitment to check in with your players on their state of your relationship and their experience on the team.

Empathetic listening is a mental and emotional skill that requires active listening.

You can become so busy pursuing your mission that you forget your mission!!!!

What was your first day like on the team?

What would you like to feel like?

How can we create that experience for our new players?

Establish a buddy program/ big sister-little sister

Ask your players "What's hard for you?"

Athletes will follow you because they know you believe in them and care about what is important to them.

ESTABLISHING NON-NEGOTIABLES

Standards are agreed upon expectations that you strive to achieve

Types of standards

- Coach standards
- Player standards
- Individual standards

Pete Carroll Standards:

1. Always protect the team
2. No whining, no complaining, no excuses
3. Be early

John Wooden Standards:

1. Be on time
2. Be Neat and Clean
3. No profanity
4. Never criticize a teammate

Standards must be . . .

- Specific
- Objective
- Observable
- Controllable

People rarely change their behavior without knowing the cost or price of their behavior

Nate Sanderson "I'm going to fight for your eyes."

THE TEAM MANIFESTO

Ask the team questions:

- Why are we at the place that we are?
- What do we have to do to become the best?

What happens on the team stays on the team

Establishing team standards is a continuous process rather than a one time event

A good “Team Manifesto” achieves five things:

1. Sets clear vision, values and standards
2. Empowers players to take ownership
3. Identifies expectations for supporting standards
4. Specifies agreed upon consequences
5. Provides a framework for reflection

Building a Team Manifesto:

- Carve out 90 minutes and find a neutral location.
- Start with small group discussions, then bring it together as a group to finalize
 - What is our goal(s)?
 - What do we want this experience to be like?
 - What are the values that are going to guide our behavior?
 - How do we want to do things?
 - Write down all the behaviors that do not align with your values below a line and all the values that you want to display above a line
- Have an accountability agreement

It’s important early on to lay the foundation for support by crafting a simple standard of support

One of the best questions a coach can ask their team is “Why should I have to yell at you or make you run for not doing the things you said you needed to do to be successful?”

Prioritize what’s holding you back . . . “Which of these will be the most common challenges for our team reaching its potential?”

- This helps to not only address what have been the biggest culture problems to date, but to anticipate problems

Instead, you want to identify between 3 and 10 “bar raising standards” that naturally lead the team to improve how they do other things as well.

How we do this one thing is how we should also do everything else.

“Touches” for teammates in informal settings

Leave the place better than you found it

PLAYER IMPROVEMENT STANDARDS

We will treat the development of every player as if we are making a personal investment in him.

These meetings weren't one sided as players could give feedback, input and argue certain points. Over time the meetings seemed to be run more by the player than the manager as the players start to take ownership of their own development.

PIP: Player Improvement Plan (p. 123-124)

- The gap from where we are to where we want to be
 - Aspirations
 - Areas of Growth
 - Commitments
 - Support
 - Summarize

While the common question to start with might be "What are your goals?" the word "aspiration" implies something bigger than a goal and potentially much more meaningful.

- "What are your aspirations for your sport and life?"

What are your strengths (qualities and skills) that you need to continue developing?

How do you help your team? How do you hurt the team?

As players talk and share their perspective, it's important to actively listen

You might need to give hard feedback; don't sugarcoat it, as the more confusing the message, the more they players doesn't know where they stand.

You might have a player who isn't social but is a gym rat really putting in the work. You could affirm their individual work ethic by encouraging them to reinforce the standard throughout the program by inviting others to join them every time they go to the gym.

Implementation intention: Where, when and how?

How can I support you moving forward?

THE CAPTAIN'S COUNCIL

Unity Council

Coaches love to complain about the lack of leadership within their team, but few actually take steps to allow people to lead.

Study after study, including my own, tells us the qualities that leaders in today's world need are instructive, dynamic, collaborative and grounded in here, and now emotional intelligence.

Every captain is given the responsibility of leading a unit (typically 3-4 other players) to which they make clear commitments to serve, support and connect with each member.

In your weekly meetings, you should be vulnerable about your own challenges as a leader as well as walking with your captains through their struggles

Thus, it is important to start year one by creating a job description with the team for the Unity Council . . . the players should create a description of each quality by coming up with behaviors that align with each quality. After the first year you will just need to review and revive this job description.

On the ballot for Unity Council we recommend three rounds of voting with each round being on one of the three qualities of a leader identified on the job description

You should have one captain for every 4 or 5 players on your team.

Consider having your captains make three different commitments:

1. Serve
2. Connect: Organizing weekly team get-togethers
3. Support

Set a weekly meeting time.

What area am I weakest at as a coach?

TEAM CULTURE DAYS

Take a day to do something that is culture driven instead of practicing

“One of the best things I've found to improve a team's cohesion is to send them to do some hard, hard training.”

Maddon themed road trips

Studies have shown that the best predictor of relationships later is the amount of fun you have in the early stages of the relationship

MOTIVATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

With the right mindset these skills can help to increase an individual's well being, strengthen relationships, improve their performance and motivation to save everyone time, and at the end of the day leaves people feeling empowered, understood and accepted.

Reactance is the psychological reaction to assert your freedom.

Obstacles to change

- Too large and beyond your reach
- Too small and unimportant
- Out of Your Control
- Unpleasant to think about

The open question communicates curiosity towards the individual, not judgment

Affirmation focuses on the behavior, not the outcome

Affirmations help motivation come from within

- "You were ready for that shot and didn't hesitate"
- "You showed courage in speaking up in today's meeting; those were some difficult things."

Open questions, affirmations, reflections and summaries are the basic communication techniques used within motivational interviewing.

Keep your suggestions clear and concise . . . "Can I make a suggestion, something that has worked for me?"

"How do you feel about this plan?"

Try to make others feel better about themselves.

FINDING SOLUTIONS

At Toyota, employees along the assembly line can pull a cord to stop the entire line if they have an idea that will help with production. Employees knew that if the suggestion didn't work, somebody else would pull the cord, stop production and find a solution.

“I kept walking around the ship questioning the crew. I am a big believer in getting resentment and grumbling out of the way and into the open, where they can do a lot less damage.”

-Captain Mike Abrashoff

Leadership needs to build a culture where people feel safe and want to share their concerns.

On the other hand, if people know things get solved and they can contribute to solutions, it energizes those meetings.

Allowing employees to make decisions builds trust, develops their decision making ability and makes them more likely to take ownership of any negative consequences than if the solution were made for them.

The solutions should address the underlying problems, but they create an environment where teammates support each other. It also allows the team to take ownership of the team.

It's important to accept that the plan you agree to may not be the complete answer to the issue, and might even just be the first step.

By just documenting these commitments you increase accountability and ensure the desired outcome

STANDARDS REVIEW

You want to empower your players to take ownership of their team and help shape the culture

“What are unacceptable behaviors? When we are unacceptable, how can we support each other?”

“What are exceptional behaviors? Who do we want to be?”

Descriptions

- What would a good team dinner look like?
- Bus trip to an away game
- Film session
- Classroom behavior
- Bench during a game
- Sideline during a game
- When the team scores?

E.A.R.N.

If you don't have anything substantial to say, don't say anything at all

UCLA professor Albert Mehrabian's research has shown that communication of feelings and attitudes can be broken down into the content of the words we say (7%), the tone with which we say it (38%) and the body language with how we say it (55%).

E.A.R.N.: Encouragement, Affirmation, Reminders and Notifications

"I believe in you."

A simple change from "You're being lazy on defense" or "You're not hustling back" to "I didn't see you spring back on defense the last three possessions" changes it from criticism to notification.

One important thing to do within your support standard is having an agreed upon way of accepting feedback

- Show a hand signal
- Verbal acknowledgment
- Touch/ fist bump

If you are emphasizing players sprinting to space, quick touches and calling for the pass, those are things players should be communicating through EARN.

"Tony, I'm about to lose it with Danny. I need you to step in and fix it, because if I do, it's going to get ugly."

- Pop to Tony Parker on Danny Green

Before you start a segment of practice, let your team know it's on them as you're going to take a step back to allow them to coach each other.

Remind your captains that they have timeouts in practice and that they can use them instead of you getting upset at them.

The New Zealand All Blacks rugby team often allows their players to run a training session during the week

Questions to ask:

- How do you like to be encouraged?

- How do you like to be affirmed?
- What things do you struggle with where receiving reminders could help?
- How can you accept notifications from your teammates?

CONNECT AND CORRECT

Work so that you never get angry because you are too occupied with analyzing and searching for solutions

How you coach in the challenging moments and not just how you coach when things go well will define who you are as a coach.

How do leaders behave? Not just during the good times, but when faced with challenging moments when mistakes are made, the team's attitude and effort are poor, or even in defeat.

Threats obviously create a culture where people are afraid of failure, fostering more of a fixed mindset within your players.

They will change because they believe in what the change will do for them and how it will make them feel.

Before you can help an individual correct their behavior or mistakes, you need to connect with their emotional brain. If you fail to connect before you correct, the message you are trying to communicate will not be received because the emotional part of the brain will literally cut off communication to the thinking brain.

The goal is to create a team environment where stress is experienced in healthy rather than destructive ways.

Four factors in eliminating stress:

1. Predictability
2. Routine
3. Sense of control
4. Stable relationships with supportive people

A dysregulated person can never help another person regulate their emotions.

Rather than doing nothing, you can offer it as a solution: "Take a few minutes to yourself, grab a drink and we can talk when you're ready."

Don't be afraid to press pause and give everyone some space.

Ask curious questions

Labeling consists of naming the emotion to a context that elicits a response geared towards solving the issue.

After a player has taken ownership for their behavior, it is time to help them self-correct.

However, gentle reminders can be helpful using feedback statements connecting to the high standards of the group and the shared team purpose:

- "This isn't the effort we said we needed to give as a team to be successful."
- "We're hanging our heads right now. This isn't who we are as a team."
- "You're not showing respect towards your teammates and coaches at the moment. This isn't the type of teammate I know you want to be and I know that you're capable of being."
- "Right now, our level of focus doesn't match our team goals."

For example, Phil Jackson developed his own sign language to communicate with Toni Kukoc during games if he started playing selfishly. Key words also help.

"What does my team need from me today?"

CELEBRATE BEHAVIORS

Reinforcement is about finding ways to focus on the behaviors you want and celebrate them when you see them, instead of focusing on the behaviors you don't want

Keep your focus more on the behaviors than the outcomes.

Anson Dorrance has twelve core values; each year they study three of those values.

Great leaders not only teach their cultural language to their players, but they never stop speaking it

Have phrases that only your team knows and understands

Create a personal connection for those who hear those words

“Stories are not just stories; they are the best invention ever created for delivering mental models that drive behavior.”

-Daniel Coyle

Appreciation for work done is the most common denominator of employee motivation. Yet her findings were telling; while four out of five managers believe they express appreciation frequently, only one in five employees reported the same.

Never endorse what is below the standard and your praise will have meaning.

If you play on his team, you are just as likely to make it on the weekly highlight reel for sprinting over to pick up a teammate, a super enthusiastic bench celebration or a sacrifice the body hustle play than you are for a three point shot, a steal or a great finish at the rim.

NATURAL CONSEQUENCES

You try to figure out what brought that person to court and fix the issue rather than punish them.

When it comes to discipline, coaches should start with the end in mind

It's absolutely critical you have clear standards and have provided consistent support of those standards.

It's always best to show empathy and understanding for what they are experiencing

Sometimes natural consequences aren't practical as the behavior in question just doesn't negatively affect the individual, but has a significant negative impact on others.

You may need to surrender yourself to the fact that it's their choice to make bad decisions.

PROGRESSIVE CONSEQUENCES

Wooden taught every player that practice was a privilege and an opportunity to get better.

“We change our behavior when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing. Consequences give us the pain that motivates us to change.”

-Dr. Henry Cloud

Yet experience shows coaches should be more worried about the resentment or rebellion than often comes from punishment.

When you say those four words- “you’ve lost the privilege” or “you’ve lost the opportunity”- you communicate that the consequences were because of their choices . . . players genuinely appreciate it when coaches treat them with respect and give them a chance to act . . . Coaches therefore need to reestablish standards using logical consequences when behaviors are unacceptable and need to be addressed immediately.

“I bet if you did that drill again you could give a lot more effort. Let’s try it again.”

They should be reminded they will not go back in the game until they choose to meet the standard.

RESTORATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Make a personal connection first; everything else follows.

Maddon realized to make people do better, you don’t need to make them feel worse.

Ask the player “What can you do to make this right?”

These are solutions that are more meaningful than a forced apology and more positive than a punishment

Sometimes punishment is unavoidable, so you ask the player what their punishment should be.

REMOVE CULTURE KILLERS

It helps to make hard decisions on who is the right fit for your team simple, transparent and remarkably easy to make, because you value your culture vastly more than making an exception for a particular individual

Self-selection is the best, but sometimes you need to thin the herd

DNDC-Do Not Draft-Character

Questions to ask yourself before dismissal

- Have you invested in the relationship with this individual?
- Have you clearly established standards in the relevant areas?
- Have you supported the individual through mentorship and training?
- Have you given the individual clear feedback on areas of growth?

-Have you enforced the standards through restorative consequences?

I just knew I had a responsibility to the other 14 guys on the team...

CONCLUSIONS

Make your coaches practice teaching a skill to each other before they teach it to the team

You need to establish standards as a group, while having non-negotiables for your coach behaviors

Coaches too often let the experience of a few crazy parents taint their perspective

- Invite parents to team events
- Send a weekly email with insights on team culture
- Consistently check in with parents via text, email or phone calls
 - Email a parent every 3rd day to check in

No matter how many games or championships you win, it will never be good enough for “them” . . . take pride in what you’ve done and stay focused on your mission.

Ask first “Is it warranted” when it comes to criticism. If it is warranted, acknowledge it, apologize, learn and grow from it.

One of the most common criticisms coaches receive is from players who don’t feel their role is valued.

“I regret that I didn’t back him down. Or leave. Ironically, it was part of the reason I left, for good. By then I had lost my taste for the job. I’m not sure if I ever got it back, and in some ways Eddie was part of the reason. I let him set a preposterous standard and then humiliate me when I couldn’t reach it. Looking back on it, I concluded that there are times when you must stand up for yourself even if the consequences include being fired.”

-Bill Walsh on Eddie DeBartolo

There will be a time when you face unwarranted criticism that will steal your joy.

You as a leader are not going to be right for every organization

