What Drives Winning

by Brett Ledbetter

Forward
To open the book, the Author discusses varying philosophies regarding Goal Setting, including Brad Stevens (NBA Coach) who has moved away from talking about Goals with his teams.

Goal: The result at which **Effort** is aimed. This definition guides many coaches to focus on the Effort put toward achieving goals. With this in mind, Ledbetter emphasizes the importance of separating "What One Does" from "Who One Is." After collecting Character Skills through interviews with 15 NCAA Division I Basketball Coaches, the Author listed the top 10 Performance-Based and top 10 Moral-Based Skills to share with athletes interested in focusing on opportunities to develop Character while working toward dither goals. This practice allowed him to create the: **Character > Process > Result** Model. This essentially says successful coaches focus on Character building and processes of doing so to get results vs focusing on the results. It is based on the Effort of achieving a goal.

PART I

Person > Player

Ledbetter uses this chapter to share stories of athletes bogged down by pressure and afraid to fail. He asked each if the 10-year-old version of themselves would be impressed by where they are today. This allowed him to let athletes see they're improving and set up the practice of working toward goals as opportunities to improve their character.

One athlete shared his anxiety that replaced the happiness of winning a state championship the moment someone asked if they could repeat the next year. The happiness was immediately gone and he was already beginning to stress over an event that wouldn't even happen for another year, if at all.

Pressure creates urgency that will motivate an athlete to work toward a goal, but if there is an unhealthy view of Pressure, the athlete may begin to fear failure. Ledbetter asked the athlete to write a Thank You Note to "Pressure." The athlete included the character skills "Pressure" provided the opportunity to develop, . . . and the focus was moved to the process / effort vs. solely revolving around the result (of which he has no control over).

Getting The Order Right

This chapter focuses on ensuring an athlete is viewing his/herself as an individual who plays a sport instead of an athlete (as the main descriptor). Identity Foreclosure is the idea that what someone does becomes who that person is.

Abby Wambach went by Amy when out with friends during High School. This allowed her to separate who she was from what she did (being well known in her area). Koons Addition: U.S. Olympic Speed Skater (2018) Maame Biney goes by alter-ego Anna Digger when skating to separate what she does from who she is, . . . Anna is the "fierce" one.

If an athlete cannot separate who s/he is from what s/he does, there is the risk of one play (good or bad) defining who you are.

Getting Ahead of The Conversation

This chapter focuses largely on team efforts to get everyone on the same page. It is better for a group to decide the character skills they wish to be described as having (Core Values) and agreeing to definitions of those values.

The "Same Station" exercise (page 69) is one where players are asked to pull out their phones and play their favorite song. With all the songs playing at the same time, the noise created is annoying. However, if they can agree to listen to one song at a time, the sound is much better. You may not agree with / like the song, but it sounds much better when everyone is allowed to play their song (do their part).

Ledbetter suggests once there is an agreed upon definition of values, an athlete should write the end-of-the-year Banquet speech s/he would like to given (by the coach) about her/himself. It should be written exactly how it is to be read and will hopefully include the character skills (values) the athlete would most like to exhibit.

PART II

A Chronicle of The Author's Counseling with "Kenny"

This section of the book is just a few pages long and details some key points uncovered during his work with one specific athletes.

It also set the stage for the remainder of the book to be divided into chapters, each named after Performance and Moral Skills.

Performance: Positive

This chapter details stories and exercises to focus on and develop a positive view on competition. Immediately the Author separates an athlete's voice into two versions, "Public" and "Private." The "Public" voice is the edited version of the "Private" voice, . . . a version more acceptable for friends and family to hear. Ledbetter asks athletes to consider how they would feel if their inner voice was detailed in writing, scrolling along the bottom of the scoreboard during competition. If the athlete states they would be embarrassed by the thoughts being shared, he is one step closer to helping the athlete realize how detrimental the thoughts can be.

Brad Stevens, while coaching basketball at Butler helped pull off a significant upset over Gonzaga (January, 2013) that at one point was threatened. Each moment, the one that could have cost them the game and the one that won it, happened within 4.5 seconds of the buzzer. In each moment, Stevens reacted in the exact same way, completely composed. His "Inner Coach," as described by Ledbetter was strong and capable of "counter-balancing the external forces" to see through the chaos to make the right coaching adjustment.

Ledbetter then details the story of DI Basketball Player, Brandon who was assessed by parents, peers and younger players in regard to his demeanor on the court. The description shared was negative and moving to the player. The Author asked Brandon what "story" his demeanor was telling?

Best Friend Advice: is an exercise used where an athlete is asked to imagine her best friend is in the same situation the athlete is in, then write a letter to her with the advice you would give to help her get through a specific situation.

Plan Positive: is an exercise where the athlete imagines a future situation that will be challenging. Preparing now for a situation in the future allows you to plan a positive response that can be used in the place of potential negative thoughts that could occur when the situation actually happens.

Replace Negative: is a process where the athlete (1) acknowledges a negative thought, (2) interrupts the thought, and (3) replaces the thought with a positive response.

Opportunity Converter: is a tool to re-purpose negative situations into an opportunity to grow.

The Don Meyer Notebook: is a journal kept that asks the questions (after training or competition) "What did I do well and why?" and "What can I do better and how?"

Performance: Confidence

Ledbetter Further discusses the idea of a positive "Inner Coach," eliminating "result-based" goals (in exchange for focusing on things one can control), and introduces the idea of defining Confidence as having "Self Trust." This means that an athlete has trust in her abilities to handle a moment (and external forces affecting the moment) regardless of the outcome.

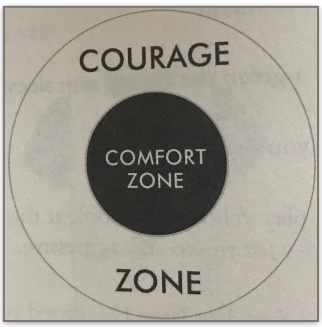
In this chapter, Ledbetter re-visits the exercises from the previous chapter to view them as Confidence building exercises.

Performance: Courageous

This chapter details the re-definition of failure through a story where a basketball coach shares with his players that "Winners Fail, Losers Hide." This allows a player to fail to score, but realize the action of having the courage to take a shot is what creates a winning mentality.

Option 1 or Option 2: presents athletes with two choices, for example: a players has a coach who takes him out after mistakes so the athlete can choose between (1) Play safe and never make a mistake or (2) Risk being taken out of the game by taking a chance t be great, to grow, to improve, etc.

Ledbetter then describes the University of Florida's Women's Soccer Team's "Play Green" idea. This is an action where players and coaches view a traffic light as determining their current level of effort. "Playing Green" entails going all-in, . . . Amber represents a player starting to show hesitation and players then use this as an opportunity to remind her to "Play Green" before she gets further away and into the negative actions of "Turning Red."



Ledbetter then details the concept of a "Courage Zone" where players are challenged to grow their "Comfort Zone" by trying things outside that circle. Every time they can get outside that "Comfort Zone," they become more comfortable with that action and the zone grows.

The next segment encourages players to be **Honest** with each other when confronted with potentially difficult conversations. As players share they are unsure of how to start a difficult conversation, Ledbetter replies, “Tell her that.” If a player replies she is scared to share, he replies: “Tell her that.”

The Author then suggests athletes not “Cosign” with a teammate (by either agreeing to a claim because you don’t want to upset the person or saying nothing at all) on difficult claims.

The chapter concludes with an exercise between Ledbetter and an athlete dealing with an overbearing father. The exercise allowed Ledbetter to write down her comments as she pretended to speak to her father (directing comments at an empty chair representing her father).

Performance: Resilient

Ledbetter shares in the beginning of the chapter an angle coaches take in recruiting where they prefer to see players making mistakes so they can see how they react vs seeing them succeed and making the character flaws that are hidden by winning.

This is another chance to discuss the Author’s “Opportunity Converter.” This allows athletes to build Resilience by redesign mistakes as opportunities to grow.

Mike Krzyzewski’s “Next Play Mentality” focuses on the present moment encouraging athletes to forget what has already happened (since it cannot be controlled).

Detailing how long a mistake lasts compared to the amount of time remaining in a match helps an athlete see the minor blip a mistake is and how the remainder of time should not tainted by the mistake. The remaining time is an opportunity to grow, if the athlete can move on.

Rearview Mirror vs Windshield: is a concept shared with a young soccer player who missed a penalty, where she was encouraged to look through the windshield (metaphorically) to focus on the future vs looking in the rearview mirror to dwell on what is behind her.

This is the basis of Sue Enquist’s “Failure Recovery System.” UCLA Softball players under Enquist were expected to complete a three-step action after every mistake that included owning the mistake (pounding their chest twice), letting the team know they had moved on (pointing to a teammate), and alerting the team one is back in the present (calling out the number of outs in that inning). If a player didn’t complete these actions after a mistake, . . . she was substituted out of the game.

Performance: Competitive

Do you want to be “The Best” or “Your Best” is a question athletes need to consider.

Competere is the latin word “Compete” comes from, but actually means “to strive together.”

The Author discusses the concept of helping a teammate to his/her best will also force you to improve. He emphasizes this idea with stories such as, Kevin Durant pulling teammates into the weight room to workout with him.

Ledbetter shares his thoughts on young children who achieve a certain status as an athlete, in that they will often look to protect that status over the idea of appreciating challenges.

Re-defining “Competition” as an effort where you strive together with teammates will create a healthier view of competition and potential for growth. In line with earlier exercises, Ledbetter suggests athletes write a Thank You Note to “Competition.”

Moral: Unselfish

The Author opens the chapter with discussion of young athletes who are paid for points and how that correlates to future performance. In a team sport, why would a player being paid for points pass (even when the situation calls for passing)?

Ledbetter then asks questions:
Would you rather win and not score or score twice and lose?
He also adds to the concept of asking athletes to report how much time they believe they should receive. When added up, the number will be more than the accumulation of total minutes available. To that concept, he asks athletes to report (2) Should you start? (3)How many points will you average per game?

James Harden (NBA All-Star) struggled when starting in the NBA (in comparison to success at stages earlier in his career). Instead of focusing on scoring X amount of points, he made his mindset focused on “changing the game.”

Dwayne Wade (during the Olympics) made it a point to remind his teammates they were playing for the name on the front of the jersey, not the name on the back.

The chapter goes on to discuss Body Language and the distraction poor examples can be on everyone. Even if another player has good Body Language, his efforts to bring up a teammate showing negativity diverts his attention from what it should be on (the game).

This chapter also begins the discussion on teams using Bench Cams to record positive examples of support / body language.

Moral: Encouraging

Sherri Coale is the Head Coach of Women’s Basketball at the University of Oklahoma. She describes the role of Point Guard is to make everyone around you feel anything is possible, . . . to deal hope.

Jack Clark is the coach of the University of California Berkeley’s Rugby team. He has won over 20 national championships and shared during his first 15 years he would gather the team when they were playing poorly and “give them the business.” He stated that never helped. Once he began finding positives to focus on he reports a 50% success rate toward play improving within the team.

Geno Auriemma (of UCONN Women’s Basketball) shares he views too many coaches as “hoarders” of bad plays. He feels when he can let bad plays go and move on to the next play, his players can too.

Ledbetter describes the three seconds after a mistake as “The Most Important Three Seconds.” When a player follows a mistake with viewing frustrated teammates, coaches, parents, etc. it has a negative effect on the ability of players moving forward.

Ledbetter closes the chapter with opportunities to improve Encouragement. (1) He reminders the reader of his “Replace Negative” idea. (2) He suggests players send encouraging texts. (3) Teammate Day is an opportunity to focus on bringing up an teammate who is struggling. (4) Catch Them Doing It Right is a common concept among coaches who agree it is important to catch players doing something good (and let them know you caught it). (5) The Bench Cam, . . . is revisited and it is relayed Duke Basketball, Florida Soccer, etc. use Bench Cams. Furthermore it is suggested coaches use Bench Clips to encourage, . . . encouragement.

Moral: Trustworthy

The Author describes two sides of Trust: Trustworthy (being reliable) and Trustwilling (relying on others). “When people who are put in a position where they can’t do it on their own they oftentimes become more trustwilling. Adversity can be a great thing.”

Ledbetter shares the story of the University of Florida’s Swim Team and the concept of “Coach Trust.” This if followed by stories of (feuding) players forced to work together to build trust in each other and is followed by the idea that “there are people who trust others until they give them a reason not to, and there are people who don’t trust anybody until that trust is earned.”

Other ideas to build trust used by coaches in this chapter include (1) Playing a man down, (2) having a player-led practice, (3) a small team task like alternating shots, and more.

Moral: Appreciative

Sherri Coale was working with the US Women’s (Basketball) Team during the Olympics when she didn’t allow a basket in training to count after the player scoring failed to recognize the excellent pass a teammate provided her.

Ledbetter introduces the idea that an individual will contribute more when doing a task for something or someone other than himself. He used a test of asking athletes if they would walk across a 2’ wide plank between two 60 story buildings for a million dollars, only 5% said they would. However, when the reason for crossing was to save the lives of your family, 100% said they would.

The Author suggests having players dedicate a game to someone else, to share gratitude with people who inspired someone in their life, etc.

Another Thank You Note project is introduced, this time suggesting an athlete write to a specific “setback” in her life.

ETM is the concept he closes the chapter with. It’s an acronym for (E)njoy (T)he (M)oment. Ledbetter suggests athletes start a journal to record the best thing that happened to you on a given day, then review those moments at the end of each week. Looking back after a longer period will help remind you of the events you experienced with people you care about.

Moral: Caring

The final chapter begins with the idea of making an emotional connection to share with players. Anson Dorrance writes letters to his Seniors the day before Senior Day. He reads the letters in the locker room before the game. This is an item to consider when asking why emotional videos in 2010 seemed to bring out the best on the field during the NCAA Tournament run.

The discussion of Relationship-Driven Athletes (often women) and Mastery-Driven Athletes (often men) adds another potential question to ask recruits, . . . Would you rather beat your rival 1v1 or play with our team to beat your rival team? He continues the discussion stating players on opposite sides (Relationship-Driven vs Mastery-Driven) often struggle to work together.

“If you never talk about anything of substance or express care - how could strong connections exist?”

Charlie Strong (Football Coach at the University of Texas) presents a 25 question survey to his freshmen every year. The questions range from asking for a player’s name and family info to most embarrassing moment and even one’s saddest day.

Thad Matta shares his “Circle-Ups” where players circle up (to metaphorically keep outside forces out) and discuss the things challenging them.

The final passages in the book include discussions of a “Care Chart” used to track investments being made into teammates and research backing the idea that teams that ouch(high fives, shoulder bumps) have higher levels of trust and lower levels of stress.