

Leading With The Heart

Successful strategies for
basketball, business, and life

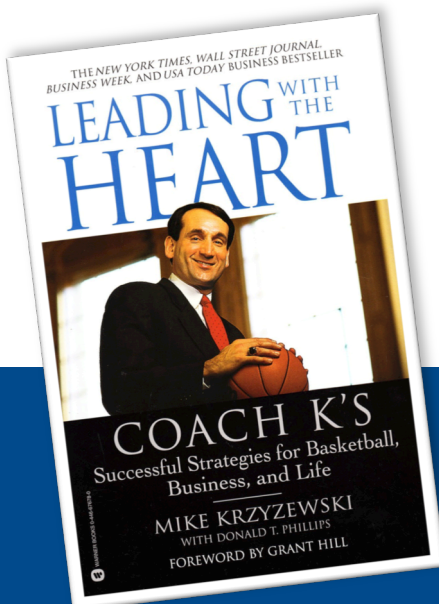
By Mike Krzyzewski

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In the Team Room

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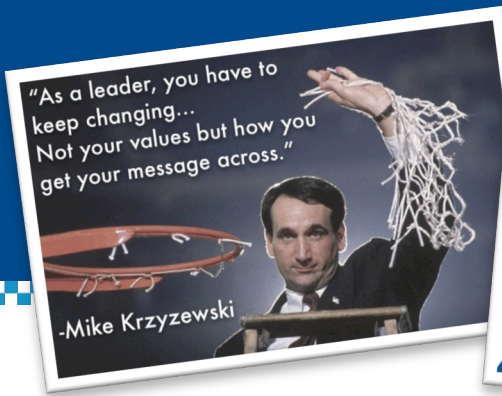


About the Author

In his more than twenty years coaching the Blue Devils, Coach Mike Krzyzewski, known mainly as Coach K, has made his program the most admired in the nation, with back-to-back national championships in '91, '92, and again in 2001, 2010 and 2015. Adding to this impressive performance, over ten Final Four appearances since 1986. Krzyzewski's ability to lead and the style in which he does is discussed in his book Leading With The Heart. Addressing topics such as establishing trust, the importance of communication and the commitment one needs to make in order to be successful, there is no better model used to achieve success in sports, business or life.

Coach K on Leadership:

In leadership, there are no words more important than trust. In any organization, trust must be developed among every member of the team if success is going to be achieved.



PRESEASON

“My goal in preseason is to get to know my players and what they can do. My total focus is finding out who we are and developing a personality on our team” (Krzyzewski, 2000, p. 2).

Getting Organized

Coach K begins his season as any other coach would, with a team meeting to lay the foundation for the season. Prior to this, however, he begins by recruiting players to fill out his roster. Krzyzewski (2000) states “we search for good kids with strong character – not necessarily kids with great talent who can play, but great individuals who are willing to be part of a team and who are coachable” (p. 6).

Coach K places an emphasis on time management and the importance of how this not only impacts themselves as players but also their teammates. He also addresses academics and the

expectation that every player graduates and the notion that the worst thing to happen academically would be to cheat.



Krzyzewski (2000) goes on to discuss his belief on rules – he only has one which is to “not do anything detrimental to yourself” (p. 10). He believes too many rules get in the way of leadership and do not allow flexibility when it comes to making a decision.

Leadership needs to be adjustable, flexible and dynamic. This ongoing process is something he practices on a daily basis. A support system is also put in place to make sure players know that the team is there for support. Teams need to show a genuine interest and level of compassion toward one another and shatter any jealousy that may be present.

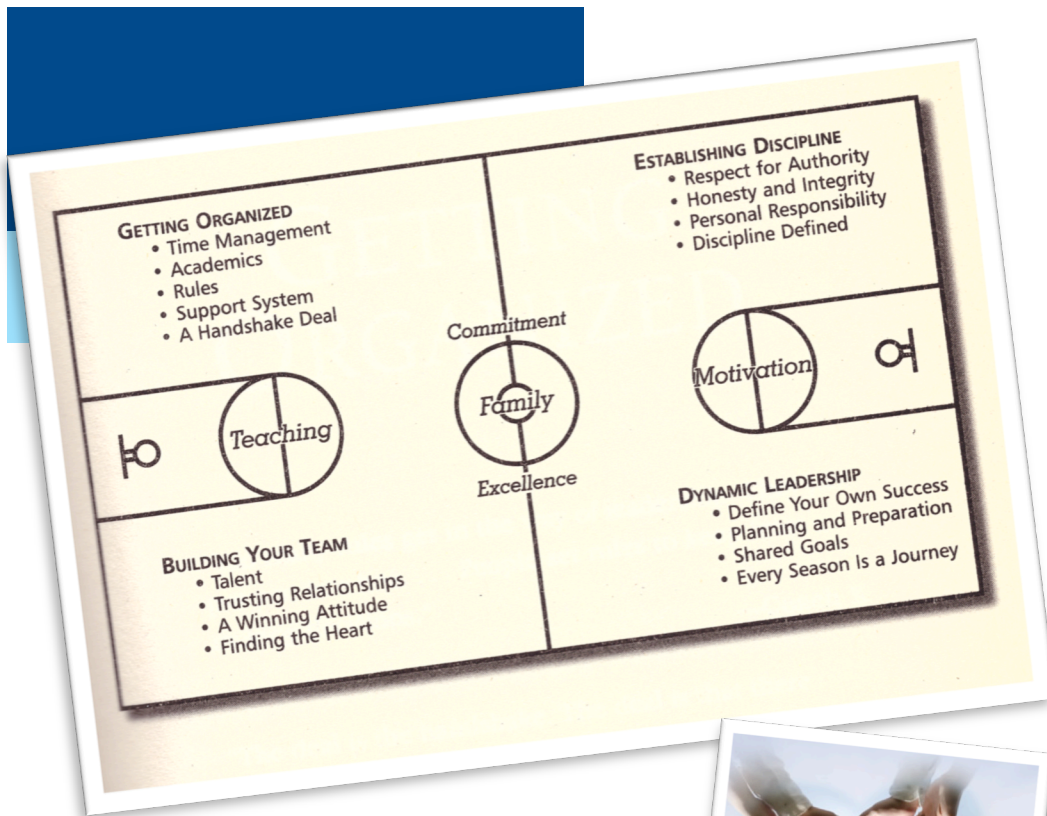
Lastly, he discusses his handshake deal: He gives his best to each player and expects the same in return. By establishing trust through ongoing communication, this re-enforces the handshake.

Building Your Team

When a team is first assembled, it is only a collection of individuals. It now becomes a leader's job to motivate those people to perform as a team. Coach K believes his assistants should have the vision to be a head coach. This attitude creates

a vision for individuals to want to learn and grow. He also believes job descriptions are limiting and would rather match the needs of the team to the strengths of the individuals running the program. A person's weakness should never get in the way of his

strength. Krzyzewski's greatest strength would be in forming trusting relationships. He believes everything in leadership comes back to relationships. As the level of cooperation rises on a team, so does the level of trust among teammates. Continued...



However, lasting success on a team is not simply the bond between leader and other members, it involves the connections formed among all members of the team. This framework of leadership needs to be created to sustain the connections if something happens to the hub of the leadership.

Coach K addresses his standards of excellence early on with the team, and discusses how winning and losing should not be the end result. Having a real winning attitude involves these standards and they vary from year to year, and team to team. The one constant is the ability to do your best and be the best you can be.

This concept applies to individuals and teams. The role of the leader is crucial in determining the quality of the team, set the standard of excellence and then work collaboratively to achieve this standard.



Every year you should ask yourself this question: “Where will the heart be?”
(Krzyzewski, 2000, p. 34)

Coach K also believes people on the team have to be given the opportunity to show the heart they possess and to display what type of emotion they will show for their family. Leaders have the job of finding who the heart of the team is as this person can bring out the best in everyone. The person with heart inspires others and makes the leaders job easier.

Establishing Discipline

“Discipline is doing what you are supposed to do in the best possible manner at the time you are supposed to do it. And that’s not such a bad thing” (Krzyzewski, 2000, p. 35).

Coach K always wants his players to have a belief in a higher authority and respect for that authority. He seeks this out by the way the players communicate to their parents. By observing this interaction between players and parents, this gives him an indication of how players will handle higher authorities on the team. Every leader must realize this respect for authority takes time to develop, like building trust. This can be done by establishing direct, regular communication and by always being honest in your conversations. Instilling the discipline to tell the truth avoids conversations that waste time. Krzyzewski believes due to the high demands placed on a team, they need to communicate in direct ways. Establishing trust early in relationships results in an instant acceptance of the facts in the conversation.

Personal responsibility is another focus Coach K brings to his team. This responsibility is also not lost on the leader. By showing your own responsibility as a leader, you display a healthy respect for people on your team and set a good example.

Lastly, Krzyzewski discusses discipline and its use on his teams. Fear should not be the primary motivator but he makes sure his players know that mediocrity is unacceptable; your best needs to be given at all times. Be disciplined in your work as well as in good sportsmanship, be patient, and be enthusiastic and energized every time out. If every person has a great foundation of discipline and the passion or heart to love what he or she does, they will love their life.

Dynamic Leadership

If culture is properly developed, in the heat of the moment when a point needs to be driven home, the individual or team will respond well. This ongoing process of establishing a culture is like leadership. It is dynamic, ongoing and active. Krzyzewski states if you are trying to achieve success based on other peoples goals, you will be frustrated all of the time. Teams should define their own success and determine their own passion. As a leader one has to look beyond what your team is doing now. Whatever a leader establishes now sets up what will be done later.

It is important that in leadership you always look ahead and plan and prepare for every phase while remaining flexible when things do not go as expected. Success is more than just wanting to win and should include preparation. This preparation is in direct correlation to future success. Coach K uses an energy cycle, planned short bursts of energy, to help his team stay motivated over an extended period of time.

Another area of emphasis is that of a shared goal. In leadership, goal setting is important. Goals should be attainable, realistic and mutual. Shared goals contribute to cooperation with one another and aid in developing a bond between teammates. These shared goals should also be reflective of the team's commitment. If the group is not fully committed to achieving the goals, then the goals should be changed. A leader should be thinking what does the group need in order to achieve success.



“There are five fundamental qualities that make every team great: communication, trust, collective responsibility, caring, and pride. I like to think of each as a separate finger on the fist. Any one individually is important. But all of them together are unbeatable”

(Krzyzewski, 2000, p. 65).

REGULAR SEASON

T e a m w o r k



“You develop a team to achieve what one person cannot accomplish *alone*.

All of us alone are weaker, by far, than all of us *together*”
(Krzyszewski, 2000, p. 67).



“Confidence shared is better than confidence only in yourself”
(Krzyszewski, 2000, p. 67).

Coach K always wants his team to play together. He refers to this playing together as a fist. As soon as the mentality of teamwork is achieved, the group can assume an identity and any combination of players can play as one.

A communication system is employed at Duke, just like an offensive or defensive system they use on the court. Effective communication is the first finger in the fist. Leaders need to remind individuals to talk to one another while under the pressure of the game. This communication is also not one directional. Communication must move throughout the group, it's everybody communicating. If not, you will have individuals who are on an island, not pulling in the same direction as the team.

As noted earlier, trust is Coach K's most important leadership factor and is the second finger on his fist. It is imperative if success is going to be achieved. He also believes that confrontation is a good thing. It is the one time when truth and trust are used to over-power an obstacle blocking an individual or team from achieving success. If confrontation is not dealt with, however, rather than a competitor beating a team to its goals, it is the team beating itself.

The third finger is a feeling of collective responsibility. If a team is going to be great, there should be no finger pointing or no excuse making when a mistake is made. When this happens, and a finger

points out, the fist is broken and the bond of trust is lost.

The fourth finger is caring. Caring can be increased among teams by spending personal time with one another. Caring is not just singular in description as well. You care about yourself, your teammates, the performance of the team and its success. Caring leads to people taking action and is a powerful motivator for success.

The last finger on the fist is pride. When everyone on the team believes that the team's personal signature is on everything they do, that is when an opportunity presents itself for the team to be great.

The fist is the most important tool in achieving success. It outweighs talent, technical and individual skill. These are still important factors but are performed greater if the fist is clenched tight. As a leader you must consistently monitor the team's fist to make sure it is strong and never assume the fist is secure. It takes work and when all five fingers are working together it can handle a weakness of one of the fingers by compensating with the others together.

Krzyszewski (2000) summarizes his philosophy surrounding teamwork with the following thought, “Two are better than one if two act as one. And if you believe that two acting as one are better than one, just imagine what an entire team acting as one can do” (p. 83).

**TEAMWORK IS THE
BEAUTY OF
BASKETBALL.
FIVE PEOPLE
WORKING AS ONE.
YOU BECOME
SELFLESS.**

MIKE KRZYZEWSKI



Krzyzewski trains his team to be effective at all times. His concept (2000) of “You hear, you forget. You see, you remember. You do, you understand” (p. 88) is a simple phrase Coach K uses in teaching. Every detail is planned out from his drills to his speeches. Things are kept on schedule to allow a maximum amount of time dedicating to “doing” in a game like environment. He is always present and insists a leader must go through the process with the team to know they are prepared and will perform accordingly. One cannot simply tell someone what to do and expect them to perform well. A leader can be the most knowledgeable person in the world but if his team cannot translate this knowledge into action, success will be an afterthought.



Members of a team must see themselves through a leader’s eyes. This is a point Coach K emphasizes with the use of video. If a player is able to see how they really are, not how they think they are, this helps make the communication clear.

The concept of if one of us is not doing well, all of us are not doing well is something Krzyzewski makes a point of. This simple concept encourages teamwork and teaches camaraderie, confidence and discipline. It is a way to stay on top of performance.

Lastly, Coach K believes leaders should be reliable without being predictable. They should be consistent without being anticipated. When leaders are too structured and ruled, it removes any enjoyment from being a part of the team.

Coach K believes it is important for a leader to have some level of focus on the technical aspect of the team. However, he believes it is vital that a leader focuses on details related specifically to people in the organization. By understanding people on your team better, this increases the level of effective communication and thus resulting in a path toward success.

He stresses it is important to realize people communicate in different ways; including facial expressions, moods, mannerisms, body language, tone in their voice and the look in their eyes. As a leader he encourages it to be a priority to use these as a way to increase communication rather than hinder it. A leader must be able to read his or her team members.

Krzyzewski states that it often takes courage not only to make key decisions in an instant, but also to live with those decisions afterward. In this decision-making mode, it takes courage and confidence



“Every minute of the game, every moment that leads up to the game, I’m trying to think and plan and prepare myself and our players for anything that might happen – and that means putting some of my own emotions aside if they won’t help us reach our goals”
(Krzyzewski, 2000, p. 116)

Game Day

On game day Krzyzewski believes in giving the day all of his focus. He respects game day just as if you respected your children, you would give them time. He also expects his players and fellow coaches to come in prepared and ready for any unpredictable situation.

He compares the game of basketball to a business – it is a game of adjustments. A leader’s ability to think on his or her feet, make quick decisions and react to the situation in front of them is of the utmost importance.

During a game, unpredictable events can occur that may cause you to throw out your game plan. Often you have to put some of your emotions aside if you are to help your team reach its goals.

For Coach K, game day is also about interaction. Not one leader giving a long, drawn-out speech. As a leader you need to read the emotional and mental level of your

team and determine what they need to get the job done. Krzyzewski often refers to his team as being on the train. Is the team aboard the train and all ready to compete?





Refresh & Renew

- Regain your focus as you head into this time of the season.
- Be sure to analyze the demeanor of the team. How do they appear? Healthy, injured, excited, tired, down? What will need to be done to get them ready for competition?
- Take things one step at a time; use mini-goals and plan for “energy bursts.”
- Approach the postseason with the mindset of being one of the teams who believes you can win it all; but, do not assume that you *will* win it all.
- Lastly, each game brings new challenges and the need to always respect your competition. To disrespect your competition is to disrespect yourself.

Handling A Crisis

- Coach K believes when dealing with a crisis situation, the worse the crisis, the more people tend to disband the team concept and become individuals.
- To have success when dealing with a crisis, it is best achieved when people are immediately truthful with one another.
- If a leader makes a mistake, admit you are wrong and do this in front of the entire team. To admit a mistake is a positive, not a negative.
- A very effective weapon against fear is confidence; Krzyzewski encourages strength to be on display and hide weakness.
- Anger is an emotion that is acceptable if it motivates you to do something good.
- A leader's job is to help create opportunities for teams to be successful.

Focus On The Task At Hand

- Delegate responsibility as much as possible if events cause you to be pulled from your team. This is what your team trains for. Individuals are still responsible for their own performance.
- The job of a leader is to remove any obstacle's that negatively impact the team's performance.
- In critical times, leaders need to show strength in the leadership; no anger, weakness, feeling sorry for one's self.
- Leaders, as well as the team, need strong focus and concentration to perform when under the pressures games bring.
- Coach K makes it clear that although they have experienced a high volume of success, no organization, no matter how good it is, is going to win on reputation alone.

Celebrate Tradition

Krzyzewski states that it is important to always thank your team for their effort at the end of every season; they are the one's that made success happen. By establishing a culture people want to be a part of, you are creating a tradition. Tradition helps to motivate people. When people are involved with something involving tradition, they are less likely to show signs of jealousy or to do something detrimental to the organization. Coach K also believes that in creating a culture that supports tradition, increased levels of confidence, excellence, unity and pride are evident among members of the organization.

“Like the springtime, our team is beginning anew. This is the time of the year when we not only must be playing our best basketball, but when we should be our most enthusiastic about playing” (Krzyzewski, 2000, p. 133).

ALL SEASON



Blueprint Basics

When addressing commitment, Krzyzewski believes leaders have to let players have the freedom to show their personal commitment to the organization. “If people invest in something, they are more likely to become valued members of the organization” (Krzyzewski, 2000, p. 207). Players are encouraged to seek new skill sets so as to not confine themselves to a role and accept certain limitations on their performance. Leaders must be committed to helping people grow and realize their full potential.

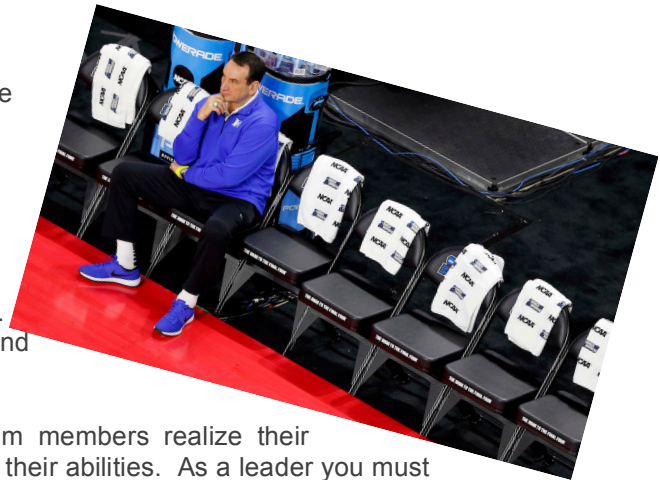
Coach K’s pursuit is always for excellence. If excellence is attained, then success just naturally follows. He is also a firm believer in not allowing someone else to define excellence for him. You should do what you do because you love it.

Krzyzewski believes a leader cannot simply write down a motivational phrase and say, “Let’s go.” Motivation is an ever-evolving topic that comes down to understanding people and what they need to achieve excellence in certain situations. Playing in a positive manner, using their abilities and not being afraid to fail is his ultimate goal in motivation. However, motivation must be looked at not only individually but also as a team. A leader’s job is to motivate people so they are doing their best while helping the team perform at a peak level. Individuals on the team often need varying levels of motivation. Also, the style of motivation varies from individual to individual. Ultimately it is the leaders responsibility to understand this; this takes us back to one of his first points of emphasis on establishing relationships and communication.

Teaching was something Krzyzewski believes is of major importance in transferring knowledge to his team. Planning is very important in this process. He also encourages players to learn from someone else outside of the team. This helps in creating a broader perspective. He believes if you are a good teacher, you understand that the transfer of knowledge goes both ways; you give to the group and the group gives back to you. Although a leader may be afraid of losing an individual to another company by going out and learning elsewhere, if you have developed a good relationship with the individual, he or she will come back stronger with increased knowledge and experience.

The Core Of Character

- In leadership, you need to have courage. Courage to stand beside your beliefs and fight for what you believe is right.
- Persistence is also needed to continue this belief in one’s self. Even when you have a set back, you must continue to push forward and stand beside your commitment to the team.
- A leader must say it, mean it and demonstrate it all of the time. People are always trying to pull down a leader. Stand your ground and stand up for your beliefs.
- As a leader you need confidence. You also need to help team members realize their confidence. It is more than just saying to them you are confident in their abilities. As a leader you must put them in a position where they can do so.



- “Any blueprint to leadership has to be used as a guide. It can only be structured so much. There has to be room for personal creativity. And every leader has to put his own signature on his leadership style” (Krzyzewski, 2000, p. 231).

- Because leadership is always evolving, you have to be adaptable in every situation, to meet new challenges. Leadership never stops and you have to think of ways to learn and grow each day.

