

A person wearing a blue baseball cap and a blue shirt is seen from behind, standing on a baseball field. The background shows a baseball field with other players and a mountain range in the distance. The text "10 LESSONS FOR COACHES" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

10 LESSONS FOR COACHES

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Dear Coach,

I'm so glad you chose to download this ebook.

As you read through the 10 lessons, **you'll be equipped with new tools to improve your relationships with players, tap into your players' potential, avoid competitive thinking in your career, and more.**

The lessons come from some of the greatest coaches of all-time. Coaches like Phil Jackson, Bill Belichick, Nick Saban, and Jürgen Klopp.

And to expand your mind a little bit, I've included a few lessons from less-conventional sources.

You'll hear from Ben Falk, former VP of Basketball Strategy for the 76ers, about how sports should be positive-sum. You'll also learn from Nobel Prize-winning behavioral psychologist Daniel Kahneman on how removing tension is often the best approach to behavior change.

Some of these lessons will be refreshers. But some will be completely new.

And I trust that by the end, you'll have *at least* one new way that you can become a better coach.

So what are you waiting for?

Let's get to it.



1. Phil Jackson and the Five Stages of Tribal Leadership

One of the most interesting themes of *Eleven Rings* by Phil Jackson was his application of the 5 stages of tribal leadership from *Tribal Leadership*, a book by Dave Logan, John King, and Halee Fischer-Wright.

There are five stages of tribal leadership. Here's how Jackson describes each stage:

Stage 1 – shared by most street gangs and characterized by despair, hostility, and the collective belief that “life sucks.”

Stage 2 – filled primarily with apathetic people who perceive themselves as victims and who are passively antagonistic, with the mind-set that “my life sucks.” Think *The Office* on TV or the *Dilbert* comic strip.

Stage 3 – focused primarily on individual achievement and driven by the motto “I’m great (and you’re not).” According to the authors, people in organizations at this stage “have to win, and for them winning is personal. They’ll outwork and outthink their competitors on an individual basis. The mood that results is a collection of ‘lone warriors.’”

Stage 4 – dedicated to tribal pride and the overriding conviction that “we’re great (and they’re not).” This kind of team requires a strong adversary, and the bigger the foe, the more powerful the tribe.

Stage 5 – a rare stage characterized by a sense of innocent wonder and the strong belief that “life is great.” (Bulls, 1995-1998)

Over the course of the book, Jackson highlighted the different transitions his Bulls and Lakers teams went through as they ascended the stages of tribal leadership.

Most notably, he believed that the 1995-98 Bulls teams had become a stage 5 team. Here's what Jackson had to say:

“I’m often asked to reveal the secret of the 1995-96 Bulls, which some consider the greatest basketball team ever assembled...In truth, it was a confluence of forces that came together in the fall of 1995 to transform the Bulls into a new breed of championship team. From a tribal-leadership perspective, the Bulls were moving from being a stage 4 team to a stage 5. The first series of championships transformed the Bulls from an “I’m great, you’re not” team to a “We’re great, they’re not” team. But for the second series, **the team adopted a broader, “Life is great” point of view.** By midseason it became clear to me that it wasn’t competition per se

that was driving the team; **it was simply the joy of the game itself.** This dance was ours, **and the only team that could compete against us was ourselves.”**

Stage 5 teams like the 95-98 Bulls are extremely rare. Jackson points out that the Lakers teams he led—who had a 3-peat of their own—never got past stage 4 as a group. Egos got in the way and blocked the team from becoming all that it could.

But here’s how this applies to you: a stage 5 team requires a level 5 leader. That leader is you.

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins talks about the five levels of leadership. Collins notes that those level 5 leaders have a “paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.”



As you work to lead your team to stage 5, you need to check in with yourself on where you’re at in the leadership pyramid. As coach, you are the leader.

And the tribe can only go as far as its leader.

2. Bill Belichick and Nick Saban: When You Become the Mountain



There are plenty of one-hit-wonders. Teams that made it one time but never replicated that success year-over-year.

In an HBO special called *The Art of Coaching*¹, Nick Saban and Bill Belichick talked about what it takes to become the best. Here's a summary:

Have an unwavering commitment to continual improvement.

That commitment is exactly what has enabled Saban's Crimson Tide teams and Belichick's Patriots to remain at the top of the game for so long.

As the two reflected on the success, they made a really interesting point.

Nick Saban: "There's a lot of people in the world that will take the challenge to climb the mountain. But when you get to the top of the mountain, **you become the mountain** because everybody's shooting at you to get where you are."

Bill Belichick: "But the great ones say, '**I can be even better.**'"

It's not enough to get to the top of the mountain. The whole purpose of becoming #1 is to remain number one.

Many teams have climbed the mountain. Very few have become the mountain.

¹ Source: [Belichick & Saban: The Art of Coaching](#)

3. Jürgen Klopp and the Deeper Layers

In a Goal.com article², Liverpool's loveable manager Jürgen Klopp dropped some incredible wisdom on what he calls "the real details" of his players.

When Liverpool FC acquired fullback Andy Robertson in 2017, he and his fiancé were expecting their first child. Klopp knew this. But he was "absolutely perplexed" that a member of his staff had no idea Robertson was due to become a father.

Klopp scolded his assistant: "How can you not know that? That's the biggest thing in his life now. Come on!"

When asked about this exchange by the interviewer, Klopp explained:

"What a footballer can do in and out of possession is easy to establish, but **the deeper layers** - who they are, what they believe in, how they've reached this point, what drives them, what awaits them when they depart training - **are the real details.**"

We all know this. Every coach I've ever spoken with has given an affirmative nod towards the importance of getting to know one's players. Even so, I don't think we give this aspect of coaching enough attention.

It's easier (and more comfortable) to look into objective data about a player's performance. It's much more messy to dive into a player's psychology. To build strong relationships. To meet players where they're at. To serve *them*.

In his free [Conscious Coaching Field Guide](#), Brett Bartholomew gives the idea of building out what he calls a "**Player Personality Profile**".

It's a simple idea. Create a new Google Sheet. Put all your player's names in the first column. Then put all sorts of things you think would be good to know about your players across the columns in the first row. Then, start filling them in.

When I started doing this, it unlocked new levels of trust with the players I coached every day. Each day, I would have one question that I wanted to ask 2-4 players. After we got done with that day's session, I would fire up Google Sheets and fill in the cells for each player I talked with.

This simple act was a catalyst for better relationships with my players. I trust it'll do the same for you.

By the way, I've created a free template for you to start using with your players immediately. Access it totally free here: [Player Personality Profile Template](#).

² Source: [Inside the mind of Jurgen Klopp](#)

4. Pete Carroll and Player's Mind

On an episode of the Flying Coach podcast³, Pete Carroll dove into a topic he calls “Player’s Mind.”

Carroll expanded on Tim Gallwey’s famous book, *The Inner Game of Tennis* with the following quote (loosely edited for clarity):

We have a concept that we use. We refer to it as player's mind and we're trying to, in all of our teaching and all of our coaching, get the guy to get in the frame of mind where he's just playing the game. And I think it goes to exactly what you're talking about.

The player's mind to me is the reactive, responsive, natural, you know, in the game, not in the stats, not in the numbers, not in the score, not in the standings and get them out of that. We can coach them so much that they're thinking about so many things that [the players] can't flow and freely play, like we were capable of playing.

So, I think the part of our art is to help these guys use the information, find the frame of mind that allows that to have a place.

The job of the coach is to help the player find their ideal “player’s mind.” It’s different for everybody. Kobe was the Black Mamba. Ray Lewis had his special pregame ritual that freed him into his ideal mindset. Jordan was a different breed all together.

No matter who we’re coaching, relationships are the underlying factor that help you guide a player into the right frame of mind.

And more often than not, getting them into the right mindset requires subtraction, not addition.

Listen to the full clip by clicking on the picture below.



Buying Into Analytics and The
Advantage of the Multisport Athle...
FLYING COACH WITH STEVE KERR AND P...
MAY 7, 2020

39:31 ————— -0:35



³ Source: [Buying into Analytics and the Advantage of the Multisport Athlete](#)

5. Daniel Kahneman and the Loaded Spring

Growing up, I was a two-way baseball player.

Each season, I would go through a slump. It was like clockwork. I wasn't a particularly good hitter the way it was, so those slumps could be *brutal*.

To try to fix my slump, I would try all sorts of new things. New batting stance. Different swing path. A changed approach.

With each attempt to right the ship, I was adding new layers of complexity to one of the hardest activities in all of sports. It never worked.

Instead, my slumps ended when I threw my hands up in the air and committed to simplifying the game.

See ball, hit ball.

This approach let me return to that Player's Mind. The instinctual, responsive, and natural frame of mind where optimal performance lies.

It was in simplifying my approach that I was able to find the performance I was after.

Nobel Prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman shares a fascinating example that speaks to this.⁴

What we tend to do when we want to move people from A to B is we push them. We add to the driving forces. Kurt Lewin's insight was that this is not what you should do. You should actually work on the restraining forces and try to make them weaker. That's a beautiful point...but it's like you have the plank and it's being held by two sets of springs.

You want it to move one direction, and so you could add another spring that would push it that way, or you could remove one of the springs that are holding back.

The interesting thing, and that's the striking outcome, is when it moves, if it moves because of the driving force—you've added to the driving force—then at equilibrium, it will be in a higher state of tension than it was originally. That is because you've compressed one spring and so it's pushing back harder. **But if you remove a restraining force, at equilibrium, there'll be less tension on the system.** I must have been 20 years old, but I thought that's just so beautiful."

The lesson here is a first principle of coaching: **Seek first to remove tension.**

⁴ Source: [Daniel Kahneman: Putting Your Intuition on Ice](#)

6. Peter Thiel and Avoiding the Trap of Competition

The most influential book I have EVER read is [Zero to One](#) by Peter Thiel.

One of the most powerful ideas in it is the secret that competition is a destructive force.

The argument goes like this:

When people compete, they focus on each other. When they focus on each other, they copy the actions of the other in the spirit of competing.

As the competition grows more intense, the competitors actually start to resemble each other more and more. Leading to a state where two competitors essentially look the exact same.

In the coaching world, this destructive competition is fueled by comparison. As Colonel Robert Bollinger points out⁵:

“Comparisons should be avoided in the world of human performance due to the complexity of the environment. Everyone is dealing with different athletes, with different backgrounds and different constraints. Fighting about who is the best or who is right in these types of environments is like asking whether SEALs, Delta, or Rangers are superior. We may poke fun at one another because we are brothers, but at the end of the day WE ARE ALL Special Forces.”

When we focus on competition above all else, we actually lose our edge--the thing that makes us uniquely valuable to the team.

The secret is to build a personal monopoly. **Do something so well that nobody else can offer a close substitute.**

In an industry that is inherently competitive, the best coaches escape competition. They do not imitate. They innovate.

Think about the best coaches: Phil Jackson, Bill Belichick, Steve Kerr, Pete Carroll, Mike Krzyzewski, Dabo Swinney, Nick Saban. They've all figured something out that makes them unique in the coaching world.

Instead of standing on the sidelines and falling prey to the comparison trap, focus on building something unique.

Because the world doesn't need more zero-sum coaches. We need positive-sum innovators.

⁵ Source: [Conscious Coaching](#) by Brett Bartholomew

7. Ben Falk: Sports as Positive Sum

The 76ers' Process was crafted by three men: Sam Hinkie, Sachin Gupta, and Ben Falk.

In a profile of Ben Falk⁶, SI journalist Chris Ballard wrote about a particular interaction between Gupta and Falk.

“The first time he met Falk, years earlier while out at the Four’s sports bar in Boston during the Sloan Conference, the two had discussed not basketball but the societal value of their career choices. **Because while what they did theoretically brought happiness to people, winning games is still a zero-sum situation—someone has to lose for you to win**—and wasn’t that antithetical to their life goals of bettering the world? And, furthermore, didn’t all these smart people going into sports, instead of other fields, represent a form of brain drain?”

Thinking back to our previous point on avoiding competition, we can see that this is the issue Gupta and Falk were sorting through.

How--in an industry so obsessed with competing--can we actually make the world a better place?

I firmly believe that this is an essential question every aspiring coach must answer.

Benjamin Franklin has been credited with saying, “If everyone is thinking alike, then no one is thinking.”

In sports, the default view is hyper-competition. That makes sense. There are winners. There are losers. That’s sports.

But, legacy-building is not a zero-sum game. One coaches’ positive contribution does not require another coaches’ downfall.

So there’s the game we all play. We will always try to win. That’s the nature of sports.

But beyond the game we play is what I call the meta-game. For coaches, this is where relationships, impact, and cultural transformation happen.

Building your legacy is positive-sum. Please, never forget that.

⁶ Source: [The smartest basketball mind outside the NBA](#)

8. Matt Deggs and Servant Leadership

After a devastating 19-0 loss to end their season and dash their hopes of reaching the College World Series, Sam Houston State Head Coach Matt Deggs gave one of the greatest press conferences of all-time.

Click the picture to watch the video.



There's not much I can add to Deggs' heartfelt speech.

The best thing you and I can do is listen with an open heart and seek to become the best leader we can.

9. Herb Brooks and the Dark Side of Team Building

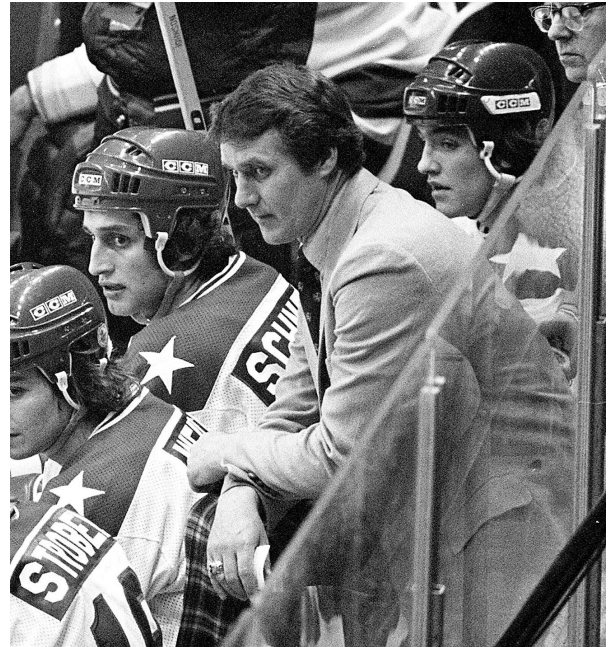
One of the greatest things about sports is the camaraderie we share with the team.

As players, we loved the back-and-forth banter with our teammates. The sense of togetherness before a big game. The time spent hanging out away from the field.

Many of us--myself included--carry this mindset into our coaching career. And unbeknownst to us, it can undermine the team's success.

Leading up to the 1980 Olympics, legendary US Men's Hockey Coach Herb Brooks took one of his assistants aside and said the following:

"A lot of these guys hate each other, and the only way I can think to make them a team is for all of them to hate me. You're going to have to keep all the pieces together and be the guy they can lean on, because they're not going to be able to lean on me. I'm going to be the same to all of them. I'm going to be tough on all of them."⁷



If you've seen *Miracle*, you know what this looked like. Brooks was brutal on his players. But it's likely that his approach of intentionally making the team hate them so they could come together as a team worked.

This is uncomfortable for most. It sure is for me.

But coaching isn't about you. It's about them. And when it's about them, you do whatever has to be done to make *them* successful.

⁷ Source: [Inside a Miracle: The 1980 U.S. Hockey Team](#)

10. Brett Bartholomew and The Leadership Paradox

In lesson #3, I talked about the importance of strong relationships with players. But then lesson #9 said that there might be times where those relationships look a lot different than the loving, nurturing relationships talked about in leadership books all over.

Does lesson #9 negate lesson #3? Do we no longer need strong relationships? Of course not.

So what's missing? Context and an appreciation for paradox.



Brett Bartholomew shared this great graphic detailing what he called “The Leadership Paradox.”

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You’ll need to study and apply it to realize the true potential here, but Bartholomew teaches us that there are bright and dark sides of any trait. Just like there is a point where too much charisma becomes a bad thing, narcissism also has a bright side that is helpful to drive individual and team success.

Which is the interesting thing about leadership. It’s not as easy as it’s often made out to be.

It’s not A or B, yes or no, good or bad. And as leaders, the earlier we can appreciate that good leadership is often paradoxical, the sooner we will be on our way to becoming a master coach.

⁸ Source: ALTIS Foundations Course Lesson 8.1

What to do Next

I hope you found this ebook helpful.

If you did, please email me at tanner@tannerrek.com and tell me which lesson you found most helpful to where you're at. I would love to hear from you!

And one more thing before you go...

Do you have a friend or two that would enjoy this free ebook?

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Thank you,

Tanner

