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# *Teaching the Code for Living*

## Series B: Essays on the Code

Short pieces designed to provide insight and a starting point for discussion.



***Winning More  
Than The Game***

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## **Introduction:**

This series provides a short piece of writing for each section of the Code. These essays are intended to serve as a starting point for discussion. They can be read aloud by a coach or player, photocopied and passed out, or the coach may present the ideas in his or her own words.

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

## **Why do your best?**

Davy Crockett, the pioneer who died at the Alamo, had a famous personal motto: "Make sure you're right, then go straight ahead." That motto reflects a determination to define a goal, and then to work to achieve it. Whenever we undertake anything, we need to stop and ask ourselves, "Why am I doing this?" "What do I expect to get out of it?" "What is my goal?"

A number of years ago my wife and I met Richard Nixon. She was talking with President Nixon, and said to him that I was a friend of his son-in-law, Ed Cox. She explained to Nixon that Eddie and I had played tennis together as kids. "Do you play tennis?" Nixon asked her. "Well," she replied, "I do, but I'm not any good." "Give it up!" the President replied.

Do you agree with Nixon? Should we only participate in those things in which we are able to excel? Why do we participate? What is good enough? What is the goal?

One reason that we set goals for ourselves is out of personal pride. When we work hard at anything we have the satisfaction of what we have done, whether it is raking a yard, writing a paper, or learning to dribble. Our personal pride is *not* a reflection of how good our work necessarily is compared with others (the paper may *not* be the best in the class, we may *not* be the best dribbler on the team) but of the *progress* and *effort* we have made. Somehow it vitally important to our own sense of self that each of us not settle for the so-so, the half effort, or the lackadaisical. When we do that we cannot hold our heads up, because we know we have betrayed ourselves by not giving our best.

The second reason we set goals for ourselves is out of respect for the team. When we join a team we make a commitment to our teammates. This is not necessarily acknowledged, but it is understood. This is why it is important for everyone to be on time for practice, to encourage one another, and to take responsibility for our time with the team. The team commits to doing its best to win. In order for the team to reach its full potential each member must work to achieve his or her full potential. If a person misses practice, the team suffers. Equally, if a person makes no effort to improve, the team suffers.

The third reason that we set goals for ourselves is so that we will create a positive image for our family and those who see us. Whenever a person sees another making a special effort, it is inspiring. We are judged by those who are our teammates, by those who are family, friends, and even by those who only see us as players. Our reputation, that of our family, and of the team is built by the character we exhibit day in and day out, in practice and in games.

## **Questions for reflection:**

1. What would Davy Crockett say about goal setting in sports?
2. What would you have said to President Nixon?
3. Have you ever felt like you did not do your best? Discuss.
4. Do you agree that you have a responsibility to the team? To your family and others?
5. Have you ever been inspired by the effort of another? Discuss.

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

## **When I was a kid**

When I was a kid we all cheated from time to time. In card games we would try to see the other person's hand; in board games we would try to steal money from the bank; in tennis we would call a ball out that was just barely in. We did this, of course, because we wanted to win, and we didn't think a little cheating was that big a deal. One of the worst things that could happen, of course, would be to get caught, and to then be called a "cheater."

As I grew up I came to understand that if I moved my golf ball - just a few inches - (but from out behind a tree) I would not so much be cheating my opponent as I would myself. Whatever score I would make would not be the truth. There could be no integrity to my score.

The same thing is true in any sport. Rules provide integrity to the game. It is the rules that define the game and guarantee fairness. To violate the rules is to violate the integrity of the game. If we do not play by the rules then have we really won anything? For example, if a pitcher puts Vaseline on a baseball, which makes it virtually unhittable, in order to win the final game of the World Series, has that team really proven that it is the best?

There are, of course, many games in which rules violation are commonplace - offside in football or soccer, fouls in basketball, footfaults in tennis, the list is endless. That is not what we are thinking about. Rules infractions are to be expected in most sports, and occur as a natural part of the game. What we are talking about is an intentional effort to violate the rules in a way that gives a player or a team an unfair advantage.

Finally, there is another reason to compete within the rules. Our opponent assumes that we will. There is integrity in the relationship between opponents. If one person cheats, they violate the trust that has been given them by the other. If we violate that trust, then our opponent will lose respect for us, and our reputation will be damaged.

## **Questions for reflection:**

1. Have you known anyone, or a team, that you thought intentionally broke the rules?
2. What did you think about the individual or the team?
3. What is a common way in your sport to break the rules and gain an unfair advantage?
4. Would you rather win without integrity or lose with integrity?

***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.***

## **Teasing, Trash-talking, Taunting, and Cursing: Where do you draw the line?**

There are few aspects of competition more fun than the light and good-natured verbal game that often accompanies sport of every kind. Coaches and athletes may argue about whether the game is 90% mental or 50% mental or some other percentage. Whatever it is, everyone agrees that the mind is a significant part of any competition. It is inevitable that various psychological tactics and mind games are a part of sport itself. Everyone engages in one kind of verbal game or another, and for many, the verbal and mental game is as much fun as the sport itself. Even chess players engage in mind games by arguing about such things as the lighting, the arrangement of the room, and so on.

When does good-natured teasing cross over the line into unacceptable behavior? We all remember the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The converse is equally important here: Do not say or do something that you would not want someone to say or do to you. Obviously, this is a value judgement, which means that there is no one correct answer that will fit all situations. However, Athletes for a Better World does believe that there are some guidelines and principles by which we should all try to live. They are as follows:

Our goal is to raise the standard of sport, not to lower it, or even to keep it where it is. The question one should ask is: how can I elevate the level of sport by my verbal tactics?

1. If we think something is appropriate, but our opponent doesn't, we should follow that higher standard, not try to bring the other person down to our level. We should remember that it is most tempting to push the verbal game too far when we are losing or winning.
2. Good-natured teasing is just that, good-natured. If it becomes hostile, it is inappropriate. It is important to know when to stop and to have the strength to do so.
3. Cursing and taunting are always inappropriate. Racist or sexist comments are also always inappropriate.
4. Some questions to think about:
  - Would I say this in front of my grandparent?
  - Would I like to have this shown on television?
  - Would I like someone to say this to me?
5. Listen for when the tone begins to change. It's probably time to take a deep breath and lighten up. Someone has to be the leader in this case. Learning limits is a sign of maturity and growth.
6. It is important to realize that taunting and ugly trash talking is never just between two players. Your opponent will later talk about you to teammates. Teammates talk to coaches and friends. In other words, everyone talks to everyone including the media. Who we are and what our personal reputation is begin with how we compete against others. Nothing is ever said or kept in isolation.

Finally, many of us growing up were taught the words “Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can never hurt you.” This is true at one level, but profoundly not true at another. Words do matter. Athletes for a Better World is committed to making a difference in the words we use before, during and after competition.

**Questions for reflection:**

1. How do you feel about trash-talking?
2. When does teasing become negative and hostile?
3. What is the most difficult part of this whole issue for you?
4. What can you do about it?
5. Why is it that in a crowd in a stadium we may yell something that we would not say if we were the only one present?

***I will place team goals ahead of personal goals.***

**Let's Be Honest.**

"I will place team goals ahead of personal goals." This is not a natural thing to do. We must admit that up front. Everything in this country that we see or read or hear about tells us that the glory comes from being a "star." To be a part of the culture is to know that what matters to the media is personal statistics. It is difficult not to be swept away by this. This is why it is important to be honest about this at the beginning.

Equally, it is clear when we look at team sports, that while the media always focuses on individuals, teams win team sports. Not individuals. Michael Jordan didn't win in Chicago until they got a strong team to be with him. No matter which sport one looks at, it is invariably the team that plays best as a team that wins championships.

There are many reasons why athletes often put themselves ahead of the team. Some of the reasons are:

1. The need to try to impress the coach, so the individual will be given a chance to play, or play more.
2. Selfishness. The player simply cares more about looking good personally than winning.
3. The need for the high school or college athlete to put up some "numbers," so they may get a college scholarship or a job.
4. The fact that the athlete or coach has grown up in the culture of "stars," has given lip service to the idea of team play, but has not bought in at a significant level.

Often unnoticed immeasurables and intangibles make a team successful. Sacrifice, hustle, selflessness, and all the other ingredients of teamwork should be noticed and rewarded.

**Questions for reflection:**

1. Do you agree that the media focuses on "stars" rather than teamwork?
2. When are you tempted to put yourself ahead of the good of the team?
3. In what ways do you think your team puts team goals ahead of personal goals?
4. In what ways do you think that it doesn't?

## **Courage**

It has been said that the greatest virtue is courage, because without it you cannot practice other virtues consistently. Courage is not something we are born with; it is a learned habit. However, it is not an easy habit to learn and like all virtues only comes through the discipline of practice.

To have moral courage is to be willing to stand against another person, the culture, your friends, even society itself and do the right thing. When threatened, the basic animal instinct is “fight or flight.” That is, in a threatening situation the basic animal response is either to fight or to run away. Unfortunately, when facing moral challenges we often resort to these primitive choices. If a person taunts you, it is easier to hit them back than to respond in a positive manner. If a person hits you, it is easier to hit them back than to refrain from violence. If your team is being totally defeated, it is easier to give up than to play with all your heart. If others are violating team rules it is easier to go along with them, than to challenge them or to report them. All of these acts require courage.

The difficulty we humans have is in realizing and practicing a third choice. This choice is more difficult and requires courage. It is to stay and not fight. It is to meet verbal or physical force with moral force. To stay and meet one form of violence, whether physical or verbal, with a non-violent response requires far more courage and strength than to fight.

There are two basic internal barriers to moral courage: laziness and fear. We hesitate to do the right thing often because we are lazy. An act of courage requires energy. It requires a will to act. It may require various forms of action. To do nothing requires nothing. We often fail to act simply because we are too lazy. Secondly, we often do not act because we are afraid. We do not know what the consequences will be. Or we do know what the consequences will be. In both cases we fear it will be costly for us; it may cost energy, or time, or friends. We are afraid of those costs. And so we choose not to act.

Further, there is a barrier that comes from outside ourselves. This is peer pressure, societal pressure, pressure from others. We do not live in a vacuum, but on a team, in a family, a community of friends and in society. Each of these external individuals and all of them collectively are a formidable group to challenge. When we choose behavior which is counter to the culture of one or more of these groups, it will require an act of courage. It does not take courage to agree with others. To challenge one person, or one group requires courage, and to challenge more than one requires a great deal of courage. The acts which require the most courage (apart from those, which involve actual risk of life), are those that put us in opposition to our friends, and the accepted norms.

Courage is a learned habit. It is never too late to begin to cultivate this habit, starting with small acts at first, and then as your character grows to take ever more meaningful risks. To become a person who stands for the hard right against the easy wrong.

### **Questions for reflection:**

1. If you felt there was something you needed to say or do, would you have the courage to say or do it?
2. What if it meant making some people angry, maybe losing a friend?
3. What is it that takes courage in your sport?

***I will follow the team rules established by the coach.***

## **Kings and Queens, Rules and Coaches**

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be ruled by a king or a queen? Or an emperor? For centuries most of civilization was ruled by one form of autocratic rule or another: kings, queens, chiefs, war lords, emperors and dictators. There are some advantages to authoritarian rule. First, any decision can be made immediately. The ruler can listen to the various points of view and then make an immediate decision. Second, the ruler can decide how the country will be run, what the laws will be, what the priorities will be. This avoids angry debates and people divided against each other. Third, since the ruler rules for life, and the power is finally transferred to the person the ruler chooses, there is stability within the country.

Another way of looking at this is to consider the army. Armies are run by absolute authority from the top down. No one can question a superior officer's command. Are not teams like army units charged to defeat the opposition? Should a team be run this way by the coach?

Various forms of democracy offer a different way of governing. In a democracy, the people vote and choose who their elected officials will be. Individuals are elected to terms of service, so that if the people do not like them, they can elect another person at the next election. Further, the people choose not only their chief elected official, but also the legislatures with whom the elected authorities must share power. Democracies generally provide for a system of "checks and balances" so that neither the executive branch nor the legislative branch will be all powerful.

Some coaches function like autocratic rulers. They establish the rules and run the team according to what they think is right and best. Other coaches like to involve the team, and give them the chance to participate in the setting up of rules. Such coaches believe that if the players have a voice in the team they will have "ownership" of the team, and thus have greater commitment.

### **Questions for reflection:**

1. If you were the coach, how would you go about setting up the rules?
2. What are the most important rules to you, or issues that need to have rules?
3. Should there be penalties for breaking the rules? Who decides the penalty?
4. Is it fair to compare a team to an army unit?

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

## **Your Name**

Have you ever wondered what other people think when your name is spoken? Do they have good thoughts or bad thoughts? What does your name mean? I want to invite you to reflect on your name.

1. Your name was given to you as a gift. Your first and middle names were not randomly drawn out of a hat filled with all the possible names on earth. They were chosen and given to you.
2. Your family name began before you were born. It connects you to all those who have come before you in your family and to all who will come after you. Your last name comes as a trust, that you be worthy, honor your family and bring distinction to them as you bear their name.
3. Your name can always be developed. You can always move in a new direction to bring credit and honor to your name. Further, it is never too late to build respect for your name in the minds and hearts of others. Jimmy Carter, in "retirement," is a wonderful example of this.
4. Your name can be damaged, hurt, and ruined by the way you behave. This can happen in small ways, by the mistakes you make in daily living, or in bigger ways, by serious crimes or public scandal.
5. Your name can always be rebuilt when it has been damaged. It begins with an open, honest, acknowledgement of the mistakes made, and a genuine effort to set things right. We have all failed in our lives, and an honest acknowledgement of that can lead to renewed respect for us.
6. Your name can be an inspiration to others. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave words worth repeating: "Everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve...You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

## **Questions for reflection:**

1. What do people think when your name is spoken?
2. What would you like them to think?
3. What is one thing you can do, starting today, that will make a difference in what people think about you?

## **Other identity topics to be considered:**

- the "name of the team,"
- the "name of the school,"
- the "name of the mascot."

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

## **Why give? Why serve?**

Once I asked a young man, who is wealthy, to donate some money to a non-profit agency. He asked very sincerely, "Why should I give my money away?" Why should we be good? Why ever do anything for anyone? When our oldest son was a child he asked the same question, I said, "Remember, it is more blessed to give than to receive." He said, "I've heard that, but it's a hard one to believe."

When we were children, like my son, we wanted to get things. Christmas, birthdays, and on other occasions we hoped we would get lots of presents. Growing older makes us aware of the powerful advertising industry, creating greed within each of us for thousands of products, most of which we could easily live without.

But something else happens to us along the way. There comes a time when we want to give someone a gift, a friend or family member, and giving that gift gives us far more happiness than receiving a gift in return. This is because giving to that person was, for us, an act of love. We discover that giving can be better than getting, because giving is an act of love.

But what about people we don't know? Why should we care about them?

No one asked to be born; all of us were given the gift of life. Not only were we given the gift of life, but also, for most of us, the gift of families, friends, neighborhood, community. Those who have come before us have created the society we now enjoy. Our society may be imperfect; it may have great needs and injustices, but it is far better than it was in the past. It was given to us as a gift by those who came before us. In the same way, we have a moral obligation to make this world a better place for those who will come after us. We do that by giving back to our communities. There are millions of ways we can do that: by being a friend to a young kid or an elderly shut-in, by feeding the hungry, building a Habitat house, helping coach a team, or by being a part of endless non-profit agencies and worthy causes.

When we give of ourselves to something on behalf of others we discover joy and happiness. Surprisingly, in many ways it is the same happiness and joy that we discovered in giving a gift to a person we knew. In both cases, giving is an act of love, and in both cases we gain far more than we gave. Whenever we love, life is more fully lived.

## **Questions for reflection:**

1. When have there been some times when you have done something for someone else?
2. Do you believe that you should leave the world a better place?
3. Discuss this quote by Martin Luther King: "Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve...You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."
4. Discuss this quote by Winston Churchill: "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."
5. Who have been the people in your life who have made a difference? Why?
6. Would you like to be remembered as a person who made a difference in the lives of others?