



# THE -NEW SCHOOL- COACH

*Understanding and Connecting with Today's Athlete*

**BY DR. TIM ELMORE**  
[WWW.GROWINGLEADERS.COM](http://WWW.GROWINGLEADERS.COM)



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Requests for information should be addressed to  
[info@GrowingLeaders.com](mailto:info@GrowingLeaders.com)



# FOREWORD

## THE WORLD IS CHANGING.

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*If you've worked with young athletes over the last 15 years, chances are you've seen a change in the way they think, talk, or act. In some cases, these changes have been positive—many athletes practice multiple sports, accept diversity on their teams, and are great teammates. But in other cases, young athletes seem to be lacking in focus, passion, and drive, all of which are essential components for success (both on and off the field). Frankly, this has me worried.*

I call this population of youth, born since 1990, "Generation iY" (the second half of Generation Y and first half of Gen Z). They earned this name because of the world they grew up in, a world that's become increasingly consumed by "i" technologies – iPhones, iPads, iTunes. You name it, they have it. And while there are many incredible benefits to the technological advances we experience today, I think these technologies

may be at the heart of our disconnect with young athletes today.

Consider this recent conversation I had with a hitting coach for a professional baseball team. He told me how he tried to help a 19-year-old minor leaguer improve his swing. After attempting his suggestion three times, the player tossed down the bat, saying, "It doesn't work."

The hitting coach replied, "But you gave it

just three swings.”

“I know, and it doesn’t work,” retorted the frustrated player.

“But it’s gonna take you three thousand swings to get it right!” the coach exclaimed.

Is this dialogue familiar to you? It’s become the “new normal” coaches are facing with today’s breed of athlete. These players are not stupid or slow or untalented—they’ve just grown up in a world where they often get what they want with a quick click. A Google search. A single step. It’s an iY world.

And in this world, it’s challenging to get young athletes to love the process. You know what I mean, don’t you? Excelling in any sport means you commit to a grueling process of preparation and habit. It’s not glitzy or glamorous, and few fans are likely watching. This is difficult for a generation of gifted athletes, where so much has come quickly and easily. To make matters worse, the media conditions them with constant pings on their smart phone, causing dopamine spikes in their systems. Consider these small ways they are molded:

- **We live in a day of one-minute highlight reels on SportsCenter. We watch LeBron James dunk shots or Peyton Manning pass for touchdowns, but we never watch them put in the hours that enabled them to achieve such feats.**
- **We live in a day of Instagram, Snapchat, microwave ovens, fast food, ATMs and high-speed Internet access. We don’t have to wait on too much or get too bored.**
- **We live in a day of “before” and “after” photos—where people lost weight or got toned or won prizes—but we only see the half-minute commercials. No details.**

In 2000, adolescent attention spans were 12 seconds. Today, they are 6 seconds. While it’s not hard to capture your athlete’s attention, it is very hard to keep their attention. Is it any wonder why coaches or trainers must work so tenaciously to get them to stay in the conditioning process between games?

I wrote this book because I believe the changes taking place in the 21st century require us to revise the way we coach today’s athlete. We need a “new school” coach who understands the language of today’s generation.

In this book, you will discover just who this generation is. You’ll also be given the opportunity to build simple practical solutions into your coaching methods that will help you motivate your athletes toward success and create lasting change within your team’s culture.

**WANT TO DEVELOP CHARACTER &  
LEADERSHIP SKILLS IN YOUR ATHLETES?**

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# 1

## WHO ARE THESE YOUNG ATHLETES?

*Do you remember the movie **Miracle**? It's about the 1980 USA Olympic hockey team that took on and defeated a Russian national team that hadn't been beaten in years. That's right, it had been years since they'd lost a game.*

The coach of the USA team, Herb Brooks, knew that most believed it was impossible to beat the Russians. But he also knew that he could beat them. Sounds backwards, right? The way he words it in the film is the best way to say it:

*One game. If we played 'em ten times, they might win nine. But not this game. Not tonight. Tonight, we skate with them. Tonight, we stay with them. And we shut them down because we can!*

Throughout the movie, the athletes face a number of other challenges (alongside the impending Russian matchup). Some are frustrated

with teammates who used to be rivals; others aren't playing as well as they could; still others are dealing with family problems. Coach Brooks dealt with these traditional tests through drills, practice, big picture thinking, and camaraderie.

Those athletes, however, grew up in a different world than today's athlete.

If the athletes of yesterday were like the movie *Miracle*, too many athletes today are like the movie *Kicking and Screaming*. Have you seen this film? It's a comedy about a little league soccer coach who can't get his misfit team to do anything. They're distracted, on their phones, and farting for laughs. We might conclude it's because they're just kids in the movie, but as

time has gone on, it seems the emotional maturity of athletes on every level is declining. It's not just your team.

The reality is that changes in the world are affecting the way youth think, communicate, solve problems, and get motivated. Student athletes today seem to be bringing more and more of their off-the-field life onto the field, which is causing some pretty major disruptions.

Consider how this generation is in completely new territory. They're products of the world we made, having grown up in a time that's:

### **Instant**

Student athletes today seldom have to wait for anything. When everything comes to you quick, you start developing a short threshold for boredom or waiting.

### **Superficial**

Everything about the world is training our athletes to consider appearances more important than character. Success, both on the field and off, is being redefined.

### **Cosmetic**

In today's world, if something doesn't look right, it can be altered. They look for ways to change how they're perceived or appear, without adjusting the work they put in.

### **Guaranteed**

Whether it was a participation trophy, grade inflation, or mom coming to their rescue, they've always been guaranteed success. Are they mature enough to handle failure?

### **Artificial**

Our world has been doctored to make the easiest path for today's generation. We've made the world safer, but is it better? Virtual reality may not prepare them for reality.

### **Manufactured**

For many student athletes today, their life has been prescribed each step of the way. Adults have prepared the path for the child instead of the child for the path.

### **Homogenous**

Due to fear of adversity and contrary perspectives, most of this generation has spent a disproportionate time around peers. Their guide isn't Socrates... it's their friend Josh.

### **Narcissistic**

From childhood, everything in their lives has been about them. Their gift made them the center of attention. If you're constantly told you're awesome, you start believing it.

Let me remind you of something. I don't blame these young athletes for their situation. They're products of our making. This is the world that's subtly (and not so subtly) been created for them by older generations. Of course, there are other factors at play here as well. Along with parents, meds and schools, there's an entire world full of shifts ushered in by technological progress. It's produced a generation of firsts.

In fact, today's students are the first generation whom...

- Don't need adults to get information.
- Can broadcast their every thought or emotion to their followers.
- Have external stimuli at their fingertips 24/7.
- Are socially connected at all times, but often connect in isolation.
- Will learn more from a portable device than from a classroom.
- Have been enabled to be narcissistic instead of valuing a team.
- Use a phone instead of a wristwatch, camera, wall calendar or board game.
- Score lower on global comparisons, but believe they're "awesome."

They also may be the first generation to whom adults can't say: *I know exactly what you're going through.*

It can be pretty easy to be pessimistic about this generation, but I am not. I believe the global shifts in the way they think and act are an opportunity, just as much as they are a challenge. Because of today's overwhelming and over-connected world, most of your athletes are begging for leadership and direction. You are already the coach they need. In the next chapter, we'll talk more about why they need you.

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## WHY ARE ATHLETES SO CHALLENGING TO COACH?

# 2

*Right after their win over the San Francisco 49ers in the 2014 NFC championship game, Seattle cornerback Richard Sherman was so full of himself that he had to share some of it with us.*

In an interview, he boasted that he was the best cornerback in the NFL, dissing Michael Crabtree, the wide receiver he had covered. Sherman's agent, Jamie Fritz, [informed CNNMoney](#) that interest in Sherman had increased dramatically after the broadcast. "While Sherman's endorsements amounted to just a bit more than his \$550,000 salary at the time, Fritz said there were millions in deals that would be signed soon."

Sherman is indeed, awesome. Just ask him. Since then, ESPN panels have discussed the number of football players who celebrate excessively after scoring, even pushing teammates away who want to join them in the

celebration. Evidently, there's only room for one in the limelight—even though several had blocked for the one who scored.

We live in a day of extremes and exaggeration. Hyperbole. Anything for attention. The new currencies are Likes, Shares, Views, and Followers. It's about your personal platform.

Beginning with the Baby Boomer generation, the world began talking about a "generation gap." The term described the challenges of one generation trying to relate with the next. Because of rapid transitions in technology, I believe we're now enduring not just a generation gap, but a communication gap. There was a time when our young athlete's heroes were men and women of



integrity and character. Today, young athletes learn from stars that success is more about being loud and winning endorsements than it is about hard work or investment. Even student athletes can think like “free agents.” Sadly, this is making the message of good coaches even harder to hear.

**The Nationwide Decline**

Over a two-year period of time, I surveyed hundreds of NCAA coaches from across the nation. I simply asked what they’d observed in athletes, from multiple intercollegiate sports. The following are the tangible declines coaches spotted in their players:

1. Resilience – Practice goes well, but even minor adversity seems to defeat them.
2. Empathy – Parent’s often push them into individualism and self-expansion.
3. Ambition – Their internal fortitude to succeed is replaced by external stimuli.
4. Work Ethic – Because of short attention spans, the daily grind is a turn-off.
5. Patience – Due to texts, microwaves and Google, it’s hard to delay gratification.
6. Academic Stamina – It’s tough to stick with studies when the novelty’s gone.
7. Self-Awareness – Few have been honest with them about blind spots.

Certainly, we don’t see this drop in every student athlete. No doubt you’ve seen marvelous exceptions to this rule. However, even the best athletes are struggling today, and I believe the chart below is the key to understanding why:

<h1>THE GENERATION IY ‘SCENE’</h1>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Their World is Full of:</u></p> <p><b>S</b> – Speed  <b>C</b> – Convenience  <b>E</b> – Entertainment  <b>N</b> – Nurture  <b>E</b> – Entitlement</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Consequently, They Can Assume:</u></p> <p>Slow is Bad  Hard is Bad  Boring is Bad  Risk is Bad  Labor is Bad</p>

These columns on the previous page are simple explanations for why millions from Generation iY and Generation Z find it hard to develop patience, work ethic and tenacity. Just look at the world they grew up in. I am not saying we should give up on them; I'm simply saying we must be more intentional about building the life skills that may have come naturally to earlier populations.

## The World of Generation Y and Z

Generation iY represents the second half of Generation Y (Millennials) and the first half of Generation Z, born since the turn of the century. In some ways, they resemble earlier athletes, but in other ways, they stand in stark contrast. They tend to be lethargic rather than active, self-absorbed rather than engaged. As this generation exits college and heads into a career, they're facing many difficulties that aren't making the situation any better. According to [the Department of Labor Statistics](#), 16.8% of college graduates are unemployed, and 41.5% are "under" employed.

Today, huge numbers of Gen iY return home to their parents, even as older generations look on and ask, "Why haven't they grown up yet?" I spoke to an HR executive who'd just oriented recent graduates into the workforce. She said one of her sharp young employees asked her: "When is spring break?"

Too often, we have failed to get them ready for adulthood.

For years, you and I have been working with Generation Y, but it's not likely you'll be working with athletes born before 2001 for very long. As grads attempt to move on to the work force, Generation Z is hot on their tails. Although the consensus on Gen Z is far from settled, we are beginning to learn some startling things about them.

Generation Z, or "Homelanders" (a term coined by historian Neil Howe), are young people born roughly after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. Howe believes—and I think he's right—that the attacks, combined with changes around the turn of the century, catapulted our world into a new reality that's drastically affected a generation. Think about all the "new normals" Generation Z has faced growing up:

- **Terrorism and war**
- **Economic recession**
- **Racial unrest**
- **Global competition for jobs**
- **Rapid technological increase**
- **Complexity and uncertainty**
- **Societal and ideological pluralism... just to name a few.**

With all this change, expect this generation to mimic Generation X in a few ways. In addition, most social scientists agree that they will also be shaped by the continuing global trend toward technology-informed solutions and a rising entrepreneurial spirit.

## EPIC Coaching

Before we move on to how to coach these generations, I want to suggest you implement a new foundation for how you to connect with them. Why a whole new foundation? I believe one of the biggest reasons it can be so challenging to coach today's athletes is that we attempt to connect to them in ways that don't allow them to hear, process, or retain information. At [Growing Leaders](#),

the non-profit organization I founded, we tell teachers, parents, and coaches to use an EPIC style of communication. EPIC stands for:

- E** – **Experiential** – They learn best when we create experiences, then debrief.
- P** – **Participatory** – They learn best when we allow them to weigh in on outcomes.
- I** – **Image-Rich** – They learn best when we employ visuals or word pictures.
- C** – **Connected** – They learn best when we let them discuss conclusions with peers.

EPIC is a simple tool that you can use to make sure that you are communicating in a style that enables your team to hear you. It's their native language.

Here are a few practical suggestions for how to make your communication in and outside of the locker room more EPIC:

1. Long, uninterrupted meetings are counterproductive. Make them shorter. Two-hour meetings may be better divided into four half-hour meetings.
2. Communicating through paper is cumbersome. Engage digital channels of communication on mobile devices.
3. Long teachings about game plans can fail to get through the filter. Use visuals like video and PowerPoint on a screen.
4. One-way lectures don't work. Make meetings interactive. Ask for feedback. Create discussions. They will support what they help create.

Learning to coach these generations can be a challenge. I bet that's why you're reading this book. From here on out, I want to help you bridge the generational gap by providing some crucial action steps that you can utilize to meet your young athletes where they are. With these tools, you'll be able to push them to the next level of achievement, growth, and success.

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## 3

## HOW DO I HOST HARD (BUT HELPFUL) CONVERSATIONS?

*Several years ago, I met with a university student and needed to provide some difficult feedback on a project he'd just finished. We'll call him Zach. Zach was a smart young man, but, like so many from Generation iY, he was fragile when it came to taking constructive criticism.*

Zach is among the millions of kids who got awards just for playing sports, special marks just for completing a school project, praise for merely meeting minimum standards, and money just for being a part of his family. All of this has hindered him from being able to handle less than rave reviews from supervisors.

My meeting was no different.

As I ventured into the conversation, I began with positive remarks on his progress. I affirmed everything I could. However, as soon as I got honest about his unsatisfactory (even unacceptable) work, his entire demeanor changed. He bristled and began to defend his performance. Then, he actually turned on me. I

became the enemy, and he was the victim. He lashed out at me, and told me everyone else was on "his side" and believed in him. He actually reviewed the litany of awards he'd won in his past as if to convince himself he was special. (Interpretation: I was a lone critic, aggressor, and most certainly mistaken). In the end, I don't think he heard me. He was emotionally disabled from consuming helpful, corrective feedback.

### **How to Increase Effort by 40%**

Every coach or teacher knows there's no moment more important than the one when feedback is delivered. Do it well, and the learner makes

progress. Do it poorly, and the opposite happens. We assume the secret to effective feedback is the quality of the information we share: Do this, or don't do that, and you'll be better. But this may not be the case.

Daniel Coyle is a member of a team of psychologists from Stanford, Yale and Columbia who [set out to explore this issue](#), and what they uncovered is that helpful feedback had far more to do with "how" than "what." They asked middle school teachers to give a writing assignment to their students, and afterward, give the students various types of feedback. To their surprise, the researchers discovered there was one particular type of remark that improved student effort so much, they called it "magical." Students who received this feedback chose to revise their paper far more often than students who did not—a 40 percent increase among white students and a 320 percent boost for black students. In the end, it improved their performances significantly.

What was that magical remark? Just one simple phrase:

*“ I’m giving you these comments because I have very high expectations, and I know you can reach them. ”*

The fundamental quality behind this language is something you are already familiar with: *empathy*.

Empathy is like a tool in the hands of a carpenter, a weapon in the hands of a soldier, or a key that unlocks the door to a room you want to enter. Consider this: Young athletes today consistently feel that coaches, faculty, trainers and, sometimes, even parents don't really understand them. So when a coach screams at them to "do better" or "work harder," their immediate but silent reaction is: *You don't really understand what I am going through right now. You don't get me. The fact is, we may not.*

Often, student athletes shut down, but coaches who can communicate empathy for what their student athlete is facing—and relay they both feel with them and care for them—quickly earn the right to say hard things. In fact, a coach who sits down and displays empathy towards a player who's performing poorly will usually gain incredible results.

One coach recently told me about using this quality in action:

*When I met with Justin, I was ticked off at his lazy butt. Instead of yelling at him, though, I started by saying, "Hey Justin. I recognize you're going through some pretty tough stuff right now, both at home and in class. I know you feel like you don't have any more to give on the field right now. But I happen to know you more than you think I do. After looking at your past numbers and watching you this season, I believe you're loaded with untapped potential. And I want to work with you to make sure you get through your studies while at the same time realize that potential on the field."*

It might seem silly to assume that a simple phrase (or even paraphrase of these words) can make such a difference, but it can. The goal of a "New School" coach should be to become acquainted with the way this generation communicates. Part of this means utilizing new tools, like this simple phrase, that can help bridge the gap.

## The Millennial Language

When Jim Tomsula took over as head coach of the San Francisco 49ers, one of the first questions he got from journalists was about his stance on social media. His reply:

*I don't like it at all. I don't know anything about it. I don't do it. I don't use it.*

Within a month, however, Coach Tomsula had a change of heart because he wanted to be relevant to his new team. *The Wall Street Journal* [wrote an article](#) about how the 49ers were making adjustments on their coaching style to connect with Millennial players. Fans have reacted with mixed reviews, but the changes are real. The team's staff is inspired by the same challenge employers all over America are dealing with: hiring young professionals who feel more at home with an iPhone than a...

- Chalkboard with X's and O's
- Profit and Loss statement
- Textbook full of math equations

So what did the San Francisco franchise begin doing differently?

For starters, they adjusted to accommodate shorter attention spans. They used to hold two-hour meetings with no breaks, like most professional football teams do. They now break up their meetings into 30 minute increments, offering 10-minute breaks for players to, as Tomsula puts it, "Go grab your phone, do your multi-tasking and get your fix" before returning to the meeting.

While the change has invited all kinds of "armchair quarterbacks" to claim the 49ers have given in to the wimpy, media-crazed youth culture, I want to offer a different angle. While I agree that young professionals will need to learn to sit still for longer than 30 minutes and break free from the tether of their smart phone, I think coaches should approach their jobs like a missionary.

## The Coach as a Missionary

Do you know any missionaries? If not, let me simply define them as pioneers who leave their comfort zone, enter a different culture, and learn the language and customs in order to reach people with their message or service. Missionaries must literally study the culture and learn *its values* so that they can *add value* to it.

All the missionaries I know who've brought about social change in a needy culture knew they must first *learn before they can lead*. The 49ers have determined to approach their jobs that way. They are trying to connect with a population that has different values, customs and language. So, those coaches are learning and earning the right to lead at the heart level.

Let me offer four realities to consider:

### **1. You are in a cross-culture relationship with your younger athletes.**

As a coach, you will likely feel you're connecting with a very different population as you lead your young athletes. Don't fight it—face it. Find out who they are and what they value so you can lead them into a better future. Just like you must work harder to connect with someone from a foreign culture, so it is with these athletes.

### **2. To reach them, understand their culture and customs.**

Make learning your first order of business. As a coach, do you have a coachable spirit? Are you willing to flex on your methods in order to communicate with them?

You don't have to become like them—simply learn about their world of visuals and connecting. Relevant coaches use what is cultural to say what is timeless.

**3. At that point, you can speak their language and earn their trust.**

Once you've done your homework, you'll naturally communicate that you've tried to step into their world. Again, your goal isn't to imitate, but initiate. That's the leader's job. Over time, players will see you asking questions and speaking their language. This speaks volumes because true leadership operates on the basis of trust.

**4. Finally, you can bring about the changes that will benefit them.**

I know a missionary who had to learn a village's customs before he could even tell them he was there to dig wells and provide them with clean water. Once he did this, they became friends, not foes. One by one, you'll ultimately win over your athletes to listen and follow your lead as you offer different perspectives and methods.

We must start where they are, in order to lead them to where they must go.

The "Old School" coach is known, culturally, as the one yelling from the sidelines, getting upset at the smallest things, and putting his or her players down when they fall short. My suggestion for the "old school" coach is to find a medium place. The answer is in the middle. I believe athletes need us to be both responsive and demanding:

***Responsive:** We display love, acceptance, support, and belief in our athletes.*

***Demanding:** We raise the standard for them and expect them to reach it.*

"Soft" coaches go too far affirming their athletes for the sake of their self-esteem. Athletes today are not stupid, and they see through our hollow flattery. By ten-years-old, most kids know better, and they long for clear leadership (in the home and on the field) where parents, teachers, and coaches display a balance of these two elements. They know that everyone doesn't deserve a trophy.

At the same time, "Hard" coaches are often misunderstood by their players because of the communication gap. Today's coach has to find a way to balance being responsive and demanding if they are going to connect with their players. In fact, I've found I earn my right to be demanding by first being responsive to my team.

The language that you use can be tailored in a way that gets the most out of your athletes, while still making sure they feel a part of the system you're trying to create. Language should be invitational and motivational. If you can find a "sweet spot" between these two qualities, I believe your athletes will thrive under your leadership.



## WHEN ARE ATHLETES MOST LIKELY TO RESPOND?

# 4

*There are moments where coaching means more than X's and O's. There are moments where something in the external world has changed, and your athletes look to you to help them process it. There are moments where an athlete walks into your office and says, "I need help".*

There are also less obvious moments, when an athlete acts out, trying to be tough, but you recognize that something else is going on under the surface. Good coaches prepare for these moments by carefully recognizing when opportunities present themselves. When they see the moment, they know it's time to act.

### **Motivating in the Moment**

A while ago, I had lunch with my friend Lara Juras, who serves as Vice President of Human Resources for the Atlanta Braves. In our conversation, Lara reminded me of a great truth she keeps in mind

as she practices the art of motivating people.

She's learned to utilize the two greatest motivators for behavior whenever she has to inspire improvement among team members:

1. Pain (Very uncomfortable current circumstances)
2. Gain (Very powerful future possibilities)

Pause and reflect for a moment. "Pain" is a motivator for people to change because adrenaline is released in moments of tension or



fear. In fact, many people never change until they feel a little pain. Something in their life must be uncomfortable or unacceptable before they'll consider doing something new or unfamiliar. In our bodies, adrenaline is released in such contexts and operates as fuel for engagement. Without pain, athletes may not experience the "juice" they need to improve.

On the other hand, "gain" is also a great motivator. When people see some benefit up ahead or know something pleasant is coming their way, endorphins are released that operate as fuel for positive change. Endorphins cause us to feel good and move people to act. Very often, people are quite satisfied to "veg," or continue in a routine until some tangible reward or advantage is introduced—often until there's something they're willing to exchange some energy to obtain.

Today's student needs you to think about these motivations, about what it will take to inspire them to act. This starts with the simple realities of pain and gain, but it goes beyond them, too.

On the field, your athletes are motivated by the success they want to achieve and the failure they want to avoid. Off the field, however, these two categories are more blurred. If an athlete is having trouble at home, it can be hard for them to focus on their game. So when you take time to watch for subtle slips, it can provide opportunities for you to seize key moments and dig deep into your athlete's motivations.

### How to Recognize the Moment

Jim Forleder is the principal of Lincoln High School in Walla Walla, Washington. When he took over, he heard the school was known for student detentions and suspensions. Disciplinary actions were high, as students frequently showed no respect for teachers. Jim decided he needed to try a new approach to discipline.

So the next time a student dropped an F-Bomb in class and was sent to his office for punishment, Jim sat down with the teen offender, and instead of jumping into a recitation of how the student had violated school policy, he quietly sat for a moment. Then, leaning forward and looking into the eyes of the young man, he gently spoke:

“

*What just happened doesn't sound like you. You're so much better than that. Is there something going on in your life that I don't know about? Something at home with family, or in your personal relationships?*

”

Jim reports that most of the time, that's all it takes to begin a transparent conversation. In nearly every case, the offender would pause, then break down and talk about how his dad had just left... or how mom was abusing drugs... or how her family couldn't pay the rent... or how he'd just lost his brother in an accident. The floodgates opened, and Jim was able to address the real need. Along the way, he'd talk over the offense and the changes that needed to happen. Ironically, he said that it frequently wasn't necessary. The majority of the time, the student would return to class and apologize, without being told to do so. School suspensions *dropped 85%* at Lincoln High School.

So many times, the attitudes and actions of athletes can seem incomprehensible. I would guess, however, that most issues like lack of discipline or focus are often more cut and dry than they seem.

A coach's biggest communication gaps often come when they fail to recognize a moment when it's disguised as a frustrating athlete. How do you think teams would change if more coaches took a little time to ask what else was going on?

## **Six Steps Great Coaches Take to Help Athletes Reach Their Potential**

I heard a great story along these same lines about a student athlete a while back. Cristian Mojica is a high school student at Boston Latin Academy. He's also a football player and swimmer who is far more serious about sports than academic development. That is, until this year. What did it take?

Sitting on the side of the pool with a stopwatch, timing other swimmers.

Christian's coach, along with his dad, decided he needed to see the bigger picture. So when his grades came in, it was the perfect time to act. Christian had a 1.66 grade point average in the winter, and the school required athletes to have a 1.67 to participate. So Cristian approached his head coach, Mark Thomas, and asked him what he could do to continue swimming. The kid was sure the team needed his talent and that his coach would fudge on his grade since it was close to being good enough.

The coach told Cristian no one could help him get back in the pool except him. He stuck to his guns, much to the athlete's shock. "I honestly don't think he took it that serious... he didn't think it was a big deal, and he'd be able to slide by. Well guess what, he didn't," Thomas said. "He came to me and said, 'What can you do?' I said, 'Cristian, there's nothing I can do. If I could have done something, I would.' He needed to learn a lesson."

Cristian's coach recognized that the greatest benefit to his performance would occur not if he pulled strings to get Cristian back on the team, but if he allowed Cristian to take responsibility for his own mistakes. It was an important moment.

Can you guess what happened next?

Cristian now carries a solid 3.2 GPA. He is competing again in the city championships after being named the Boston Scholar-Athlete of the Month. Yes, you read that right: *Scholar-Athlete*.

The fact is, the coach saw what the athlete could not see. Now, Cristian knows he can do something he never dreamed he could.

If you want to build athletes like Cristian toward a defining moment, you have to use language that helps them see their effort differently. Here are six steps that great coaches take in order to build up to these kinds of moments with their athletes:

### **1. Tell them what you see.**

Very often, student-athletes hide behind vanity and don't see their inward potential or aptitude. If you see potential, let them know. Be clear about your vision and get other coaches or teachers to back you up. Therapists today frequently see a condition in kids they call "high arrogance, low self-esteem." We must help them see their aptitude far beyond their sport. Express your belief in them.

### **2. Use the word "yet."**

When student-athletes say they just aren't good in math, science, or reading, they aren't lying. So far, they may have only seen mediocrity in the classroom. Stanford professor Dr. Carol Dweck, however, talks about current experiments she's doing with the word "yet." You can agree a student isn't good at something... yet. Always cultivate a "growth mindset" instead of a "fixed mindset." Development is possible.

### **3. Create incentive in them.**

Like Coach Thomas above, stick to your standards for academics or character. Don't let them slide by; their boss likely won't on the job in five years. Suspend them so they can grow, but find a way to have them "hold the stopwatch" like Cristian so they have motivation to improve. Keep them close to the sport they love, to build a fire inside of them to return to it. Keep their vision alive to "get back in the pool" or on the field.

### **4. Help them "own" their growth.**

Did you notice in the Cristian Mojica story the coach communicated that the only person who could help the student get back in the pool was himself? They put the ownership on him. Our culture today so often fosters a "blame game" or a victim mindset that allows kids to blame someone else for their lack of performance. We owe it to them to equip them to take responsibility and own their journey.

### **5. Position your standards in the right place.**

It's easy to hold standards too low or too high for some of our student-athletes. You must size-up their potential; compare it to your standards for the team, and choose your standards wisely. Leaders must help teams reach heights they may not reach on their own, but not discourage them with a standard that's impossible to reach. Keep in mind students are capable of much more than they realize.

### **6. Consistently hold them accountable.**

Once you've determined your standards, the only hope you have of players meeting them is to be consistent in your enforcement. People do what people see. Talk is cheap; actions scream messages. Helping athletes achieve peak performance on and off the field is all about sticking to your guns and holding them accountable. It's how people grow — and how successful people reach their potential.

The truth is, there is no way to predict the "perfect" moment for teaching a lesson to your athletes. Teachable moments often come when they are least expected. For that reason, "New School" coaches initiate practices that push their athletes to think. They position themselves to recognize the "perfect" moments when they come, and hammer their lesson home. These coaches step back from typical coaching methods in these moments, and step with empathy into their players' lives. By doing so, they ensure that they get players who believe in themselves own their own progress. Isn't this just the kind of athlete we all want to coach?



## 5

## WHERE DO ATHLETES GAIN THE MOST PASSION?

*In November of 2015, the Kansas City Royals won their first World Series in thirty years. Many of the fans cheering them on weren't even alive when they won in 1985.*

This team is young and talented and, in many ways, went against the grain of modern day professional baseball. In a day of free agents, television contracts and big payrolls in large cities, General Manager Dayton Moore defied the odds. Kansas City is not a huge market, and their television contract is nowhere near what teams from larger markets get. Hence, the Royals don't have the money to buy talent like other teams do.

But they've got something else up their sleeve.

I have watched the leadership of this baseball club over the last seven years, since first visiting them in Surprise, AZ, at spring training in 2008. I'd like to offer some good news for those who are reading this who might be tempted to

assume they can't do anything extraordinary because they lack budget, notoriety, people or options. May I summarize what Dayton Moore and his front office leadership have practiced since they arrived in Kansas City years ago?

*"What we lack in cash, we make up for in culture."*

Did you catch that? The Royals knew if they couldn't buy talent, they'd have to create it—and they created it with culture. Culture is all about environment. Success with a team, both on and off the field, is rooted in the type of environment you create for them. Culture trumps everything else in the locker room or clubhouse.

## The Truth About Culture

All teams have a culture, by default or design.  
 People are carriers of culture, good or bad.  
 Some teammates are more contagious than others.  
 There are as many cultures as there are managers.  
 The culture affects behavior more than anything else.  
 A leader's job is to nurture a healthy culture.  
 They do this through their habits and attitudes.

### **Performance vs. Mastery**

In the spring of 2015, I had lunch with Dr. Amber Strain, the Senior Director of Cognitive Science at Decooda. Amber is an accomplished research scientist who has expertise in cognitive and experimental psychology. Her research with students has led her to some pretty interesting findings about how the environments we create help to shape the behaviors of those we are leading.

"I feel that in today's culture," she told me, "we do a lot of handholding, even in education. There are many things that students need to learn that we are failing to teach them. One of them is that we need to teach students to have a mastery approach instead of a performance approach." Let me explain what this looks like:

#### Performance Approach:

'Get the best grades', 'get the best grade on the test', 'learn just what you need to get the good grade and be done.' This creates a goal of learning for the sake of looking really smart or avoiding looking stupid.

#### Mastery Approach:

The goal is learning for the sake of learning and getting better. It's instilling in students a desire to make sure that they understand this as best they can.

"One problem with the Performance Approach," she told me, "is what happens when a student makes a bad grade. They immediately feel stupid and feel they didn't do a good job. With a mastery approach, we talk with students about what it means when you gave it your best and still got a C on the test: what can you take away from this; what do you know you really did well on; what can you learn from getting this C that you can make sure you don't do next time. This makes it an encouraging experience, not a deflating experience."

So how does this translate for a coach? Because our culture has created a fascination with what our actions and appearances look like on a screen or on social media, there is often a focus

in the mind of a young athlete on how they look, rather than the path towards skill mastery or goal accomplishment. Athletes today are worried about uniforms and glitzy plays (i.e. performance) rather than attempting to grow as a player. Can you see how this might lead to problems?

Creating an environment of mastery rather than performance on your team can be difficult, especially when it involves pushing your athletes to keep their minds constantly on their long-term and short-term goals (rather than specific successes or failures). Here are a few ways you can start creating the right kind of environment on your team:

### **1. Give up the temptation to control.**

You cannot make your athletes succeed. Trying to control your team teaches them to see you as someone who wants things to look in order, even if everyone is just pretending.

### **2. Focus on taking the time to help athletes understand the value of what they are learning.**

Stop and connect what your athletes are doing to the world outside of your team and your sport. Help them see how the skills and disciplines they are mastering will help them in the future.

### **3. Show athletes they have an advocate by showing concern and care.**

Be a leader that constantly reminds your team what they can do. You are the first one to believe in them. You are the last one to condemn their failures.

## **The Science Behind the Switch From Old School to New School**

While “old school” coaching was the norm decades ago, replete with yelling, anger, distant personalities and the focus on improving weaknesses—today’s “new school” coaches motivate young athletes in a different manner. Their methods are now scientifically proven to get better results in business (with young employees) and with doctors, as they motivate patients to comply with orders. These methods also happen to be the perfect way to create a winning environment on your team.

[In a 2014 article](#), researcher Marshall Moore highlights an important study on positive and negative coaching styles:

“In [the] study, published in [Social Neuroscience](#), researchers collected data from undergraduates at Case Western Reserve University. After finishing an initial questionnaire measuring their emotional tendencies, students had two interviews within five days.” One of those interviews utilized a positive coaching style, while the other used a negative coaching style.

In an MRI, the researchers was able to discern the areas of the brain activated by these two approaches... and the results were most telling.

“During the encouraging interactions with the positive interviewer,” Moore notes, “students showed patterns of brain activity that prior research associated with global processing (the ability to see the big picture before seeing small details), visual processing (the ability to see or imagine the future), feelings of empathy and emotional safety (fostering transparency and trust), and motivation (the predisposition to pursue big goals, instead of playing it safe).”

So what does this mean? This research has led me to create what I call **The Four 'New School' Coaching Strategies**. These strategies utilize the results of the research conducted here to give you tools to coach in positive ways that will get the most results from your athletes:

### 1. Strength-Based Coaching

Enabling a player to focus on developing their strengths and envision performing well when in his or her "strength zone" should take priority before tweaking a weak area. In his article, Marshall Moore states, "Brain scans explored the effects of different coaching styles. Based on what's happening in the brain, this more positive approach helps people visualize a better future for themselves—and provide the social-emotional tools to help them realize their vision

### 2. Visual-Based Coaching

Humans are visual learners. Our brains think in pictures. There are the regions that kick into gear when we imagine a future event or when someone provides imagery to guide our understanding. Years ago, 3M published findings confirming the power of images in communication. They reported that visual aids in the classroom improved learning, comprehension and retention. Even more, visuals "yielded a 43% improvement in action" after learning. Students like to see a picture, not just hear a word.

### 3. Trust-Based Coaching

This means our style communicates we believe the best about our players. We give them the benefit of the doubt, until they forfeit that right. (And even then, we err on the side of trust). Trust-based coaches have very few rules, but lots of equations. Instead of a long list of rules, you merely state that this kind of behavior results in this benefit, or that kind of behavior results in this consequence. It enables the coach to lead in a quiet yet authoritative manner. For instance, when giving hard feedback, this coach might say: "I'm giving you these comments because I know you're capable of achieving them. I believe in you and your potential and can see you playing a key role on this team."

### 4. Relationship-Based Coaching

This means our style connects with each player relationally, based on their personality and strength. You lead by cultivating personal power, not using positional power. You realize your position gives you authority, but your relationships earn you influence and trust. Players go the "extra mile" and give you more than they would by merely fulfilling a job description. They follow you out of "devotion" not "duty," and it's because their coach has initiated a relationship with them. For instance, this coach may ask to spend extra time with an athlete who's ethnically diverse and say, "Hey, I know we come from different backgrounds—so I'd like to get to know you better and see how much we have in common."

While researchers acknowledge much more work needs to be conducted on the topic, the results offer a first glimpse at the neurological basis of why “new school” coaching is a better approach. Athletes coached in positive, relationship-based approaches tend to be more open emotionally, more open to ideas for improvement, and more likely to pro-actively make lasting behavior changes than are those coached in ways that highlight weaknesses.

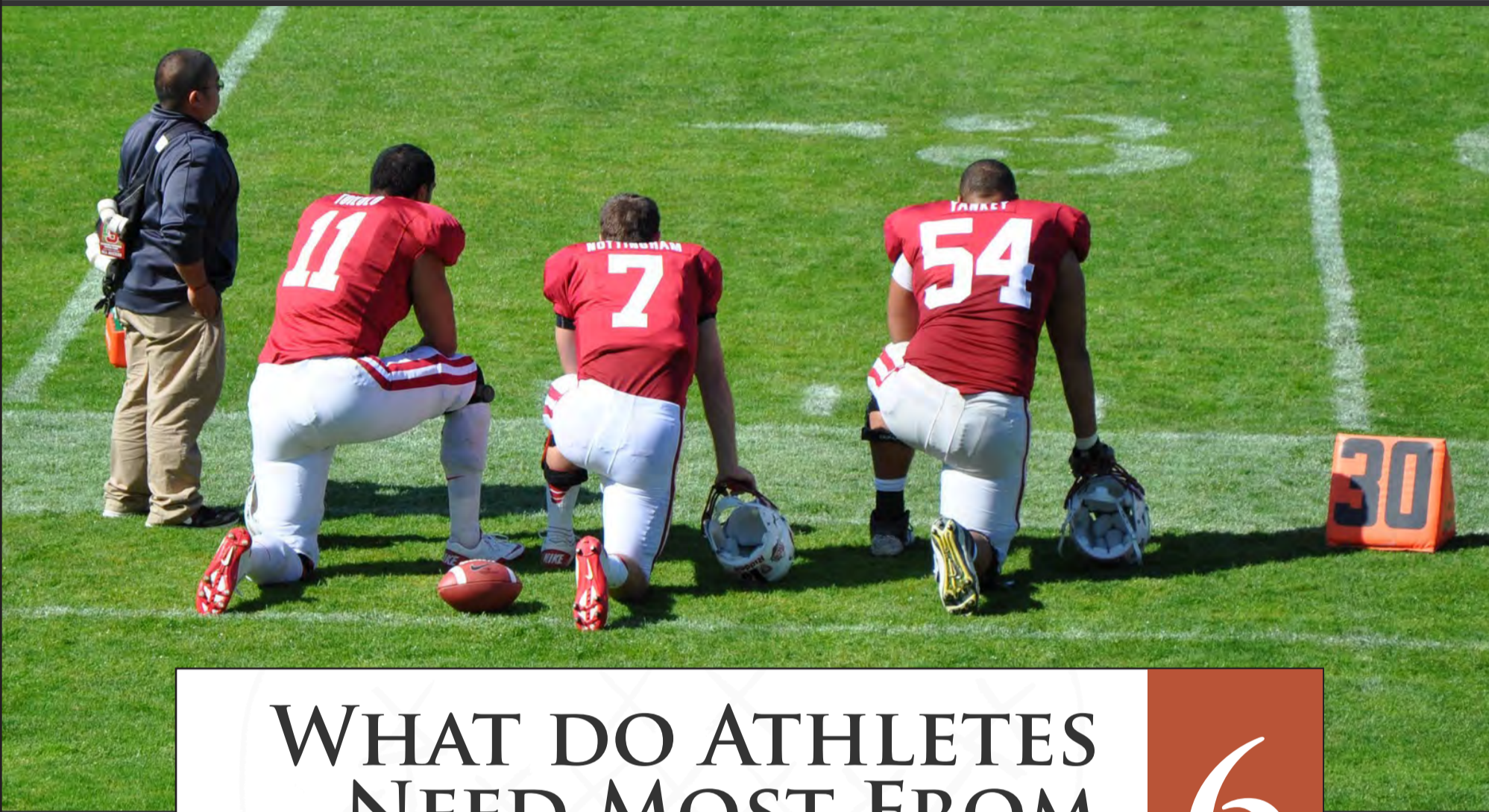
Creating this type of environment in the locker room isn’t difficult, but it does require focus and intention. It requires that both coaching staff and athletes agree on the kind of team that they want to be before they can ever determine how many games they will win. If you want proof of the effectiveness of this method, just ask our friends from Kansas City.

I recently spoke to a baseball player who used to play for the Kansas City Royals. Although he’d been released, he was writing a thank you note to their management. When I asked him why, he smiled and said, “They treated me like family. I’d do anything for Dayton Moore.” That’s what “new school” coaches tend to get from their athletes when they create the right kind of environments on their team.

**WANT TO DEVELOP CHARACTER &  
LEADERSHIP SKILLS IN YOUR ATHLETES?**

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# WHAT DO ATHLETES NEED MOST FROM A COACH?

# 6

*Years ago, legendary basketball coach John Wooden told people that he didn't see himself as a coach as much as a teacher. He referred to himself as an educator, and the game of basketball was merely a platform to instruct his athletes about winning in life. He succeeded profoundly.*

Reflect for a minute on your answer to this question: Are you a coach or a teacher? Coaches can be great, but often, our style shrinks to barking out orders and game plans (instead of teaching)

when we're faced with athletes' disrespect or short attention spans. We may teach them what to think but not how to think. Coaching is about the "what." Teaching is about the "why" and the "how."

TRADITIONAL COACH	TEACHER
<p>One-way communication.                      Yells orders.                      Confronts mistakes by shouting.                      Focuses on what needs to be done.                      It's about telling.</p>	<p>Two-way interaction.                      Facilitates learning.                      Confronts mistakes by listening.                      Explains how and why it must be done.                      It's about instructing.</p>

If your style is “old school” as an athletic coach, this may sound crazy, but today’s athletes—who’ve been empowered by technology and parents—require a different style in order to follow direction. It’s relationship-based coaching we’ve been talking about that wins them over at the heart level. This is the kind of coach your athletes need you to be:

### **They don’t need you for information, but for interpretation.**

Information is available 24/7, so why not change your style to being an interpreter, to take time and explain why something is important and how to do it? John Wooden slowly taught his players how to put on their socks so they wouldn’t get blisters.

### **They are drawn to social media more than television.**

They spend more hours using Facebook or Instagram or Snapchat than watching TV. Why? It’s interactive. It’s personal. It’s short bursts of content. What if you adapted your coaching style to resemble social media? Interactive. Personal. Short bits of content they can digest. Your message may not need to change, but your methods might.

### **They need you to start with “why.”**

A few years back, Simon Sinek wrote a book called *Start With Why*. He argues that understanding the “why” is what gets a team on board with an idea. Once you explain the why, they gain a keen interest in learning the “what” or “how.” Too often, we rush to bark out “what” needs to happen—and never gain the hearts of our young players.

### **They want you to teach them, not tell them.**

Too often, I’ve been guilty of merely telling young team members what to do. They don’t respond well to a “teller.” When we stop and actually teach them how to do something, explaining what’s behind a drill or practice or play, we win them over. Telling them gets you temporary behavior modification. Teaching them enables them to “own” the idea.

### **They need you to believe in what you’re saying.**

Young athletes today can smell a fake a mile away. If we don’t buy the message we are exporting to them, we’ll never get them to embody it. Demonstrate your passion—not just with the tone of your voice, but with the routines of your life.

My favorite John Wooden story occurred when freshman Bill Walton came to play for him at UCLA. Bill had been heavily recruited out of Helix High School in San Diego, and he knew he was good. He arrived sporting a big, red beard his first year. As he sat with the other freshmen listening to Coach Wooden explain why he didn’t allow facial hair on his team, Walton decided to confront the silly rule. Wooden explained how he wanted them to look clean cut to fellow students and he

wanted them to avoid the risk of catching a cold walking outside after showering. This was nonsense to Walton.

After the meeting, Walton approached Wooden, looked down at him, and said, "I'm planning on keeping my beard, coach."

Wooden looked up at his 6 foot, 11 inch freshman and replied, "You really feel strongly about your beard, don't you, Bill?"

"Yes I do," Walton replied.

"Well, then. I really respect people who possess strong beliefs," Wooden responded. Then, after a short pause, he smiled and said, "We're going to miss you, Bill."

Wooden was a teacher who believed in what he taught. His commitment won the respect of his players. Walton shaved his beard and went on to win championships.

### Practical Suggestions for the "New School" Coach

As we get close to the end, it's important we get very practical about ways we can engage these "new school" coaching methods. There are a lot of ways to get started, but the one that I often lay out to coaches I spend time with is to **Role the Dice**:

- D** – **Dilemma** – First, remind them of a challenge or problem they must solve. Connect the conversation you wish to have with a relevant issue in their future or on the team. This could be an upcoming game, or preparing for the next stage of their life. Once they feel the dilemma, they'll be more apt to engage and learn.
- I** – **Image** – Then, engage them with a picture or metaphor that represents a solution. As we've already noted, they are even more visual in their communication preferences than previous generations. Use a word picture that is worth a thousand words.
- C** – **Conversation** – Next, foster interaction; allow them to weigh in with their thoughts. They learn best when it feels like social media—interactive, short bursts, stimulating. They long for conversation.
- E** – **Enlist** – Finally, call them to action with an experience for them to apply the solution. Work to ensure the interaction leads to action. Talk over a single step they could take to improve and grow in the area you've discussed.

### Resources to help you Become an EPIC Coach

When I speak at events across the U.S. and share these ideas and observations, I often get a very important and practical question: how in the world can I make these changes if I am already short on time? If you feel stretched thin as a coach, you are not alone, but you are also not without options. This is why I created Growing Leaders. We're committed to resourcing you as you lead the next generation.

At Growing Leaders, we use *Habitudes® for Athletes* to help expedite the D.I.C.E. process. Each *Habitude* is a distinctive image that communicates a timeless leadership or character building

principle in a way that's relevant to today's athletes. These images have helped coaches all across the US increase retention, attention, and intention within their athletes. Here are a few sample *Habitudes* you can use to help develop the character of your athletes and fellow coaches:



**Talk about the Price Tag before you hop into the "Taxicab."**

The Taxi Principle reminds us: we must never get into a taxicab without first asking how much the ride will cost. Good coaches count the cost before taking on players who may be trouble. Do you have time to develop their hearts as well as their talents?



**Be sure you have enough "Thermostats" in the locker room.**

Never take on questionable character without strong, character-filled leaders in the locker room who influence the team. Are your leaders "thermostats" for the team... players that can turn the temperature up?



**Be willing to play "Chess," not "Checkers," with your players.**

Chess and Checkers reminds us that each team member is like a chess piece. Unlike checkers, where every piece moves alike, you must treat players like chess pieces, leading them differently based on their strengths, weaknesses and personalities. This is the key to generating the best from your team members. Will you give them this effort?



**Work on the portion of the "Iceberg" below the surface.**

You understand an iceberg, right? 10% is visible, just like talent. But 90% is invisible, just like character. Spend time working on your team's disciplines and values below the surface. It will make or break them. We must think long-term, not short-term.

Growing Leaders provides leadership development materials just like these that can help you teach leadership principles in minutes. The material utilizes the EPIC model to inspire leadership growth in student athletes and introduce a common language that can help your team remain accountable to one another on the field. If you visit [GrowingLeaders.com](http://GrowingLeaders.com), you can get a free sample of our [Habitudes for Athletes](#).

## Alicia's Story

Can I end this book with some good news? You already know it, I'm sure. There are some *incredible* athletes within Generation Y and Z.

Occasionally, you meet a student athlete that seems far ahead on the journey towards character, maturity, and success. We had just one such student athlete intern with us during the summer of 2015. Alicia Whittle was named a "Division I USTFCCCA All-Academic Individual" as a track and field athlete at Kennesaw State University near Atlanta, GA. When we asked her to share about what it took to hone her athletic development, we were impressed by her insight:

“ Although I went to a small private school, I joined an AAU (Athletic Amateur Union) track team to see how talented I really was. I've encountered many athletes who were superstars in high school but soon learned that it didn't mean much. The moment I started running in the 8th grade, I never lost a single race at my private school. Did it prove I was really good? No. Joining an AAU team and competing all summer against the best kids in the nation proved to be priceless. I won and lost races multiple times, but I knew losing a race during the summer meant way more to me than being undefeated in my school races. I grew up quoting this phrase, especially before my competitions:  
'To be the best, you must beat the best.' ”

Can you imagine meeting an 8th grader with that kind of ambition and wisdom? I believe that growing young athletes into leaders like Alicia is more possible in this generation than in any other in our history. Generation iY is, after all, eager to lead, multi-talented, and interested in giving back to others. They just need a "new school" coach to lead them in the right direction.

*Will you be the coach they need?*

WANT TO DEVELOP CHARACTER &  
LEADERSHIP SKILLS IN YOUR ATHLETES?

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# THANK YOU FOR READING!

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I hope this eBook has been able to provide you with useful information and ideas on how you can motivate those of the youngest generation in your workforce!

If you enjoyed this eBook, would you please take a moment to share it with others? Below are a few ways you can spread the word. Additionally, feel free to visit my blog, where I write daily on issues discussed in this eBook and more.

And again: Thank You for Reading!



# TOOLS FOR 'NEW SCHOOL' COACHES

At **Growing Leaders**, we partner with professional and collegiate athletic programs across the nation to help coaches connect with their athletes and equip their teams with the necessary leadership skills to win on and off the field. Below are two ways we help athletic programs reach their goals:

## 1 EVENTS FOR ATHLETIC DEPARTMENTS



Growing Leaders provides events specifically designed for coaches and athletic department staff working with the next generation of student athletes. With interactive training, Dr. Tim Elmore provides customized content to meet your team's needs.

[CLICK HERE TO BOOK AN EVENT](#)

### Events for Coaching Staff:

- Marching Off the Map: The Future of Student Development in Intercollegiate Athletics
- The New Wave: Understanding and Connecting with Generation iY Athletes

### Events for Athletes:

- Who Do You Think You Are? How Athletes Can Uncover the Life They Were Meant to Live
- Pressure Points: Making Stress Work For You

## 2 LEADERSHIP TRAINING SYSTEM FOR ATHLETES

**Habitudes® for Athletes** is a unique leadership training system specifically designed to prepare today's athletes for excellence in both their sport and life. This video-based system uses distinct images, conversations, and experiences to teach important life and leadership skills in an engaging, memorable way.

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW A SAMPLE](#)



*Habitudes for Athletes* has been molded into four unique Courses. Each Course contains a variety of resources to help you implement a leadership training environment, including video sessions with Dr. Tim Elmore, in-depth Coach's Guides, and a Facilitator Training video. These resources help you:

- Transform a group of individual athletes into a unified force.
- Create teams of student-athletes who build trust with each other and their coaches.
- Create language to talk about real life issues in a safe and authentic way.
- Build teams where every athlete thinks and acts like a leader.
- Build athletes who make wise decisions that keep them in competition and out of trouble.

# ABOUT TIM ELMORE

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Dr. Tim Elmore is a leading authority on how to understand the next generation and prepare tomorrow's leaders today. He is a best-selling author, international speaker, and president of **Growing Leaders**, a nonprofit dedicated to preparing the next generation of influencers.

Tim and his team provide public schools, universities, civic organizations, and corporations with resources that foster the growth of young leaders who can transform society. For over 30 years, he has taught leadership through the power of images and stories that enables young adults to influence others in a positive way.

Since founding Growing Leaders, he has spoken to more than 500,000 students, faculty, and staff on hundreds of campuses across the country, including the University of Alabama, Purdue University,

University of North Carolina, Georgia Tech, and Wake Forest University. Tim has also taught courses on leadership and mentoring at nine universities and graduate schools in the U.S. and around the world. He has provided workshops on understanding today's athletes for professional and collegiate athletic programs, such as the Kansas City Royals, San Francisco Giants, the New York Giants, The Ohio State University, and the University of Oklahoma.

Tim has written more than 25 books, including the best-selling, *Habitudes: Images that Form Leadership Habits and Attitudes*<sup>®</sup>, *Artificial Maturity: Helping Kids Meet the Challenge of Becoming Authentic Adults*, *Generation iY: Secrets to Connecting with Today's Teens & Young Adults in the Digital Age*, *Life Giving Mentors*, and *Nurturing the Leader Within Your Child*. His sought-after parenting advice includes insightful blog articles, such as "3 Huge Mistakes We Make Leading Kids and How to Correct Them," which went viral on Facebook and received over 1,000,000 shares.

Tim's expertise on emerging generations has led to media coverage in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes.com*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *MSNBC.com*, *The Washington Post*, *WorkingMother.com*, *Psychology Today* and *Portfolio.com*. He is a weekly blog contributor for *The Huffington Post*, and has appeared on *CNN's Headline News* and *FOX & Friends* discussing trends and advice for connecting with Generation iY.