

NOTES FROM: *The Essential Wooden*, by John Wooden and Steve Jamison

SUMMARY: It's *hard* to do your best, *much* harder than most people realize. By definition, "your best" is the absolute *greatest effort* you are capable of *giving*, and sadly, most people just never even come close to that.

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden was a *master* when it came to seeing potential greatness and infinite self-worth lying dormant inside the players on his teams, and his leadership style - that you can learn to adapt for yourself - was perfectly suited to drawing excellence from the teammates entrusted to his care.

For Wooden, there was a standard that ranked above winning, and he believed that if you give every single thing you have *within you* to be your very best, then you're *already* a success no matter what.

Doing your best is all that can ever be asked of you; it's literally *everything*, and although winning may be a natural *byproduct* of that supreme effort, it could *never* be the sole reason for a team's or a person's existence.

I won't pretend that winning isn't important to me. Indeed, John Wooden and his elite basketball players *loved* to win, but it was the *way* they played and behaved that was ultimately more impressive than any of the records or the championships themselves.

Disciplined, intensely focused on executing the fundamentals, self-controlled, team-focused, and unselfish, *they would have been winners no matter what*, and this is because of Wooden's exceptional leadership style.

John Wooden also possessed an immense *moral* strength that was given expression in many of the actions he took as a coach and leader. For one thing, when racism was still a significant presence in collegiate sports, he *refused* to enter basketball tournaments that his black players weren't allowed to participate in.

They were a team, and if they couldn't *all* play, then *none* of them were going to be there. It was this strict, incredibly demanding coaching style, combined with this gentleness, and a strong, enduring belief in human potential and infinite human worth that made John Wooden such a spectacular role model. One that we would all do well to emulate in our own lives.

"For me, there is a standard that ranks above winning. I would never allow the scoreboard to be the judge of whether I had achieved success."

"Teams under John Wooden's supervision endured just one season that produced a losing record. It was his first year as a coach back at Dayton, Kentucky - the Greendevils - in 1932-33. Never again in the four decades that followed was there a losing season. Yet all this spectacular production - *winning* - came from a leader and master team builder *who never ever mentioned that word to his teams*. Why? He wanted their complete focus on the higher standard, the one that means even more to him than winning."

"Effort is paramount."

"Early in his career, John Wooden embraced the belief that success, as measured by each one of us individually, is the peace of mind derived from making the absolute and complete *effort* to do the best of which you are capable. The quality of your effort to realize your potential counts first and foremost. For John Wooden *that* is success. And it is different from winning - beating an opponent in basketball, business, or life. This is important to recognize: that *success* and *winning* are two very different concepts in the world of Wooden and that success is the foremost of the two."

Eddie Powell: "Coach Wooden was more upset if we won but *didn't* work up to our potential than if we lost playing at our best."

"Therein, perhaps, lies the leadership genius of John Robert Wooden, a leader whose teams won over and over and over again but who never mentioned winning."

"Don't let yesterday take up too much of today."

"Over and over I have taught those under my supervision that we are all given a certain potential *unique* to each one of us. Our first responsibility is to make the utmost effort to bring forth that potential in service to our team. For me, that is success. Then perhaps when circumstances come together, we may find ourselves number 1. If that happens, it is merely a by-product of the effort we make to realize our own competency - our full potential. Success may result in winning, but winning does not necessarily mean you are a success."

"If each of you makes every effort to develop to the best of your ability, follow the proper rules of conduct and activity most conducive to good physical condition, subordinate individual acclaim for the welfare of the team, and permit no personality clashes or differences of opinion with teammates or coaches to interfere with your or a teammate's efforts, it will be a very rewarding year."

"There is great strength in gentleness - perhaps the greatest strength of all. Without it, your leadership begins to resemble the approach of a prison guard standing watch over a chain gang. Turn your back, and they're gone."

"There are really only two things to worry about: whether you are a success or whether you are a failure. If you are a success, there is no cause for worry, and if you are a failure - There are only two things to worry about: whether you have your health or whether you do not have your health. If you are healthy, a healthy person should certainly not worry, and if you do not have your health - There are only two things to worry about: whether you regain your health and get well or whether you fail to regain your health and pass on. If you regain your health, there is no cause for worry, and if you fail to regain your health and pass on - There are only two things to worry about: whether you will go to the place where we all hope to go or whether you go to that other place. If you go to the place where we all hope to go, you should not have worried, and if you go to that other place - You are going to be with all your friends and the people here. So why worry?"-Anonymous

"I slept well, comfortable in the knowledge that I had done the best of which I was capable. This knowledge is a very soft pillow on which to sleep."

"The next time you wake in the middle of the night, ask yourself, 'Am I fretting about the future, or figuring out what to do?' If it's the former, have a warm glass of milk and try to get back to sleep. If it's the latter, have a cup of coffee and make some notes."

"You must also be the kind of individual whose opinion means something."

"Tough times make you tougher. A free ride isn't free."

"These five blocks - Industriousness, Enthusiasm, Friendship, Loyalty, and Cooperation - form the foundation of the Pyramid of Success. These are powerful personal attributes essential for both you as leader and those you lead. It is a foundation upon which a structure of significance and productivity can be built."

"Prepare properly, and you will be given Poise. Next to Poise, near the apex of the Pyramid, is *Confidence* - the knowledge that you and your organization are ready for the competition in whatever form it takes. There is respect for, but no fear of, the competition. You are comfortable letting the score take care of itself because you have taken care of your preparation: Industriousness, Friendship, Loyalty, Cooperation, Enthusiasm, Self-Control, Alertness, Initiative, Intentness, Condition, Skill, and Team Spirit. Confidence and Poise are conjoined in a manner much like Industriousness and Enthusiasm. Each is potent by itself, but when combined, they become an identifying characteristic of exceptional leadership and extraordinary organizations. When they are in place, you have risen above the rest and can set the crowning block of the Pyramid in place: *Competitive Greatness*."

"Competitive Greatness includes a love for the hard battle and teaching those under your supervision the same. It is the competition itself - a worthy opponent - that gives you and your organization the opportunity to find out how good you are, to reach deep inside and perform at your best when it counts. This is Competitive Greatness. In my book, the score doesn't always reveal whether you achieve it."

"Unity produces our greatest strength."

"Make your personal standard of performance - your behavior in all areas - so exemplary that those under your supervision will find it hard to match, harder to surpass. Be hardest on yourself - the model for what you want your team to become."

"Pressure is healthy. It can lead to improvement. Stress is unhealthy. It can lead to mistakes. I wanted our team members to feel pressure so that their opponents would feel stress. I applied this pressure on the practice floor by creating a buzzing businesslike atmosphere that had an intensity and focus equal to an actual game. I removed stress - the kind that comes from a fear of losing or an overeager appetite to win - by focusing exclusively on improvement and teaching the team that ongoing and maximum progress was the standard, our daily goal. I never mentioned winning or beating an upcoming opponent. While there might be some incidents of levity during practice - and certainly I don't object to humor if done in an appropriate manner at a suitable moment - I expected nothing short of total effort and concentration in all ways on the practice floor. Those under my supervision were not there just to loosen up and run through their paces. Not at all. They did that *before* I blew the whistle signifying that class was in session - that the pressure to improve was about to be applied."

"Organization became a primary asset of my coaching methodology - the ability to use time with great efficiency. Practices were taut and fast-moving. I was able to accomplish this with three-by-five cards and the meticulous advance planning that went into what was written on them. It became very important to me that we start and *stop* on time. Neither is more important than the other. The three-by-five cards I carried kept the train running on a tight, fast schedule. They contained the entire day's practice broken down minute by minute - what we would do from 3:30 to 3:35 and from 3:35 to 3:45, at which time I'd blow the whistle to stop and call out the next sequence, which might be a three-on-one conditioner for seven minutes followed by a different five-minute drill. One after another after another interrupted only for *precise* and *concise* instruction and demonstration. Each and every aspect of the process - including precisely what everybody was supposed to be doing as well as when and where it would be done - was painstakingly etched on each card. There wasn't one second in the whole practice when anybody was standing around wondering what would come next; no one loafed and looked at others who were working. Everything had a purpose; everything was done efficiently and quickly. The whole thing was synchronized; each hour offered up 60 minutes, and I squeezed every second out of every minute."

"If you looked at my outline and organization plan for a practice in 1949 and compared it to its counterpart in 1975, you'd wonder how I got anything done in 1949. Year to year there were changes, little improvements, seemingly inconsequential adjustments, that gradually added up to big changes."

"I focused our team's attention on 'us' to the exclusion of everything else. Virtually no mention was made of the upcoming opponent - its style, tendencies, or key players. Nor did I talk about the standings or the consequence of other games being played in our conference. A joke even circulated that UCLA's team manager would go out into the lobby before a game and buy an official program so our players would know who the opponent was."

Wilfred Peterson: "The leader uses his heart as well as his head. After he has considered the facts with his head, he lets his heart take a look too."

"You become weaker as your need for praise becomes stronger."

"Turn a deaf ear to praise and criticism, and you'll hear all you need to hear of both."

"Be the kind of leader whose team *you'd* like to be a member of."

"If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?"

"We used to pray for the game to come because practices were so demanding. But it paid off."

Ray Regan: "Afterward, Coach Wooden said he was proud of us, how we gave it everything we had, that we could hold our heads high. There was disappointment in our locker room, but I don't believe any player felt like a loser. We had given it our best."

Ray Regan: "His teaching went beyond just trying to win. Before games, he told us to do our best, never harbor ill feelings if we lost, never denigrate our opponent, and, if they played well, to congratulate them. And, of course, no profanity. His morality - that basic decency he has - affected me deeply. He was a gentle man who was a *very* strong coach. I came away from him with a feeling of wanting to do my best in whatever I took on. We were prepared and trained well. And not just for basketball."

"One bad apple is one more than most barrels can stand."

"The competitor with the will to win also has the will to work."

"Finding real talent is tough. Getting that talent to sacrifice for the welfare of your team can be even tougher. For me, the solution was simple. I never forgot that a great player who couldn't make the team great wasn't so great after all."

"You may not be able to run as fast as somebody else, but that shouldn't prevent you from trying to run as fast as *you* can. Prior to the race, plan, prepare, and practice to execute at your highest level. And then, even if you're not the fastest runner in the field, try your hardest to run your best race. Who knows? On race day your opponent may have a sore foot."

"Role players must understand that their jobs count - that they contribute in a meaningful manner to the success of their team. I don't believe there are any small jobs or inconsequential roles on an efficient and productive team. There are only those few who *think* their job is small or their role inconsequential. A leader must change the person's thinking - or change the person."

"Balance means not permitting the things over which you have no control to adversely affect the things over which you do have control, and it means retaining your poise during times of turmoil *and* triumph."

"Give each individual a fair chance and every opportunity he or she earns."

Abraham Lincoln: "It is better to trust and occasionally be disappointed than to mistrust and be miserable all the time."

"No one has ever achieved anything he or she wasn't capable of. Whatever you have accomplished, you could have accomplished more. What you have done, you could have done it better."

"I believe that all prayers are heard and answered, even though the answer may be 'no.'"

"Others may be faster than you are, larger than you are, and have far more ability than you have - but *no one* should ever be your superior in team spirit, fight, determination, ambition, and character."

"Just before our team took to the court before a game, including the 10 to decide a national championship, these were my final words to the players: 'Make sure you can hold your head high after this game.' They all knew I wasn't talking about the final score. I did not say it as a fiery exhortation, but with all the seriousness and sincerity I had in me. It was the most important message our players could take with them into the battle: 'Do your best. That is success.' Believing that simple truth gave us tremendous strength. Teaching it gave me tremendous satisfaction."

"Total effort is success."

"No opponent deserves to be feared."

"Every opponent deserves respect."

"Don't draw attention to yourself; don't be like the fellow in church who coughs loudly just before he puts a coin in the collection plate."

"Meticulous planning is meaningless without hard work."

"Promise to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind. Promise to be as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are of your own. Promise to be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the press of trouble."

"I never even permitted the players to charge out onto the court all fired up. I didn't want them all fired up and jumping up and down. I wanted them bristling with intensity, finely focused, and in control of themselves. When these attitudes are combined with talent and good teaching, you may find yourself leading a team competing and prevailing at the highest levels. This will not occur if you are a slave to passion. Passion is temporary."

"The next time you've worked hard, done your best, and still find that someone is unhappy with you, remember the Pacific Ocean. It too had failed to meet someone's expectations."

"Sometimes we get so concerned with making a living that we forget to make a life."

"What to do about the wayward behavior and tattered ethics of others? Be true to true yourself. Others are watching. Do your job the way you're supposed to do it. You give strength by being strong."

"The Four Laws of Learning have been around for a long time: Explanation, Demonstration, Imitation, and Repetition. I like to tell people there are actually Eight Laws of Learning: Explanation, Demonstration (your own example), Imitation, and Repetition, Repetition, Repetition, Repetition, Repetition."

"The heights by great men reached and kept,

Were not attained by sudden flight.

But they, while their companions slept,

Were toiling upward in the night."

-Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Cervantes: "The journey is better than the inn."

"Make each day of your journey a masterpiece."