

Proven Principles and Practices
That Make
Great Teams Great

— THE —
POWER
— OF A —
POSITIVE
TEAM

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The Power of Positive Leadership

CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[No One Creates Success Alone](#)

[Chapter 1: The Power of Positive](#)

[Chapter 2: Positive Teams Create Positive Cultures](#)

[Create Your Culture](#)

[Culture Is Dynamic, Not Static](#)

[Make Your Bus Great](#)

[Make Your Culture a Priority](#)

[Invest in the Root](#)

[Decide to Be Vitamin C](#)

[The Power Is on the Inside](#)

[What Do We Want to Be?](#)

[Chapter 3: Positive Teams Work Together toward a Shared Vision with a Greater Purpose](#)

[Shared Vision](#)

[Greater Purpose](#)

[Purpose-Driven Goals](#)

[Vision + Mission](#)

[Telescope and Microscope](#)

[Creating Billions and Winning Gold](#)

[The World's Largest Family](#)

[The Table](#)

[Keep Your Vision and Purpose Alive](#)

Make Your Vision and Purpose Come Alive

One Word

Make Sure Everyone Is on the Bus

Everyone Means Everyone

Chapter 4: Positive Teams Work Together with Optimism, Positivity, and Belief

Stay Positive Together

Believe Together

Encourage Each Other

Feed the Positive Dog

Talk to Yourself

Replace Have To with Get To

Make the Next Opportunity Great

L.O.S.S.

Shark or Goldfish

Think Like Rookies

Defeat Murphy

Inside Out

Distort Reality

Fear or Faith

The Positivity Experiment

Don't Stop Believing

The Best Is Yet to Come

Chapter 5: Positive Teams Transform and Remove Negativity

No Energy Vampires Allowed

It Starts at the Culture Level

The First Step Is Transformation

Remove the Negativity

It's Not Okay to Be Moody

Implement the No Complaining Rule

Weed and Feed

Positive Conflict

Chapter 6: Positive Teams Communicate and Connect

Connection Is the Difference between Good and Great

It Starts with Communication

Where There Is a Void, Negativity Will Fill It

Fill the Void

One-on-One Communication

Why Don't We Communicate?

On a Scale of 1 to 10

Listening Enhances Communication

Communicate to Connect

Team Beats Talent When Talent Isn't a Team

Team + Talent

Team Building

It's Worth It

Team Grit

Chapter 7: Positive Teams Commit and Care

Play Your Notes

Team First

We before Me

Commitment Recognizes Commitment

Committing Makes Everyone Better

Serve to Be Great

Commit to Your Team

Do You Care?

[Care More](#)

[Craftsmen and Craftswomen](#)

[You Can't Fake It](#)

[Chapter 8: Positive Teams Are Always Striving to Get Better](#)

[The One Percent Rule](#)

[Own the Boat](#)

[Elite of the Elite](#)

[Love and Accountability](#)

[Family and Team](#)

[Love Tough](#)

[Positive Discontent](#)

[Tell-the-Truth Mondays](#)

[Have the Difficult Conversations](#)

[Like versus Love](#)

[Forged in the Fire](#)

[Chapter 9: We Are Better Together](#)

[Meraki](#)

[Are You a Real Team?](#)

[11 Thoughts about Teamwork](#)

[References](#)

[Let us Help You Build a Positive, United, and Connected Team](#)

[Power of a Positive Team Resources](#)

[Positive U](#)

[Become a Certified Positive Leadership Coach, Speaker, & Trainer](#)

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The Power of a Positive Team

Proven Principles and Practices That Make Great Teams Great

Jon Gordon

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*For my wife, Kathryn, and my children, Jade and Cole.
You are my team and I thank you for making me better.*

No One Creates Success Alone

We are better together, and together we accomplish great things.

No one creates success alone. We all need a team to be successful. We are better together, and together we accomplish great things. Teams publish a book like this. Teams win Super Bowls and championships. Teams launch rockets into outer space. Teams perform open heart surgery and find cures for diseases. Teams design, build, and sell automobiles, phones, computers, video games, software, homes, and the latest and greatest products. Teams create commercials, movies, songs, and advertisements. Teams educate children in schools and run nonprofits that feed the poor, heal the sick, shelter the homeless, and provide safe drinking water in developing countries. Teams mobilize support for victims of natural disasters and help fight human trafficking. Teams work together to launch initiatives, companies, brands, products, and missions that change the world.

I know about teams. I've been on teams most of my life. My older brother played youth football and, at the age of six, I begged my parents to let me be on his team. I was too young to play, but they let me join in and gave me a jersey with the number $\frac{1}{2}$ on it. Growing up I was a part of numerous youth sports teams, and in high school I played basketball, lacrosse, and football. In college I played on the Cornell lacrosse team and the experience had a profound impact on my life. As an adult I have been a part of restaurant teams as a waiter, bartender, and eventual owner. I served on a school team as a teacher and worked on a sales team as a salesperson for a technology company. I've been on several leadership teams for start-up

businesses and nonprofits, and I even led a political campaign team when I ran for the Atlanta City Council at the age of 26.

Now I lead a team at work and I'm second-in-command of my team at home. I also get the opportunity to speak to and consult with numerous businesses, educational organizations, nonprofits, and professional and college sports teams. I didn't plan it, but I've become someone that leaders call when they need help developing high-performing and winning teams.

I've discovered over the years that a positive, united team is a powerful team. It doesn't happen by accident. A positive team is created by a group of individuals who come together with vision, purpose, passion, optimism, grit, excellence, communication, connection, love, care, and commitment to do something amazing and create something incredible together. I believe that everyone wants to be part of a great team, but not everyone knows how to become a great team.

That's why I wrote this book. I previously wrote *The Power of Positive Leadership* and *You Win in the Locker Room First*, but they were written to help leaders build their teams. I also wrote *The Hard Hat*, which is about how to be a great teammate, but that was meant more for the individual. This book is meant for teams to read together. I wrote it in such a way that team members could read it together and understand what they need to do to be a positive and connected team. In my work with teams, and through interviews with people who were part of some of the greatest teams in history, I've discovered proven principles and practices that make great teams great. I have shared these principles and practices in this book and my hope is that you will read them with your team, discuss what you need to do to be a great team, and then take action

together. If you are willing to learn together, grow together, unite together, and act together, you will accomplish more than you ever thought possible.

Chapter 1

The Power of Positive

Positivity is more than a state of mind. It's a power that gives teams a competitive advantage in business, sports, creativity, and life.

I don't encourage teams to be positive just because it's more fun, enjoyable, and rewarding to be part of a positive team. I am passionate about creating positive teams because I know that positive teams are also more engaged and more likely to overcome all the forces against them and make a greater impact.

It's challenging to work toward a vision and create a positive future. It's difficult to launch new ideas, products, movies, missions, and organizations. It's not easy to pursue greatness and do what has never been done before. As a team you will face all kinds of adversity, negativity, and tests. There will be times when it seems as if everything in the world is conspiring against you and your team. There will be moments you want to give up. There will be days when your vision seems more like fantasy than reality. That's why becoming a positive team is so important. When I talk about positive teams, I am not talking about Pollyanna positivity, where you wear rose-colored glasses and ignore the reality of the situation. Positive teams are not about fake positivity. They are about real optimism, vision, purpose, and unity that make great teams great. Positive teams confront the reality of challenging situations and work together to overcome them.

Pessimistic teams don't become legendary. Negative teams talk about and create problems but they don't solve them. Throughout history we see that it's the positive teams that

create the future and change the world. The future belongs to those who believe in it and work together with other positive people in order to create it.

I have witnessed the power of a positive team, and the research supports that positivity is a difference maker. Research by Manju Puri and David Robinson at Duke University found that optimistic people were more likely to succeed in business, sports, and politics. Relationship expert John Gottman's pioneering research found that marriages are much more likely to succeed when the couple experiences a five-to-one ratio of positive to negative interactions; when the ratio approaches a one-to-one ratio, marriages are more likely to end in divorce.

The positive energy you share with your team is significant. According to organizational expert Wayne Baker, who works with fellow researcher Robert Cross, “the more you energize people in your workplace, the higher your work performance.” Baker says that this occurs because people want to be around you. You attract talent and people are more likely to devote discretionary time to your projects. They'll offer new ideas, information, and opportunities to you before others.”

When you have a group of people doing this on a team, you create a positive feedback loop that makes your team operate at a higher level. Many think that you have to choose between positivity and winning, but you don't. Positivity leads to winning. The research is clear. Positivity is more than a state of mind. It's a power that gives teams a competitive advantage in business, sports, creativity, and life.

Since there are many different types of teams, I made it a point to include various examples from business, education, sports, music, technology, and more. Please know that even though I share a number of examples of sports teams, I'm

aware that not everyone is a sports fan. However, I want to make it clear that the reason why I share these examples is to demonstrate how these principles work in real life.

The great thing about sports teams is that you can observe the effectiveness of these principles over the course of a season. You can tell who has become a positive team and who hasn't. You can see it in person and on television. I've been fortunate to work with many sports teams, and they are great case studies. And since I've also worked with countless businesses and schools, I can assure you the same principles apply to every team and organization. If you are not a fan of sports, simply take the sports example and think about how it applies to your team. You will discover a number of great ideas to make your team better.

Positive teams don't happen by accident. They happen when team members invest their time and energy to create a positive culture; work toward a shared vision with a greater purpose; work together with optimism and belief and overcome the negativity that too often sabotages teams and organizations. Positive teams take on the battle, overcome the negativity, face the adversity, and keep moving forward. They communicate, connect, commit, and encourage each other. They build relationships and trust that makes them stronger.

Positive teams commit to the mission and to each other. Instead of serving themselves, they serve one another. They care more about their effort, work, and teammates than they do about all the distractions vying for their attention. People on positive teams have a lot of belief in each other, a lot of love for each other, and a lot of desire to accomplish something great together. They pursue excellence and always strive to get better and make their team better. They lose their ego in the service of their team and find an uncommon collective greatness in the process. Because