

FOREWORD BY BRIGADIER GENERAL CURTIS A. BUZZARD, U.S. ARMY

MARTIN ROONEY

AUTHOR OF *COACH TO COACH*

# HIGH TEN

AN INSPIRING STORY ABOUT  
BUILDING GREAT TEAM CULTURE



WILEY

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## Praise for *High Ten*

“On every team across every sport and every business, a cohesive and inclusive culture remains the most fundamental objective. When a coach or leader wins the team's heart and respect, success always follows closely behind. For building a powerful culture, I give this book a High Ten!”

- *Howie Long, NFL Hall of Fame, Super Bowl Champion and eight-time Pro Bowl, Analyst Fox Sports*

“Respect, inclusion, and teamwork are at the foundation of every great team. These winning hallmarks can also be difficult for a coach or leader to develop. Martin's book gives you the tools to identify and solve some of the biggest challenges facing your team.”

- *Kyle Shanahan, Head Coach, San Francisco 49ers*

“MMA is the epitome of an individual sport, but I learned it takes a team to get you properly prepared. A positive culture can make an average team reach for excellence and a negative culture can bring down the best. This book will help you build a team to succeed.”

- *Forrest Griffin, UFC Light Heavyweight Champion and Hall of Fame, Vice President of Athlete Development, UFC Performance Center*

“Successful enterprises are built on an organizational culture that empowers everyone to embrace the purpose of a day as if they are part of a movement or a cause. High Ten lays out how to forge the warrior spirit that defines highly successful teams.”

- *Don Katz, Audible Founder and Executive Chairman*

“Winning at the highest level is not one or two big things, it's a thousand little things done right. The details of culture are first and foremost. Culture is the heart and soul of every great team and cannot be left to chance. High Ten proves culture is not an accident; it's an action.”

- *Phil Simms, Superbowl MVP, CBS Sports Analyst*

“As the leader of any organization or team, developing a culture of trust and discipline is your number one priority. There are few things as satisfying as working toward a common goal with a team of people you appreciate and admire. Read this book and you will be on your way to building that type of team.”

- *Lieutenant General Anthony Burshnick, US Air Force (Retired), 12th Commandant of the United States Air Force Academy*

“Culture is a powerful force that improves teamwork and creates sustained success. If you want to improve your team, business, or relationships, read this book!”

- *Jon Gordon, bestselling author of The Energy Bus and The Power of Positive Leadership*

“Being part of a great team gives you confidence and direction as an athlete. To be side by side with a teammate chasing greatness creates a culture of winning. Let *High Ten* show you how to be a better leader of culture.”

- *Frankie Edgar, UFC Lightweight Champion*

*“High Ten proves that to achieve success in an industry that is both uniquely collaborative and highly competitive, it's critical to build a team that feels respected, trusted, appreciated, and heard. That feels cared for and inspired. If you can create that environment, anything is possible – absolutely anything!”*

*– Karen Baker Landers, two-time Oscar winner for Best Sound, The Bourne Ultimatum and Skyfall*

*“Winning certainly matters, but building cohesive teams requires establishing and sustaining a positive organizational culture that will ultimately deliver performance. High Ten delivers with the ‘Culture Coach’ – an outstanding lesson in mentor-mentee relationships that highlights the importance of a lifelong learning mindset.”*

*– Colonel Nicholas Gist, Director, Department of Physical Education, “Master of the Sword,” United States Military Academy*

*“To build a winning culture, a team must value selfishness, integrity, loyalty, and accountability. The great teams maintain these values during the toughest times. If your goal is to get your organization to buy into your values, the story of High Ten is your blueprint to do it.”*

*– Scott Goodale, Head Coach, Rutgers Wrestling, winningest coach in program history, 2019 NCAA Coach of the Year*

“Football is a team sport in which culture can make all the difference. I have watched Martin create winning team culture with both teams and businesses. This book shows you how to do it.”

- *Greg Olsen, 14-year NFL veteran, three-time Pro Bowl, Fox Sports Analyst*

“To lead out of hard situations, I found a well-trained team with a culture of excellence, competition and resilience is critical to success. If I didn't have a team with great culture fighting for me, I would not be here today. Hopefully, you'll never need your team to save your life like me, but the information in *High Ten* might save your business.”

- *Jason Redman, US Navy SEAL (Retired), Recipient of the Bronze Star Medal and Purple Heart, New York Times bestselling author of The Trident and Overcome*

“High Ten is a culture bedrock from which to build any organization or team. Through gripping stories and an experienced lens, this will have every leader ready to positively impact their own environments and better cultivate future success.”

- *Casey Brown, Head Coach, University of Pennsylvania Women's Soccer, Patriot League Coach of the Year, All-American and WPS Soccer Draftee*

“Few people recognize racing as a team sport, but a group of athletes, engineers, mechanics, and a driver all contribute individual talents to drive the team's success. Successful teams have an unselfish culture where teammates can challenge each other to grow while holding each other accountable to the mission. *High Ten* can help you build that type of team.”

- *Jeremy Bullins, NASCAR Crew Chief, Team Penske*

“Everyone knows culture is at the core of every great team, but few people know how to build it. *High Ten* is your blueprint for assessing and adjusting your current culture. If you are a leader in any capacity, let Martin help turn your team into a great group of fire-breathing dragons!”

- *Todd Durkin, MA, CSCS, Founder, Fitness Quest 10, CEO, Todd Durkin Enterprises, IDEA and ACE, Trainer of the Year, author of The Impact Body Plan and Get Your Mind Right*

“Culture is the backbone of any team or organization. A weak one will crumble, while a strong one will give a unified purpose to all and help you achieve your ultimate goals. *High Ten* will make your culture-game strong!”

- *Claus Souza, Assistant Strength and Conditioning Coach, Denver Nuggets*

“*Both hands on deck!* Martin Rooney is once again *on point* and on fire. In his latest book, *High Ten*, he clarifies business culture, team productivity, and personal inspiration that you can take to a new level of success. This ‘story within a story’ will leave you and your team members blessed, changed for the better, and in position to win.”

- *Jeffrey Gitomer, bestselling author of Get Sh\*t Done and The Little Red Book of Selling*



“The building of a team and a culture is driven by trust. Embracing and genuinely loving one another is the method by which trust is built. Martin Rooney's book shows you how to build the kind of trust necessary to create a winning team.”

*- Matthew Driscoll, Head Coach, University of North Florida Men's Basketball, winningest coach in program history, three-time ASUN Coach of the Year*

“I've coached teams from four different nations and culture is the most important step in building a team. If the team is not on the same page culturally, working together toward a common goal is extremely hard. Let Martin's book help you find the Keepers and lose your Vultures.”

*- Todd Hays, Olympic Silver Medalist, Coach to 6 Olympic Medalists and 13 World Championship Medalists, Head Coach Bobsleigh Canada*

**MARTIN ROONEY**

AUTHOR OF *COACH TO COACH*

# **HIGH TEN**

**AN INSPIRING STORY ABOUT  
BUILDING GREAT TEAM CULTURE**

**WILEY**

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*To the great Dr. Rob Gilbert, who taught me the best person on the team is the best person for the team.*

## Foreword

Bottom line – great leaders focus on establishing great cultures! In *High Ten*, Martin Rooney tells an inspiring story about how to build a great team with a great culture, and he shares lessons and insights that will work anywhere: at home, in the military, on sports teams, or in corporate America. In the Army, our leaders are expected to provide purpose, direction, and motivation to their soldiers, and as commanders they are explicitly responsible for the culture of their units. But the very best commanders find a way for those in the unit to also “own” the culture – so it's everyone's responsibility. Martin drives this point home and then some.

Throughout my Army career, I've learned and observed that when building a culture, the foundation is character and values. These are essential to building trust, which leads to cohesive teams. Teams where people feel like they are part of something, not just in something. Teams that are loyal to one another and also to their values. Teams that are disciplined and whose standards exemplify excellence, and they hold one another accountable in meeting or exceeding those standards. Doing otherwise would be an acceptance of mediocrity, and that doesn't equate to winning on the battlefield, playing field, or in life. Strong cohesion also results in extraordinary resiliency, and teams that are able to absorb tough blows and bounce back even stronger. We all know what it's like to be on a great team with a great culture because it is enjoyable, rewarding, and they win. In *High Ten*, Martin reinforces all of these lessons and more through a story where two teams – one athletic and one business – grow from good to great by focusing on their culture.

While I was serving as the Commandant of Cadets at the United States Military Academy, our primary and enduring focus was on developing leaders of character. For any future leader, there's much to learn in this book, from appreciating why people are the centerpiece of your culture to ways to empower your people and reap the value of their initiative to understanding and leveraging the “3 Bs” of culture – Beings (who we are), Beliefs (what we stand for), and Behaviors (how we do it) – and, finally, to recognizing the indicators of good culture. Leaders will also learn the significance of “Culture Crusaders,” who perpetuate the culture, and to deeply examine their “Culture Custodians,” coveting the “Culture Keepers” and rooting out the “Culture Vultures.” As I read this book, I highlighted numerous passages, took notes, and reflected on my own efforts at creating cultures over the last 28 years of service. You can never stop studying leadership; it's a lifelong journey of education, experiences, and reflection.

Throughout *High Ten*, Martin also builds on his previous book, *Coach to Coach*, and reinforces that great leaders must also see themselves as coaches. He shares important insights on how to coach but also explains how a coach gets the whole team to steward the culture. It starts with the coach setting the foundation – the vision, standards, and expectations – and doing it alongside the players to maximize their ownership. Coaches then focus relentlessly on driving the team to achieve these goals. Martin also subtly reinforces that leadership and coaching are more art than science. The Xs and Os and tactics matter, but he reminds us that ultimately it's the culture that determines success. As Martin writes, “Your competitive advantage is culture.” If you want to learn to be a great coach and how to develop a great culture, then this book is for you!

Brigadier General Curtis A. Buzzard, U.S. Army

*The views expressed in the foreword are those of the author and do not reflect the official position of the United States Military Academy, Department of the Army, or Department of Defense.*



# Introduction

In today's war for attention, culture is not simply a buzzword. It's your biggest competitive advantage.

Before you worry about building your next program, product, or membership base, be more concerned with building a great culture first. As businesses and organizations learned during the pandemic, when you have a great culture, you are more prepared for big challenges. When you don't, you must be prepared to have more of them.

Everyone wants to feel both appreciated and part of something bigger – to feel part of a cool culture. The way a leader creates this special environment is by creating a culture based in trust, purpose, and fun.

But you may have heard that “culture isn't taught, it's caught.”

*High Ten* is going to fly in the face of that statement and teach you about culture.

As you will learn, you don't get the culture for which you hope, wait, or wish – you get the one you design, implement, and maintain. And beware – if you don't design your culture, someone else will!

This book is the sequel to *Coach to Coach*. That book contained my philosophy of how to be a great coach and leader. In *High Ten*, I build on that information and teach you how a coach creates and leads a great culture. If you liked the easy-to-read style of *Coach to Coach*, you will enjoy following the journeys of Brian Knight and Marcus Chase 25 years later. Among all the positive feedback about *Coach to Coach*, the only critique was that the readers

wanted more – more depth into the characters, more lessons, and more stories. I believe this book has made good on those requests.

*High Ten* is a business book, a sports book, and a motivational leadership book too. Although *High Ten* is a fictional story, the contents of this book are not theory; the information inside was produced through decades of real-life trial and error. Having helped build the cultures of two global businesses that have lasted a combined 40 years, this book was written so you enjoy the same success without making the same mistakes. Everything I have learned about culture from working with top professional and college sport teams, military organizations, and Fortune 500 companies is waiting for you inside.

To be clear, building or changing a culture can be difficult. Whether you are starting a business or already leading a company, team, or family, *High Ten* provides you with a working roadmap of how to navigate your current cultural challenges. Culture is not a one-time event; it's a never-ending process. And *High Ten* is your blueprint of how to build a culture that not only stands for something, but also stands the test of time. The question is not whether the culture lessons inside this book work, but whether you will work them. As any culture coach will tell you – what you permit, you promote.

In addition to helping you learn about people, *High Ten* will also teach you that there is no culture without communication. Do you have a team, leadership, or culture question? Do you have a favorite story or idea from either book? Write me at [Martin@CoachingGreatness.com](mailto:Martin@CoachingGreatness.com), and I look forward to starting a conversation.

I hope that you enjoy this book and, like Brian, Sam, and Marcus, that you never look at culture the same way again.

Giving you a big “High Ten,”

Martin Rooney  
Gatlinburg, TN  
2021

# 1

## Trackside Diner

"Sorry it's taken so long to get together, Coach. Great to see you," said Marcus.

"Come on, kid," responded Brian, "after your big professional career and now becoming the youngest head coach at this prestigious school, I should thank you."

"Yeah right! As for 'youngest,' I'm feeling my age. And without you, this wouldn't be possible."

"Don't go soft on me," Brian said. "You've got work ahead bringing this place back to glory ... and trying to unseat me as the best head coach this place ever had."

"Whoa!" exclaimed Marcus. "Is that what you call yourself? You know there've been legends here?"

"I know. I didn't want you to think rebuilding this program's gonna be easy. You're inheriting a losing program, and you aren't just inheriting the previous players – you're inheriting the previous problems too."

"Thanks for the reminder," Marcus said.

"Remember, Marcus, that's what coaches do. Sometimes it's a pat on the back and sometimes it's a kick in the pants. How's the move been?"

"Liz was nervous, but between my pro career and coaching, this's our fifth move in 24 years. She's knows how it works. The kids are resilient, and actually excited, which made the decision easier."

"That's great, and I can't wait to see them. Now the big question. How're you feeling?" Brian asked as he took another swig of beer.

“Well, coaching at my alma mater's a dream come true – and the big salary. But honestly, I'm scared. It's my first head job, and along with not feeling prepared, I feel pressured to win. It's not that the president and alumni aren't supportive, but I'm afraid to fail.”

“That fear's a good thing,” said Brian. “Means you care. Beware of when you don't care anymore. That's when you'll wish for something to put fear in your gut.”

As Marcus listened, he realized his old coach was on his second beer. And that he'd been monopolizing the conversation.

“How've you been, Coach? What've you been up to?”

“Well,” Brian sighed, “not much. After Kelly passed and I got her things in order, I never got started again. The kids visit, but they've got their own lives in other places. We'll be together over the holidays, but – I miss her so much.”

“She was the best,” said Marcus.

“Yeah, she was, kid,” Brian said as he took another swig. “Enough of that. This's a reunion and new chapter for you. Have you met the team? What're your biggest challenges?”

Marcus answered, “I haven't met with them yet, since I need to get my coaching staff secured first. I'll let some old staff go, but a few match my style.”

“And that style is?”

“You know me, Coach,” smiled Marcus. “Like you, I love to fire people up with passion.”

“I know you,” laughed Brian. “Just wanted to make sure you did. That'll be important during this process. It'll be tough to stay who you are. Especially in the beginning.”

“That's why you'll be my most important staff member, Coach.”

"Is this a paid position?" Brian teased.

"Paid? You have money," laughed Marcus. "You want the job or what?"

"I don't know. I'm pretty busy," replied Brian. "What's the job title?"

"We could call you 'coach of the head coach.' Seriously, I need your help. You've forgotten more things about coaching than I'll ever know. Wouldn't you want to help this place win again?"

"You have good points ... especially me knowing more than you ... and I do like the title ..." deliberated Brian.

"Come on. Don't do this to me. Just like your judo story, I need help making my weaknesses into strengths."

"Jeez, you remember that one, huh?" said Brian.

"I remember them all. You got me started in coaching, so this's all your fault," Marcus said. "Let's do this together. If we pull this off, there might be a shirt in it for you."

"Hmmm, I do like free gear. Okay kid, I'm in. Let's turn that fear into fun."

As Brian and Marcus ate, they talked about Marcus's decade playing in the pros, his family, and future ideas for his program. As Brian offered his coaching wisdom, Marcus noticed his old coach downed a few more beers. The rhythm of Brian and the waiter told Marcus that it wasn't Brian's first time drinking at Trackside.

Brian paid the tab without Marcus seeing it. His old coach still had some moves left.

As they put on their winter jackets, Brian said, "Say hi to Elizabeth and the kids. See you at my old - I mean, your new office next week?"

"Yes, Coach."

*"And Marcus ... I am proud of you."*

When he said those words, Marcus hugged Brian and whispered, "Thanks, Coach."

At that moment, Brian had a moment of déjà vu. At the same table where he met his mysterious old coach years before was seated a man with his head in his hands. As Marcus headed out the door, Brian walked toward the table.

"Excuse me, do you need any help?" Brian asked.

"Can I have a tuna melt?" said the man.

Brian laughed and said, "Not that kind of help. I don't work here. But I recognize that look."

"What look?"

"That look when you have a problem and don't know how to fix it," said Brian.

The man looked away and said, "Nah, I'm good. I can handle it, thanks."

"With a tuna melt?"

"No, a tuna melt isn't going to fix this problem," said the man, smiling back. "This one requires a bacon double cheeseburger...."

"That bad, huh? I know the feeling. I used to sit in that same seat when I had issues."

After a long pause as he wondered if the old man would go away, he asked, "If you don't work here, what do you do?"

"I'm retired, but I used to help people fix their problems by helping them get where they wanted to go. People called me a consultant," answered Brian.

"Ahh, I own a tech startup and we've had our share of consultants. Good gig if you ask me. You tell people ideas

and if they work, you look great. If they fail, you say they didn't do them right," the man replied.

Brian paused as he pondered whether he should go away. Then he said, "To learn something new, sometimes you gotta read an old book, kid. I'm not sure if you're too proud or too afraid to ask for help."

Brian removed a gold-colored business card from his wallet. "Since I can't decide, here's my card."

The man read:

## **Brian Knight**

### ***Culture Coach***

"Culture coach? I never heard that before," said the man.

"Most people haven't, kid. That's why so many businesses fail."

"Sorry I haven't been polite. It's been a tough day, and I don't usually meet people in diners."

"You should get out more," smiled Brian. "My name's Brian."

"I'm Sam ... Sam Raucci."

"Nice to meet you, Sam, and good luck with your problem. If I were you, I'd stick with the tuna melt. First choices are often the right one."

"Thanks." Sam smiled.

"Before I go, I'll leave you with a question that always helped when I had troubles," offered Brian.

"Let's hear it," replied Sam.

"Ask yourself if you're unhappy about your dream come true."