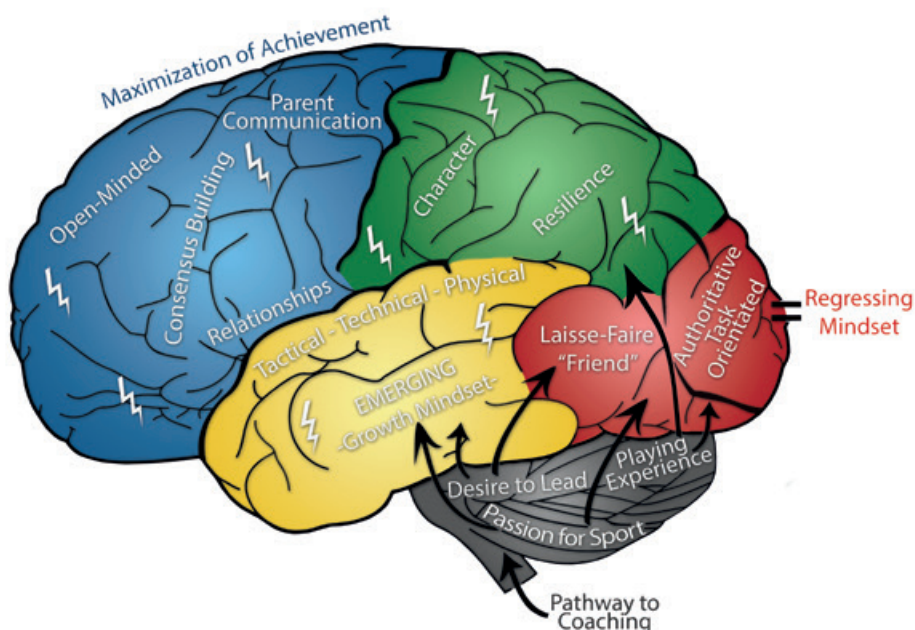


The Transformational COACH

Incorporating Mindfulness for Improved Performance



GREG WINKLER

MEYER
& MEYER
SPORT

“Greg Winkler’s Transformational Coach gives a full spectrum outlook on what coaching entails. Winkler takes the reader on a path through his experiences, challenges, and discoveries in the coaching world. He creates a holistic coaching model focused on progressive behaviors that speaks to today’s athlete. This is a must read for coaches as it offers up solutions to modern challenges in the coaching world of today.”

–Mike Juels, President and CEO, GAMEBREAKER

“Helping coaches master the qualities that inspire players and deliver the joy youngsters deserve from sports is a far more challenging task than teaching Xs and Os. Greg Winkler succeeds. After reading Greg Winkler, the complexities of coaching for success while delivering the enjoyable and nurturing environment that children deserve no longer seems so daunting.”

–Mike Wiollta, Executive Editor, Soccer America Magazine

“I read this book from the ‘new’ coach perspective where we tend to worry more about the ‘how to’ of everything rather than the ‘who am I coaching?’ This book addresses the how and the who, the powerful and pertinent questions we should be asking as we seek transformation in ourselves and subsequently our impact on the players and community. This is the type of book that I know beyond a doubt will transform the way coaches at any level can find mindfulness in what they do every day. If you coach, manage, or lead others, you will benefit greatly from this work.”

**–Miguel Dotres, CIC, Charlotte County Soccer Federation,
Vice President of Recreational Soccer – South**

This book is dedicated to my family who were instrumental in my coaching journey, a journey that still continues today, most especially to my wife, Vikki, who knows firsthand what it means to be a coaching widow.

As I reach a new stage in my life – grandparenthood – I also dedicate this book to Sophia, Rocco, and Oliver, and any future little ones. It is my hope that the coaches, teachers, and role models they have in their lives lead them with a transformational heart.

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Two of my family members: my wife Vikki who is my ultimate proof-reader and life partner. She has lived this journey. She has been through all of the highs and lows a coaching life has to offer. My son Brett who, despite his busy schedule, provided feedback and editorial advice throughout the process.

INTRODUCTION

“Coaches have a responsibility to create an environment where players are free to be creative and make in-moment game decisions.”

Welcome to the Transformational Journey

You are about to take a literary journey to improve on your influence over the people that you lead. This book is a leadership guide; whether you are a coach of youth, high school-age, college-age, or professional athletes, there is a pathway to excellence and influence. You may not coach in the athletic arena, but as a teacher, an administrator, or a business leader, the lessons from athletic pursuits have always correlated with the classroom or the boardroom. You will find the following definitions helpful as we attempt to dig deeper and embark on this path to transformational leadership.

Transformational Coaching

A style of leadership in which the leader identifies the needed change, creates a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executes the move with the commitment of the members of the group. (Business Directory Definition)

When a coach reaches this level of leadership, they have realized that coaching was never about them. Coaching/leadership was never intended to be about the leader's ego; it was always supposed to be a path to developing individuals through sport. My father wanted me to participate in athletics because sports were supposed to build character. My father grew up in the late 40s and 50s. His coaches demanded respect and responsibility; most of the coaches in that period did so

with command-style leadership. It was a post-World War II era with an emerging Korean War. Young men needed to be trained to follow orders and commands without question. The authoritative style of coaching worked; it prepared young men for that purpose.

When the fighting was over and more athletic opportunities sprang up on the American landscape, authoritative style coaching was the norm. It was successful. Young men would run through walls because a coach would demand that of them. Coaches who attempted to use a more cooperative or holistic style of leadership were soft, laughed at, and often ridiculed.

Those coaches were scoffed at and accused of trying to be a “friend” or “wussifying” the young men. When Title IX became law, young women had opportunities to play sports. Males dominated the coaching profession, and it became necessary for them to embrace relationship building and strive for more balance. The authoritative coach could still be successful while coaching young women. However, coaches who embraced a style that focused on relationships found greater success as they worked with the female athlete. That success with female athletes and relationships started to show success with male athletes as well. This book will help you navigate a journey that will expose you to transformational coaching and mindfulness.

Mindfulness

The practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis also: such a state of awareness. (Webster)

To simplify, mindfulness is to *be present*. Your focus is on the task at hand, on those people that are around you. When you practice mindfulness with your family, you are not in front of a screen, your phone is off or away, you truly engage with those in the room.

Coaching for mindfulness is the latest buzzword in the leadership world. When we apply mindfulness to coaching athletics, we are

attempting to teach our athletes to be fully aware of what is happening around them. As a high school football player, I had one job on every play. I had to know my responsibility for every call that came into the huddle. Our coach did not teach the game in a way that encouraged us to understand the duty of every other player on the field. We all had our jobs, and we had to make sure we did them.

When I went out for the school musical and learned I would be the lead role, I suddenly found out I had a lot of lines to learn. As my drama instructor worked with me, I soon found that I was learning everyone's lines. I was developing mindfulness without even realizing it. I had the lead role, so if someone forgot their line, I should know it. I learned that if I wanted the performance to be successful, part of my responsibility would be to help my cast.

When I returned to the gridiron the following fall, I became more aware of what the duties of my teammates were. Suddenly it was vital for me to know what routes players were running, whom they were blocking, who was a decoy, and what their missed block meant to me. The game suddenly opened up to me, and I became a more enlightened player.

If my football coach had had the tools to teach us how to play the game with mindfulness, the success of our football team would have reached unknown heights.

As an adult I found cycling to be my fitness pursuit of choice. Coaching can be stressful and healthy eating habits are often sacrificed for convenience. As my weight started to push up I told myself that cycling would affect the numbers I was seeing on the scale. I realized over some time that those numbers on the scale were not going in the direction I wanted, even with my cycling.

The problem was lack of mindfulness and lack of purpose; I was just riding. My eighty to one-hundred miles a week were just numbers. I didn't state my purpose, which was to lose weight. I didn't alter my diet, if anything I was eating a little more because I was exercising.

Mindfulness means to be present. State your purpose and then make sure your thoughts and actions reflect that purpose.

For those we coach, mindfulness also means to play without risk of ridicule when you make a decision based on how the game is being played. Coaches have a responsibility to create an environment where players are free to be creative and make in-moment game decisions.

Gratitude

The quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness. (def.) I believe that players with a grateful attitude perform at a higher level. When we go to work, and we are thankful for the job we have and the money we earn, we attack the day with a positive attitude and perform at a higher level. When a player is upset because they are not in the starting line-up, it affects their practice performance. Their detrimental or lack-luster practice performance has that same effect on the team's performance that day. When the player comes to practice grateful for the opportunity to be part of that team and compete for a position or playing time, they work harder and find a way to help those around them improve. Having a grateful heart enhances the experience for everyone.

Mastery

Comprehensive knowledge or skill in a subject or accomplishment (def.) Mastery is something we strive for both as athletes and then as coaches. There may be a level of proficiency for an eight-year-old and then a new level as a nine-year-old. We may believe we achieved mastery as a senior high school basketball player; then, we have the opportunity to play in college. Collegiate basketball then presents a new level of proficiency.

Coaching/leading brings the same challenges. As I achieved mastery as a middle school wrestling coach, I had new areas to develop as I moved into the high school ranks. As a middle school coach, I had the highest participation numbers in the area. My athletes were motivated, they had

a lot of success, and they were prepared to enter a high school program. I met all the expectations of a very successful coach at the middle school level.

As a high school coach, many of those same criteria were measurements of success, but now there were new levels of achievement for success and mastery. To achieve mastery, you must be a life-long learner.

Entitlement

The fact of having a right to something. The belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment.

When you talk to coaches, teachers, employers, or business leaders, it will not take too long to hear the term entitlement dropped in the conversation. Coaches experience challenges with players, from the youth ranks to the professional level, that are rooted in entitlement. The player feels entitled to something. At the club level, they pay a lot of money; therefore, they are entitled to play. At the high school level, mom or dad dropped a considerable donation to the program, which entitles them to be the star player.

The player was all-state in high school, and therefore they are entitled to a starting position on their new college team. How many stories do we read about professional athletes who have signed a contract but sit out because they feel underpaid and entitled to more money? This belief causes issues between the player, the coach, and the team that can be corrected with transformational coaching.

The 2019 Dallas Cowboys looked to have a dynamite team coming into the season. On paper they had talented players on both sides of the ball. The team was destined to be the divisional champions and the fans were expecting a deep playoff run.

There were many reasons the team did not achieve the success that had been forecasted for them. I would argue that entitlement infected the team early and played a key role in them not meeting expectations.