
Teaching the Code for Living

Series A: Talking about the Code

Lessons designed for conversation
between coaches and players.



***Winning More
Than The Game***

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR ASSISTANCE
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Introduction

Athletes for a Better World is built around the Code for Living. It is important that posters of the Code be posted where they can be easily seen, so that the Code becomes a part of the culture of the team, school, club, association, neighborhood or family. It is also important that the coach or parent refer to the Code on a regular basis, to reinforce its importance. Virtually any behavior is a reflection of some aspect of the Code, so with constant thought and reflection individuals will come to see their lives in terms of how they are living out the Code. For example, when there is a newspaper account of a player who has skipped a practice or missed a plane, this is an opportunity to talk about "following the team rules established by the coach." When a player signs a huge contract there is the opportunity to talk about "giving a significant amount of time and income for the betterment of my community and world." Whenever practice is sloppy the coach can refer to "trying to develop my skills to the best of my ability," and so on. As this happens they will consciously and unconsciously begin to raise the standard of their behavior.

In this series the Code is discussed and explained by a series of questions and answers. These are not all of the possible questions or answers, of course, but are intended to serve as a starting point for conversation and greater understanding by coaches and athletes.

Because I am a role model and have the opportunity and the responsibility to make a difference in the lives of others, I commit to this Code. I will take responsibility and appropriate actions when I fail to live up to it.

Commentary

This commitment begins with the recognition that that we do not live in isolation but that we are a part of the human family with the opportunity and the responsibility to make a difference in the lives of others. In other words, we have a moral obligation and duty to behave in certain ways as a member of society. It also recognizes that we will all fail to give our best at times, and when that occurs to have the courage to take responsibility and appropriate action. What is appropriate will depend on the situation.

Questions for discussion

1. What is the value of having a Code for Living?

It provides a framework for behavior. It reminds a person of the values by which they seek to live. It is not vague, but clear. It gives a yardstick against one can measure oneself.

2. What other Codes or value systems are a part of your life?

- *Possibilities: Religion - Christian: Hebrew Scripture, Sermon on the Mount*
- *Jewish: Ten Commandments, the Law of Moses, the Talmud. Muslim: Koran, the teachings of Muhammad.*
- *Other: Boy and Girl Scouting groups, Campfire, sororities and fraternities, service organizations have oaths, mottoes, etc.*

3. What are some of the things that you have been taught that are not written down but are an understood Code?

- *In your family*

Clean up your room, don't talk back to your parents, stand up when an older person comes in the room, table manners, etc.

- *At school*

Raise your hand in class, no running in the halls, no cheating, etc.

- *With your friends*

Be considerate of them and their desires, be truthful with them, share, etc.

- *Anywhere else*

Be considerate of others, be polite/kind to strangers, respect a policeman, don't litter, etc.

4. What is the value of a group of people having the same Code?

When people have the same code, it provides for a common vision and understanding. It also provides a basis for knowing what we can expect from others. The Code becomes the basis for trust and for group solidarity.

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Questions continued

5. Who are the people who have made a difference in your life?

Family members, neighbors, friends, teachers, coaches, religious leaders, etc.

6. Do you think that you have "the opportunity and responsibility to make a difference in the lives of others?" Why?

It is important to think about the "little" people who have influenced you: a big brother or sister, a neighborhood person, anyone who is not in any way "famous." Then identify one person you know in whose life you could make a difference.

7. Why should we care about others?

We can choose to make this world a better place or choose not to. We can pick up a piece of paper on the street, or leave it. We can speak a kind word to a person or say nothing. We can, in other words, choose whether each day our life makes a difference in small but meaningful ways, such as in the lives of others (speaking to someone) or in our community (picking up a piece of paper). A small child just wants everything for themselves, without regard to others. Becoming a full whole adult person is about learning that we have opportunities and responsibilities with others.

8. What does it mean to "take responsibility when I fail?"

It's important to see that there are occasions when we can do nothing, look the other way, and nothing will ever happen to us, or we can take responsibility. When we take responsibility for a mistake we have made, we take the opportunity to apologize and to make appropriate restitution (such as pay for something we have broken). In this way, we set things right and we will feel better inside because we know we have done the right thing. It is like a broken bone: if we ignore it, the wound will remain, but if we acknowledge it, and take proper steps, then it can heal. We can also take responsibility for things that are not our fault, and try to set them right. This may involve trying to get others to acknowledge their mistakes and to set things right. Taking responsibility involves having real courage. It often takes courage to do the right thing, far more courage than looking the other way and doing nothing.

9. Have you ever made a mistake and taken responsibility for it? How did you feel afterward for having taken responsibility?

Hopefully, each person will have had an experience of doing the right thing and of feeling better for having done it. It is important to remind oneself of this, for this will help provide the courage to do the right thing in the future.

**I will develop my skills to the best of my ability and give my best effort
in practice and competition.**

Commentary

Each person must develop personal pride and respect for oneself, so that one will not cheat oneself by giving only half an effort, being satisfied with the sloppy, the inadequate or anything less than one's best. It also has to do with respect for others, especially for the team, so that one does not let down those who have put their trust and confidence in you. By giving one's best effort in practice and in competition one honors oneself, the team, and sport.

Questions for discussion

1. Who have you known who worked the hardest on personal development? What did they do?

Hopefully, each person will be able to identify a person who came out first, and/or practiced after practice, and/or gave a superior effort during practice.

2. How do you develop your skills to the best of your ability?

This comes through practice. Practice requires self-discipline. Most athletes do not enjoy the drudgery of repeating over and over again the same aspect of their sport. Golfers do not want to practice the same three foot putt for hours on end, basketball players do not want to practice the same shot over and over again, etc., and few enjoy the rigors of conditioning. Self-discipline, grounded in the desire to excel to the best of one's ability, leads a person to continue to do that which is best for their development, not what is most fun. A part of that discipline might be the willingness to listen to the coach's opinion of what part of one's sport should be concentrated on.

3. Why do we give our best effort in competition?

Competition is an opportunity to test our skills against a worthy opponent. We owe it to ourselves, to our teammates, and to our opponents to give our best effort. It is demeaning to ourselves, our opponents and to our sport if we only give a lackluster effort.

4. What if our opponent is clearly inferior?

When this is the case we should never embarrass our seek to humiliate our opponent by laughing at them or by "running up the score." It is important always to play with integrity and to show respect for our opponent.

I will compete within the spirit and letter of the rules of my sport.

Commentary

The athlete must always play fair, recognizing that one's own integrity and the respect of others is more important than winning any game. To gain the respect and the admiration of others for the way in which one competes is itself an admirable goal. Obviously, this would exclude using any form of illegal drug or steroid.

Questions for discussion

1. Have you ever played against anyone whom you thought cheated? How did you feel about them?

It is important to focus on the feelings (anger, frustration, disappointment, etc.). Is this the kind of person you would want for a friend? Or to marry your brother or sister?

2. If you cheated, do you think you would feel good about winning?

It is important to focus on the fact that you wouldn't feel the same as if you had won fairly, that there would be a bad feeling in your stomach, even if others didn't know.

3. What's the difference between cheating and "playing dirty?" What constitutes "playing dirty" in your sport?

It is important to recognize that there are "lines" in all sports that can be crossed or not crossed. It is good to have a healthy conversation about where those lines are in your sport, and to recognize that different people will have different views on where those lines are.

4. "When the One Great Scorer comes to mark beside your name, He writes not whether you won or lost, but how you played the game." Those are the famous words of Grantland Rice, a sportswriter who lived at the first part of this century. Do you agree?

This points to the foundation of all competition: the sheer pleasure of sport for sport's sake. Competition should be seen a value in itself, for the playing of the game, the exhibition of one's skills, and the working together as a team, all have inherent value. So, in a profound sense, one always wins by competing to the best of one's ability regardless of the outcome. Would you rather play your best and lose, or play poorly and win? Can you make a case for both sides of that question?

I will respect the dignity of every human being, and will not be abusive or dehumanizing of another either as an athlete or as a fan.

Commentary

Athletes, coaches and fans have the opportunity to set a high moral standard in their treatment of others. The individual's words and actions either while competing or while watching a sport demonstrate this. It means that no one should resort to name calling or any form of abusive speech no matter how angry, how frustrated, or even how wronged they may have been. ABW seeks to raise the standard of behavior of all.

Questions for discussion:

1. What do we mean by the "dignity of every person?"

We mean that every single person is a member of the human family. We may behave differently, have different gifts and levels of intelligence, but everyone has been created with the dignity and worth of being human. We must never believe that we are inherently superior to another.

2. Has anyone ever called you a name? How did it feel?

Everyone has had the experience of being called a name. Would anyone be willing to share a time when they were called a name and it really hurt them?

3. Have you ever thought about how it feels to another player when someone calls them a name, or says something mean about the way they play, or in any way ridicules them? What about officials?

We sometimes think that the bigger the event the more impersonal it becomes, and the more freedom we have to say whatever we want to say. In other words, do you ever hear people yell things in stadiums that they would not say to the person if they were alone with them? Do we behave differently in a crowd than alone? Why is this? Does it make it right?

4. What do you think about booing, either a player or an official?

Booing is inappropriate behavior because it does not show respect for the other person. There are appropriate and inappropriate ways to register our disagreement with anything. Booing, cursing, taunting, ridiculing and the like are always inappropriate.

I will place team goals ahead of personal goals.

Commentary

This encourages sacrifice and selflessness instead of selfishness and self-centeredness. It reminds the athlete that the team goal of winning is the important goal, not one's own glory, and that it is through cooperation and teamwork that that goal is best accomplished.

Questions for discussion:

1. Have you ever played with a person who was more interested in how they were doing than how the team was doing?

Try to get feelings about that: anger, disappointment, betrayal, frustration, helplessness...Ask if they have ever been more interested in how they were doing, than the team.

2. Have you ever been a part of a team where everyone worked for the good of the team? If not, can you imagine what that would be like?

One of the great experiences of sport is to play "as a team." When the team comes together as one, it is a great experience because each person realizes values the contribution of the other and knows that each is an important part of the whole.

3. When would it be all right to place a personal goal ahead of a team goal?

If the game is clearly lost, or clearly won, and a player has the opportunity for a personal goal, then the team may wish to help that player achieve it. Notice that the personal goal actually becomes the team's goal.

I will be a positive influence on the relationships on the team.

Commentary

This means that each person has a role and a responsibility in helping deal with any difficulties or tensions that arise between players, or between players and coaches, seeking to mediate any problems that arise in any appropriate way possible. It also means that each person will take responsibility for the spirit of the team, seeking to help build a sense of community and team spirit among the players and coaches.

Questions for discussion:

1. Have you ever been on a team when some of the players didn't get along?

How did that affect the team? How did that affect you? It is important to emphasize that on a team you have common goals, and that can be something that players can agree on, even if they disagree off the field. This is why it is important for players to agree on a "code" which includes the coach's rules, so that when they become part of a team, those goals have precedence over other things, such as personality conflicts, that divide them. Hopefully, a good experience on the field may influence a poor relationship off the field. At a minimum, the coach should make it clear that differences must be worked out or set aside during the season.

2. Have you ever been on a team when some of the players didn't like the coach?

How did that affect you? How did that affect the team? Why did the players not like the coach? The coach should be willing to listen, to hear the things that players feel strongly about, without being threatened. It is important for the coach to understand that all personalities are different, and that the good coach will treat each player as an individual, respecting their differences, and dealing appropriately with them.

3. Have you ever tried to help out a situation where two people didn't get along?

What happened? If it didn't work, is there something you could do differently if you had to do it over again? What would be the best way to encourage others to work through their problems? It might be helpful to get another teammate to go with you and to approach the players separately at first, and then together. In talking to them it might be helpful to focus on the team, and the team goals, and how both players are needed for the team to reach its highest potential.

I will follow the team rules established by the coach.

Commentary

It is important to keep training rules, practice rules or any other rules established by the coach as a matter of trust with the team and the coach. It is a matter of personal honor and integrity that one does not cut corners or betray the expectations of the coach or of one's teammates.

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you think that the coach and your teammates trust you to keep the rules?

When a person joins a team, they make a commitment to themselves, the coach, and their teammates. This is a trust. It must be understood as such. Players cannot choose whether or not to come to practice or games, nor can they violate any of the training rules without violating a trust they have made.

2. Have you ever disregarded one or more rules established by the coach?

How did you feel? Do you think it mattered? Does your word matter? Do you care whether or not people think they can trust you?

3. Can you see how your own sense of yourself, of who you are, would be influenced by whether or not you follow the rules established by the coach?

Each of us should have a sense of pride about ourselves, a sense of integrity, a sense of value and importance. When we set goals for ourselves and achieve them, this builds our own sense of self, of who we are. Just as we build a house one brick or board at a time, so we build our own characters with daily actions. We should have a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment after every practice or game, if only for having given our best effort.

I will display caring and honorable behavior off the field and be a positive influence in my community and world.

Commentary

Everyone is a role model, no matter who he or she is or what he or she is doing. The only question is "what kind of model?" Those who compete in the public must know that others are observing, evaluating, and judging them, and often deciding whether or not to emulate them. Most behaviors are learned from the observation of the behavior of others. ABW seeks to encourage athletes who understand this undeniable role, and who seek to provide models worthy of emulation.

Questions for discussion:

1. Can you think of who some of your role models have been?

It is important for each person to realize that they have been influenced by people who would not have known it.

2. How often do you observe the behavior of others when they are playing? And make comments to yourself about their behavior?

We do it all the time, whenever we watch others. We think about how calmly they handle pressure, or how they walk or run, or how they react to whatever happens in their game. Have you ever thought that others are doing that about you? Either as an athlete or as a fan?

3. Have you ever understood yourself to be a role model, or at least a person others observed, and consciously tried to behave in a particular way?

A mature person realizes that whenever they are in public, being viewed by others, they become models, and seeks to behave in a way that will be seen in a positive way.

I will give of my time, skills, and money as I am able for the betterment of my community and world.

Commentary

It is important to recognize that we all have a responsibility to make this world a better place. ABW believes that it is important for each person to give something back to their community beginning early in life, and building on that spirit of giving, as they grow older. "Significant" is a word that each person must define for him or herself. It may mean giving up one Saturday morning, or many. It may mean giving up one dollar or many dollars. The important thing is that we have a common understanding: we all have a responsibility for the betterment of our world, and that responsibility begins with small steps and small actions.

Questions for discussion:

1. Why should we be concerned about others?

Because we are all members of the human family, so that the other is in some sense my brother or my sister. We have a responsibility for each other.

2. Why should we give away our time and money?

There are two basic reasons: it helps the giver (me) and the receiver. Whenever we give a gift, we feel better than before. Whenever we see a need that we can help and we respond, we feel better. Why? We feel better because we become more of a person, and our sense of self, of who we are, is developed. In other words, rather than just trying to live alone, and selfishly get all we can for ourselves, we reach out to our neighbors in need. Then we are more than we were before, and we are taking leadership, taking responsibility in trying to make a difference. In this way we grow and develop as individuals - that is, in fact, why we feel better. Moreover, afterwards we have a sense of accomplishment, which also makes us feel better, and also helps us grow as individuals.

3. What is a "significant" amount?

This must be defined by each person. What is significant to one person may not be to another. What we are trying to do is develop a generous heart and a generous spirit, which will result in each person asking themselves, am I doing all I can do? How can I do more? What is the next step for me?

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

1. WAYS TO USE THE CODE FOR LIVING

1. As a foundation for the coach's own values teaching
 - Coaches can add their own additional points
 - Coaches can stress the points important to them
 - Coaches can talk about one point or all of them
2. As the outline for a speech
 - Coaches can use the three areas: individual, team, society as the basic outline for a speech, using whatever points they wish, personalizing it as they wish
 - ABW will be happy to help coaches who need to make a speech at any time at no cost.
 - ABW will provide teaching points for each part of the Code for Living.

2. SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR SERVICE

3. Actions or projects may be taken by individuals, two or more individuals, or teams. Such actions can be initiated by:
 - A parent
 - A member of a team
 - A coach
 - A league
4. Action or project ideas could be such things as:
 - Coaching kids on a younger team one or more days
 - Tutoring or helping out in a neighborhood program one or more days
 - Clean up or paint the field, locker room, or park
 - Participation one or more times with any non-profit such as Habitat For Humanity, March of Dimes, Cancer Society, etc.
 - Support a project of a local church, synagogue, or mosque.

The important aspect is that members of ABW recognize they have the opportunity and responsibility to make their community and world a better place, and that they talk among themselves to see whether there is something they would like to do, either individually or collectively.