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**YOU WIN
IN THE
LOCKER ROOM
FIRST**



The 7 C's to Build a Winning Team
in Business, Sports, and Life

WILEY

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THE LOCKER
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MIKE SMITH

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*To Julie, for always being there for me.
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project with Jon.*

*To my mom and dad, for all of your love and guidance.
To all the coaches, players, and support staff that I have
worked with and coached against. Thank you for helping me
have a better understanding of the greatest sport of all.*

—Mike Smith

*To Kathryn, thank you for being my lifelong teammate.
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experiences and wisdom with me. This book would not have
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—Jon Gordon

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Introduction

By Mike Smith

I've been a coach for 32 years and half of that time was in the NFL. I was on the staff of the Baltimore Ravens when we won the Super Bowl, and I was one play away from going to the Super Bowl as head coach of the Atlanta Falcons. For five years we had the second most wins in the NFL—only Bill Belichick and the Patriots had more. I'm also a coach that was fired because during my last two seasons with the Falcons we only had 10 wins combined. Looking back, I can see clearly the difference between those first five seasons and the last two. I understand why we won and why we lost. In this book, Jon and I aim to help you build a winning team and avoid the mistakes made by too many leaders, including me. Jon and I often talk about the fact that success happens by focusing on the process, not the outcome. You win by cultivating the right culture, leadership, expectations, beliefs, mindset, relationships, and habits before you even play the game. You win in the locker room first. Then, you win on the field.

I've known Jon for over 10 years. We first met when I was the defensive coordinator with the Jacksonville Jaguars and our head athletic trainer Mike Ryan introduced us. Our team read his book *The Energy Bus*, and Jon spoke to our team during training camp. We had an incredible season, went to

the playoffs, and beat the Steelers in Pittsburgh in the first round.

When I became the head coach for the Atlanta Falcons the next year, I knew I wanted to bring *The Energy Bus* and Jon to our team as well. I had all the guys read the book and Jon spoke to our team. We focused on implementing many of the principles in this book. We went from a losing record of 4 and 12 to 11 and 5 and we made it to the playoffs. I'll tell you more about that turnaround in a little bit, but for now it's important for you to know that Jon and I have spent eight training camps together and each year we have talked about using the seven C's to build a great team and win in the locker room first. I have my favorite C's and Jon has his.

Since Jon and I first began working together, he has also helped countless teams in the NFL, MLB, NBA, and NCAA. He has had the luxury of seeing what other coaches do to build their teams and has amassed a ton of knowledge and best practices. He became very passionate about his C's and I grew confident about my own favorites since I had seen the impact firsthand. Jon and I would often debate about which were most important.

After my last year with the Falcons and seeing what happened to our culture the last two seasons compared to the first five seasons, we know without a doubt that winning in the locker room begins foremost with culture. So let's start there. Jon and I will share what we know about building winning teams and we truly hope it helps you develop and grow your team.

Chapter 1

Culture

*Culture drives expectations and beliefs;
expectations and beliefs drive behavior;
behavior drives habits;
and habits create the future.
It all starts with culture.*

Create a Winning Culture

Mike Smith



In January of 2008 I was hired as the head coach of the Atlanta Falcons. Most of the time when head coaches are hired, they are not coming into a very good or stable situation. It is not the norm to replace a coach who has just won the Super Bowl and is riding off into the sunset, like Bill Walsh after Super Bowl XXXIII or Bill Cowher who only coached one more season after Super Bowl XL. When I was named the coach of the Atlanta Falcons, they were a team that had been through quite a bit of recent turmoil and struggled to win consistently throughout the history of the franchise. In their 42 years, the Atlanta Falcons had never had back-to-back winning seasons. They had always for some reason or another struggled with consistency and sustainability. For example, from 2000 to 2007 the Falcons had five different men stand on the sideline in the role of head coach. The 2007 season had been an extremely difficult one, in which the first-year head coach had resigned after 12 games—three-quarters through the season—to return to coach at the college level. The quarterback, who was not only the face of the franchise but also without a doubt one of the most popular players in the NFL, was headed to federal prison. While none of this was the fault of the ownership and executives of the Falcons organization, such extreme and unfortunate events

can create a challenging, almost dysfunctional, working environment. Needless to say, the culture of the team was in shambles.

Jon and I talked several times on the phone about the state of the Falcons' organization and it became very clear that if I was going to turn this team around, the first step would be to focus on transforming the culture. While the football coach in me wanted to attack the X and O issues and work with first-year general manager Thomas Dimitroff to calibrate the roster for the upcoming season, I knew the biggest priority was to create a winning culture in which every member could thrive and excel. This meant we would not only have to create the right culture for the team but also for the rest of the organization.

Build Your Culture Up and Down

Mike Smith

I've always believed that culture is defined and created from the top down, but it comes to life from the bottom up. This meant that I had to build our culture by working with the leadership group (i.e., the owner, general manager, and executives), the coaching staff, and the football team. To strengthen the culture among the leadership group, it was important to reiterate to the owner, team president, and general manager the shared beliefs, values, and expectations that we had discussed in depth when I was interviewing for the head coaching position. It was important to have collaborative conversations on a regular basis to discuss the changes we were making and why we were making them.