

## THE MESSIAH METHOD

“The longer you are in this program, the more you’ll understand that it’s really not about soccer.”

“Have a great day. Make the most of it. Tell someone you love them. Your parents will really appreciate it, I promise.”

“The winning isn’t what happens on the field. Ninety-five percent of it is what happens before we ever get to the field.”

Pursue a higher purpose than winning → “The only thing worse than running is not having something to run for.”

Be intentional about everything → By being *intentional about everything*, by insisting on getting things right no matter how small, by attending to- even obsessing over- detail. From communicating the purpose, to designing the world’s best recruiting visit, to proactively managing team chemistry, to consistently confronting mediocrity, to developing the passing patterns that will take them from the center back to the back of the net.”

“If you don’t like what’s happening on your team, it’s your fault.”

“I’m not looking for the best players. I’m looking for the right players.”

Cultivate team chemistry → “Team chemistry isn’t something that we hope for. It’s something that we work really hard at. It’s not easy, it’s not simple and it just doesn’t happen.”

Link all training to the match → At Messiah, it begins with the leaders crystal clear vision of what the game should look like and of the options that each player has in almost every situation. Training should be closely linked to the match.

Choreograph game day → Execution requires readiness and readiness is no accident. In short, they choreograph game day. For home games, that means routines and traditions to keep players focused and to connect back to those alumni who came before them.

Play to a standard → It’s easy to fall into complacency, a false sense of security . . . But we can’t expect the same result. We have to go out and earn it. Playing to a standard is a higher calling than winning.

**They stand on the shoulders of those that came before them.**

## **Discipline #1: Pursue a Higher Purpose than Winning**

Put substance over image

It's about keeping the team focused on a higher purpose than that, a higher purpose than themselves.

“I wrote on the board that we're going to be the ‘best place in the country to play college soccer.’ I didn't say that we'd be the best team, I said the best place to play, which is controllable. The best guys, the best coaches, the best team chemistry, the best training methods, the best practices, the most positive group.”

It means you develop deep relationships that go well beyond soccer.

There's an environment here that fosters leadership.

Servant leadership. The athletes are proactive about their serving, too, since this is just who they are as people.

Sportsmanship should never be sacrificed for the cause of winning a game, even if it's a championship. You model sportsmanship and playing the game the right way all the time.

“The best teams are those that not only combine the skills of their members to be successfully fit the demands of their task, but also energize team members through the bonding that comes with striving towards a common goal.”

“Selflessness means the team comes first. There is no place for selfishness, egotism or envy.”

“If at the end of your career all you can say is ‘I was a national champion and we won a lot of games,’ then I'd say it wasn't worth the time and energy.”

## **Discipline #2: Be Intentional About Everything**

“I will study and get ready, and perhaps my chance will come.”

-Abraham Lincoln

Don't whine about uninspired team members, or a culture of mediocrity, or people who won't follow, or your anemic pipeline of recruits. Those things, like almost everything else, are controllable. Shapeable. Changeable. You're in charge, now do something about it.

If anything matters, everything matters.

There are no unimportant details. We do things a certain way for a reason. ‘Little things make big things happen’.

Intentionality may be the biggest part of our success.

It all starts with the extraordinary team chemistry, a hidden asset many coaches know is essential but struggle to attain.

“Forced family fun.”

“I just agonize over practice. Rarely does it just come. I’ll spend two hours at night and I’m embarrassed to say sometimes I get stuck at work and I’ll just lose a day in trying to come up with a practice.”

There’s an inextricable link between training and the match.

Every minute of practice matters, and I’ve been able to convince our teams of that too.

Messiah coaches don’t talk long before a game, but that doesn’t give them a license to wing it. They build their pre-game talk ahead of time. Then they sometimes re-build it. This needs to be right. It often requires more preparation to speak persuasively for five minutes than it does for 15 or 20 minutes.

I’m not asking you to be perfect. I’m asking you to give it your best at all times.

Confronting the human tendency to be comfortably mediocre is exhausting. It’s a battle in leadership.

Do I become more compassionate by being less results-driven? No. Balance is not the answer. A leader has to be both.

### **Discipline #3: Recruit the “Both-And” Players**

While affirming the value of discipline, it affirms the value of imagination

Pursuing athletic excellence, developing Christian character. If we don’t accomplish both of these goals in a season, then we have not had a successful season.

“Built to Last”: In brief, the concept is the antithesis of what’s called “the tyranny of the or”, the presumption that there is a necessary tradeoff, that we must choose between seemingly competing ideals. They want both. They insist on both. Usually they get both.

Messiah has:

- A fiercely competitive spirit AND selfless love
- The hardest working team AND the most technical team
- Champions heart AND humble spirit
- Driven individuals AND selfless teammates
- Dare greatly AND the courage to fail
- Goal: to be a champion AND being a champion is not our purpose

We want an extremely technical team and an extremely tough team.

Prioritize character, insisting on a humble, team-first attitude; communicate these criteria unashamedly; don’t settle for what you don’t want; and achieve critical mass so teammates will sharpen one another

### ***Simplify and stand firm.***

The two-day “Advanced Camp” was a masterstroke innovation, attracting good-fit players to campus and giving those players a glimpse into the exciting future they’d enjoy on the men’s team.

Soccer coaches do an awful job with camps. I don’t know what they’re thinking- just roll out the balls as a way to make money. It’s glorified babysitting. I wanted everything that had our name on it- this is business and branding, of course- to be phenomenal, to exude excellence. So camps have been a big piece of the PR, the public image of our program. It was very important to me that if it said Messiah on it, it was special.

Talent is not enough!

### **Discipline #4: Cultivate Team Chemistry**

Solitary, summertime workouts are not really alone

Everyone expends maximum effort because they want to do their very best for the team. Because of their close relationships, because of their camaraderie.

Team Chemistry is:

- The ability of the players to get along with one another, to work smoothly and unselfishly under the leadership of the coaching staff.
- Each player's recognition of the specific role that he or she has in terms of team approach
- Mutual feelings of loyalty and empathy for one another
- The ability of the players to anticipate one another's moves and to blend their efforts into the team pattern
- A strong sense of team identity coupled with the total commitment to the program and coaching staff

***“Relationships are the foundation of the team. You can never invest too much care and time in a teammate.”***

Loyalty, commitment, morale, retention, confidence, *esprit de corps*- they all flow from cohesion and consequently, so do better results.

Notice, they're fighting *for* one another, rather than against each other to gain a starting position.

Listen to your coach. He doesn't play mind games. You need to trust him. He knows what he's doing. It's going to take some time.

Putting others before yourself, lifting up teammates in times of need and encouraging even when you may not feel like it.

All they do is encourage each other!

Leaders don't realize that they can dictate the culture. We cross our fingers and hope things work out, instead of dictating a positive culture of success.

Team chemistry is a conscious effort.

Without insistence, we lose accountability.

Lot's of things can damage relationships, from a rough tackle in practice, to gossip, to cliques, to mere non-verbals that communicate criticism. Some of these actions are intentionally malicious, some are not, and some are simply misunderstood. Regardless, they all threaten team chemistry. Messiah addresses this threat through their principle of “mean no offense, take no offense.” Teammates are to say nothing and do nothing that undermines one another, and on the receiving end, they're not to interpret comments or actions as personal attacks.

What happens at practice stays at practice.

We tell our seniors ‘you’ve gotta find that freshman and invest in him.’

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

-Proverbs 27:17

“I’m a great believer in the concept of guilt. You weren’t punished for missing the five minute mile standard, but what do you suffer? You suffer the weight of disappointment to your teammates, your coaches and the legions of Messiah players who have gone before you and made that five minute mile important.”

Leadership is not a title but an attitude

The summer workout is not about you. The five minute mile is not about you. Our upcoming season is not about you. This is about the team and what we can accomplish together.

There is nothing more important- *nothing*- than organizational culture. It is everything and it can be amazing everywhere. And is 100 percent under your control.

**“The number one piece of developing team chemistry is *time*. Everything else is a bumper sticker. The only way any of it works is time invested in people. Period. If it were easy, everyone would do it.”**

### **Discipline #5: Link Training to the Match**

Many Brazilian players will do what they’re supposed to do in practice, but then do their own thing in the games. Not us.

The elusive link between what happens in practice and what happens in a game.

Brandt standardized Messiah’s approach to the game, *thereby enabling them to train in a way that made a real difference in the match.*

It added up to three years of experimentation and then the breakthrough: their first national title.

One that broke down the game into almost every conceivable situation and then dictated the options a player has in those situations.

There aren’t team rules on the floor; they’re called team agreements. Team agreements are things that players must do in a certain way . . . It’s not a choice. We agree it’s what’s going to happen.

We were going to think and act a certain way. We were going to be open to doing what was best for the team rather than what was best for me. If you don't agree? You get a trip into the coaches office, then to the end of the bench . . . it's not a choice.

Everybody knows what everybody else is supposed to be doing.

It's "freedom within a framework."

Indeed they have, building a standardized system and securing buy-in through team agreements.

If you're doing something in practice that doesn't show up in a game, you're wasting everyone's time. Most coaches haven't developed a system where positional play is so dictated, so they can't train as well for what's going to happen in the match.

"Shadow": A 10 v. 0 game where the team plays against no defenders to practice pre-determined passing sequences that lead to scoring chances.

Overall, Messiah does not use a wide variety of drills. Instead, they tend to rely on a scalable set of exercises, starting with fundamentals, progressively adding new elements and working them to perfection.

We don't do anything in practice without a purpose. Everything we do in practice translates to the game. Everything is functional, so if you're a right back, you're spending time on what you need to do.

The head coaches are talking non-stop to the players. Teaching actually.

Then you learn that you don't get yelled at if you do the right thing but shank it. You *do* get yelled at if you do the wrong thing and then crank it into the back of the net.

It's hard to put a value on cognitive habits.

We're not friends on the practice field.

Mentally toughness for me is your ability to focus on what you can control.

Mentally tough players and teams push beyond their perceived limits.

Messiah usually pulls out late game victories because of their poise and determination that comes from mental toughness.

We do the right things for the right reasons all the time.

The last thing that you want to do is let your teammates down.

When it comes to mental toughness, personal experience is indeed the best teacher.

They have a clear vision of what its going to look like on the field and they use specific training to get there, focusing incessantly on what will work in their particular system.

There's a difference between "general training" and "specific training"

Standardize the system. Bring order out of chaos. Insist on structure rather than sovereignty. Control what you previously thought was uncontrollable. In Brandt's words, "dictate the options." and then, in Becker's words, "use specific training" to instill those options. Enable people to succeed by linking all training to the match.

### **Discipline #6: Choreograph Game Day**

I'm anti-distraction. I try to eliminate these and set the team mindset. It's a team agreement that everyone will buy in.

Messiah has "team time" planned for all but about an hour of game day. There's very little free time and it's highly scheduled.

90 minutes before kickoff it's "focus time". It's silent mental preparation

The women's and men's routines are just that, a habitual, standardized process. Messiah coaches intentionally manage the team's mentality.

A team talk should always contain a healthy dose of realism, should encourage your men to recognize their strengths and work to exploit them.

Although these talks are usually only five to ten minutes long, they're carefully designed and, according to Coach Frey, "semi-rehearsed" so the coach can deliver them cogently.

Don't rely on emotion



It is to say, though, that these guys don't expend time trying to arouse game day emotions to gain an edge. Emotional highs are just too fleeting, often dissipating with fatigue or the opponent's first goal.

You can't allow body language to communicate you're tired or down . . . Our emotions, our feelings, our concerns about injustice can put us at a competitive disadvantage if the opponent can read us.

He and his assistants plastered the locker room wall with 200 sheets of paper that said "ATTACK" in the largest possible font.

Halftime is seldom an emotional time, consistent with the stoic tenor of pregame. It's not a jovial time or a panicky time, no matter the score. Just business, with steely determination.

We don't talk about the score much.

A more obvious advantage of playing many of the reserves is that it can yield a competitive edge during the match.

Messiah is not only playing to win today, they're using today's game to help them win the next one.

I don't ever want to be young. I just want it to be another new group. But that's an intentional decision by the coaches.

Good programs don't have rebuilding years. No, they prepare next year's players on the pitch this year.

### **Discipline #7: Play to a Standard**

Striving for excellence; it's a mindset that there is no finish line, that they've never arrived

Nothing breeds complacency faster than a few national titles

Play to a standard all the time and that standard will be perfection-the game where every pass connects, every run is well-timed, every shot rips the back of the net. We know we'll never play the perfect game, but we're going to try.

Every team is supposed to leave the program better than what they found it.

It's impossible to overstate the value of a collective mindset

Instead, he cites Bono, the front man for the rock band U2, another team that has sustained success for decades in the face of accelerating competition.

It means getting there and *staying* there, or at least playing to the teams' potential all the time.

Either do it with excellence or don't do it at all.

When footballers complain about the dullness of repetitive passing exercises, it is usually not monotony they resent, but the hard work . . . practice may not make you perfect, but it will definitely make you better and any player working with me on the training ground will hear me preach the virtues of repetition- repeatedly.

The players know that the coach will run an exercise until the team gets it right. The focus is entirely on developing technical and tactical abilities that improve their form in a game situation. If a player has a problem with the repetitive nature of the training, "tough luck" says an unapologetic Dave Brandt. This is the way that we're going to do it. This is what makes us excellent. Tenacity personified.

Excellence is accomplished through the doing of actions, ordinary in themselves, performed consistently and carefully, habitually compounded together, added up over time.

Don't take anything lightly, even if it's just a drill in practice. High standards are consistently enforced.

Charting a game is really helpful from a coaching perspective. Measure twice and correct once.

If I'm in last place, then I've got to do something about it. In the female mind, if I'm in last place, then that means that I'm not good enough. It's a real mental burden for them. Hence the current practice on the women's side of limiting individual feedback to private conversations.

First, adopt a lifestyle of learning to stay current and to stay a step ahead of the competition. The second lesson is to simplify your learning.

You've got two choices when confronting a challenge; shrink from it or fight it. I want you to fight it.

They refuse to let the critics dictate the terms or targets of their leadership.

The best musicians seem to operate this way, too. To quote U2's Bono, "Sing the melody line you hear in your head. Remember, you don't owe anyone any explanations."

### **Some Other Enabling Conditions to Success**

I will always go and do something about it if I feel the relationship is in jeopardy at any moment. Highly demanding but highly relational. It's kind of "both-and" approach he champions in every other area of the program.

But I think you can create this community if the players understand that you respect them based on things beyond their athletic performance. With a women's team, it's critical to establish this because they are too mature to feel athletics has any superior value. Those of us who come from men's athletics seem to feel that sports do have something intrinsically valuable. Women think that's absurd.

A reason that Messiah has enjoyed so much success since the late 1990s is because they've hired leaders who fit their situation.

Credibility . . . is arguably the most important characteristic for any leader. If you don't believe the messenger, they won't believe the message. If they don't believe in you, they won't believe in what you say.

Effective leadership is not about making speeches or being liked. Leadership is defined by results, not attributes.

You can't demand respect. It doesn't come with the title or the degrees. You earn it over time. That's an important caveat.

Earning credibility doesn't require winning a national championship. Even small results, as long as they're meaningful to the team, will give you traction.

How does it happen? Little steps. Little successes. Success gives you credibility.

Winning fuels belief. It fuels buy-in, and you hate to say that, but . . . if we can just get a few breaks and win a few critical games next year, it's going to explode.

Build "Camelot on the Soccer Field".

