

COACH IT, DON'T ADVISE IT!

INTRODUCTION

Currently, I am the Liaison for Student Activities for Broward County (Florida) Public Schools and work out of the Department of Student Activities and Athletics. In this capacity I am directly responsible for county wide (32 high schools, 45 middle schools, 135 elementary schools) leadership training. While I still work directly with student leaders, I am also responsible for training teacher sponsors and advisors.

When I started my career in education, I was lucky enough to be in a high school Social Studies Department that contained a unique mix of “Young Turks” and experienced teachers. All of whom were involved in coaching or advising and most of whom would be considered, by any evaluator, to be excellent teachers. Our pre-school, lunch time and planning period discussions were stimulating, lively and, often times, loud. We tended to debate every topic from the Vietnam War and Richard Nixon to who was ranked number one in the college football polls to the membership policy of our school's service clubs. Teaching strategies and the characteristics that make a good or great teacher could be counted on to provide the grist for a day long discussion.

During one of those debates, someone asked, “What is the difference between teaching and coaching?” As that question was debated, another was thrown out, “What is the difference between advising a student organization and coaching?” Being involved in all three endeavors at the time (assistant football coach, student government advisor and American History teacher), I found the discussion to be pertinent and interesting. At some point during this discussion, I recognized that I was approaching my jobs as advisor and teacher the same way I approached my coaching assignment. This prompted me to start writing down what I considered to be the basic coaching/teaching/advising principles.

Over the next forty-two years, as I learned more and more from working for and with great teachers and coaches, I constantly revised those principles. Because I fervently believe that no human being has all the right answers, I believe the principles to follow will continue to be changed and revised. I also believe that writing these principles down and reviewing them regularly helped to keep me focused as an advisor, a coach, and a teacher.

By keeping focused on the principles that I felt were paramount, I was able to achieve a degree of success in all three fields. The football teams I coached won eighty-two percent of their games. The student government's I advised constantly received awards from the state association and the Southern Association of Student Councils (SASC). I was selected as an SASC Advisor of the Year and as Florida's first Student Council Advisor of the Year. Just as importantly, I was selected as my high school's outstanding faculty member on three different occasions, nominated to be Broward County's Teacher of the Year and was a Runner-up for Silver Knight Teacher. The awards are not as important as the means of achieving them. They are mentioned here only as proof that, at least in one case, focusing on the principles included in this document worked.

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE NO. 1
by Vince Lombardi

You've got to pay the price.

"Winning is not a sometime thing; it's an all-the-time thing. you don't win once in a while, you don't do things right once in a while, you do them right all the time. Winning is a habit. Unfortunately, so is losing.

"There is no room for second place. There is only one place in my game and that's first place. I have finished second twice at Green Bay and I don't ever want to finish second again. There is a second place bowl game, but it is a game for losers played by losers. It is and always has been an American zeal to be first in anything we do and to win and to win and to win.

"Every time a football player goes out to ply his trade he's got to play from the ground up-from the soles of his feet right up to his head. Every inch of him has to play. Some guys play with their heads. That's O.K. You've got to be smart to be No. 1 in any business. But more important, you've got to play with your heart-with every fiber of your body. If you're lucky enough to find a guy with a lot of head and a lot of heart, he's never going to come off the field in second.

"Running a football team is no different from running any other kind of organization-an army, a political party, a business. The principles are the same. The object is to win-to beat the other guy. Maybe that sounds hard or cruel. I don't think it is.

"It's a reality of life that men are competitive and the most competitive games draw the most competitive men. That's why they're there-to compete. They know the rules and the objectives when they get in the game. The objective is to win-fairly, squarely, decently, by the rules-but to win.

"And in truth, I've never know a man worth all his salt who in the long run, deep down in his heart, didn't appreciate the grind, the discipline. There is something in good men that really yearns for, needs, discipline and the harsh reality of head-to-head combat.

"I don't say these things because I believe the 'brute' nature of man or that men must be brutalized to be combative. I believe in God, and I believe in human decency. But I firmly believe that any man's finest hour -his greatest fulfillment to all he holds dear-is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle-victorious."

PRINCIPLE ONE: FOCUS ON THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE.

In the words of Vince Lombardi, the primary objective of an athletic contest is, "...to win, fairly, squarely, decently, by the rules-but to win." Coaches who forget the primary objective or who try to cloud the issue by listing many objectives, not only won't win, but they will not accomplish their other objectives. Unless, of course, one of those objectives was to teach young men and women how to loose.

Advisors must identify the primary objective of their organization. Fortunately, in student government, that primary objective is simple, to involve as many students as possible. By involvement, I do not mean attending an event, I mean helping to plan, organize and see through to completion an event. In other words, to have ownership in an event. As long as that objective is the one we focus on, the student governments we coach will always be successful. It sounds easy, but it is not. In athletics every participant understands and agrees with the objective. That is not so in student government. The idea that it is the job of student officers to involve others may be agreed to in principle but never really understood. So having a better homecoming dance than last year's or a bigger float or just doing more projects than last year's SGA may easily become the primary objective. Just as it is a coach's job to keep his/her team focused, so it is the advisor's.

PRINCIPLE TWO: YOU CAN'T PLAY THE GAME FOR THEM.

It is easy for a coach to follow this principle. There are rules that prevent a coach from physically participating. Again, not so in student government. In student government it is a belief not a rule that prevents the advisor/coach from participating in the event. If advisors find themselves lettering banners or posters, preparing agendas, filling out a purchase orders, contacting faculty members to be chaperones, etc., they are not doing their job. Just as it is a coach's job to train an athlete for the contest, it is an advisor's job to train the officers and members. They learn nothing if you do it for them. They learn a great deal if you train them and then make them play the game.

PRINCIPLE THREE: THE TEAM YOU MEET IN AUGUST IS NOT THE TEAM YOU LEFT IN NOVEMBER.

If a coach has done his/her job, by the end of the season the team is trained in the fundamentals of the sport. Then that particular team leaves. When a new season starts, a coach greets a team that may be either partially trained or totally untrained. A coach must remember to start over. Like a lot of other coaching principals, this is not as easy as it sounds.

This same principal holds true for SGA. At the end of Each year, SGA officers and members who are trained in parliamentary procedure, group dynamics, meeting skills, how to write an press release, how to fill out a project approval form, how to get a date reserved on the school calendar, etc. graduate, fail to be re-elected or move. When advisors meet with the members and officers for the succeeding year they must remember to start at the beginning. Like a varsity football team, the SGA will consist of a mixed group of experienced and inexperienced students. Even the experienced leaders will have had some time over the summer to "forget" some of what they learned last year. Start over from the beginning.

PRINCIPLE THREE: Cont.

Of course the students who have experience will have an advantage but, by making everyone start at the beginning, “new” players/members will understand that they are as much a part of the team as the “veterans.” Highly motivated and intelligent newcomers will push experienced members to do better. The newcomer may, eventually, be able to do a better job than the “veteran.” However, there will be no growth without a sound understanding of fundamentals.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: TEACH FUNDAMENTALS ON THE FIRST DAY AND ON THE LAST DAY.

Winning teams are those that are fundamentally sound. Winning coaches teach and re-teach fundamentals every day. This is much easier to do on the athletic field when practice time is easily identifiable. As an SGA coach, you must not only identify the practice time, but you must make use of other occasions to teach basic leadership fundamentals. Those leaders who are well trained in fundamentals will be those who, all other things being equal, will be successful.

The fundamentals the advisor/coach must teach are too numerous to list, but will range from planning, decision making, organization, evaluation, communications to how to hold a hammer, saw or paint brush. While this is being done, an advisor/coach must keep Principle Two in mind.

A good high school football coach will teach and re-emphasize stance and position all season long. If he doesn't things will start to get sloppy very quickly. In the arena of student leadership, if basic meeting skills are taught only once, at the beginning of the year, I can almost guarantee that by midyear, written agendas for all participants, previewing the meeting, arriving early to arrange the room and reviewing the meeting will disappear.

Just as a coach must learn the drills that will emphasize fundamentals, so an advisor must learn the games and structured experiences that will teach the fundamentals of leadership.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: NEVER TRY TO TEACH A PIG TO SING. IT ONLY IRRITATES THE PIG AND MAKES YOU LOOK LIKE A FOOL.

We all would like to believe that there is nothing that any of our students could not accomplish if they put their mind to it. Coaches realize that there is a real fallacy in that belief. Some student athletes will never have certain physical attributes. That does not mean those athletes cannot be successful. It just means that good coaches recognize what athletes are capable of doing and what they are not.

Once again, the same principle applies to the SGA advisor. SGA advisors do not, usually, deal with a student's physical limitations, but regularly deal with those limitations that are harder to identify, emotional and psychological. Sometimes the SGA advisor will also deal with moral and religious limitations.

While we encourage students to push at their own limitations, we must also learn what our students are incapable of doing.

PRINCIPLE SIX: NEVER UNDERESTIMATE YOUR TEAM'S ABILITY.

A well-coached, fundamentally sound team can overcome many obstacles. Many games that are called upsets are just cases of well-coached teams overcoming some of their own weaknesses and beating less well prepared teams. If you coach them properly and prepare them for the game, your SGA will surprise everyone with the quantity and quality of their activities.

An advisor's job is to encourage and prepare his/her SGA to attempt things that are new and challenging.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: K.I.S.S.-KEEP IT SIMPLE STUPID.

Probably one of the greatest coaching and teaching principles of all time. Students don't determine to do something wrong or make mistakes, but in many cases we help them do just that by making the job too complicated. The most important rule in keeping it simple is to keep referring back to the basic objective. If what you are doing doesn't help you accomplish the primary objective, eliminate it.

Break jobs down into small, understandable tasks. Do away with the mystique and mystery. After all, what we do is not brain surgery.

A couple of the fundamentals that most students view as very complicated are meeting skills and parliamentary procedure. Channing Bete Company, Inc. has reduced these two concepts to two very simple pamphlets. They have done the same with decision making, communications, planning and organizing and many more. They are a great example of the K.I.S.S. principle.

PRINCIPLE EIGHT: YOU PLAY LIKE YOU PRACTICE.

We don't expect athletes to take the field without practice and we don't expect athletes to play well unless they practice well. The old saying, "a bad dress rehearsal means a good show" is about as wrong as wrong can be. Coaches know that athletes play like they practice. Why should we expect any less or more from student leaders.

This principle presupposes that time to teach and practice the fundamentals of leadership has been set aside. This, of course, is much easier if the student leaders are in a leadership class. The fact that a school does not have a leadership class and/or student leaders are not in the leadership class does not diminish the importance of coaching and practice.

The skills required to be a good or great leader (communications, problem solving, public speaking, meeting facilitation, decision making, planning, organization, etc.) can be taught and should be demonstrated in a practice situation.

The concept of an "open student council" is in use in many high schools today. "Open Student Councils" may have "general assemblies of one hundred to three hundred students. It is ridiculous to believe that a president who cannot facilitate a small practice meeting can facilitate an hour long meeting with one, two or three hundred students in attendance. This is just one example of the importance of practice, there are many more.

**PRINCIPLE NINE: NEVER CRITICIZE YOUR OWN PLAYERS,
THEY ARE THE ONLY PLAYERS YOU HAVE.**

The opportunities for a coach to criticize his/her athletes are too numerous to list. The faculty lounge offers just one such opportunity. Coaches know that their team will lose games and their players will make mistakes. After all they are teenagers who are, for the most part, just learning the sport. The same is true for student leaders.

When student leaders make a mistake or when a project fails, they will correct their mistake much quicker or work even harder to make the next project a success if they feel as though their coach/advisor will continue to support them. This does not mean that a coach/advisor does not show the student where he/she was wrong or tell the committee how they could have made the project succeed. It just means that they know that they are not going to hear the coach/advisor was talking about their shortcomings or failures to other people.

**PRINCIPLE TEN: DISCIPLINE AND PRAISE MUST BE
CONSISTANT AND FAIR.**

A team must understand and believe that "first teamers" will be subject to the same discipline and rules as "third teamers." Nothing can destroy team moral quicker than the concept of "special rules for special people."

Praise in public, chastise in private. No one likes being criticized or corrected, even when they know they were wrong or made a mistake. When it is necessary to chastise, or in coach's terms, "deliver a chewing out," do it in private. The whole team or student council or leadership class does not need to hear what a coach or advisor is saying when he chastises a member.

Make sure the person being criticized understands that it is the behavior or actions that are wrong and the criticism is not personal. By criticizing in private, egos are less involved. The student who is being criticized is more likely to respond positively to criticism if he/she does not feel obligated to defend his/her ego. In addition, the student's friends are less likely to choose sides. In these situations, right or wrong, students chastised in public can usually count on the support of their friends.

Use the "Bench" as a teaching Tool. Students participate in athletics because they want to play. Students become involved in leadership because they want to lead. Most coaches understand that the "bench" is their best disciplinary tool. The same is true for student leadership.

Using the "bench" is, in many ways, more important to advisors. If an athlete keeps fouling up, breaking team rules, etc., the coach can cut him or her. Advisors may not have that privilege; however, there is no rule against sitting a leader down and letting someone else do their job until they prove that they wish to do it right or obey the "team rules". Most leaders will respond by accepting the challenge. The student who doesn't respond and is content to "sit on the bench," is no loss to the team.

Finally, in the words of the Lord High Executioner, "Let the punishment fit the crime."

PRINCIPLE TEN:

CONT.

We all like to have our accomplishments recognized. Student leaders who go above and beyond should be recognized and praised in front of their peers. Not only is this just plain good manners, it is common sense. Teammates who see and hear one of their own being praised will work even harder to gain that recognition for themselves and, by so doing, increase the efficiency and productivity of the organization. Praise should also be immediate. It is great to have an end of the year event to recognize overall accomplishments but, the timely public recognition of accomplishments is a necessity. This is the theory behind the helmet awards that are given out at the first practice after a game

PRINCIPLE ELEVEN:

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE IS IMPORTANT BUT REMEMBER, IT IS A TEAM SPORT.

This is a principle that is easy to remember in team sports but, sometimes, easy to forget in student government. SGA officers, in particular, tend to forget that SGA is the ultimate in a team game.

Just as a successful corporation or business requires a team effort, so also does SGA. Some of the accouterments of teams; shirts, cheers, etc. can help to establish the team effect. The coach/advisor should help the officers find a way for every member, even if there are over 200 members, get a shirt and establish certain days on which the SGA shirt is worn.

The coach/advisor must remind the officers to express appreciation for the work of the non-officers, much like a smart running back thanks his offensive line after a great run. The coach/advisor must keep reminding everyone that if a project ends in failure, it is a team loss not some individual's fault.

Individual awards during the year, as opposed to end of the year awards, are good as long as they emphasize the contribution the individual made to the success of the team.

PRINCIPLE TWELVE:

PREPARE YOUR TEAM TO MEET THE OPPONENT.

To be successful, not only does each team member have to know what they must do but, they must also know and understand what obstacles they face. The school administration is not the opponent of the SGA but, a student leader should understand the concerns and constraints placed on the school administration prior to proposing a new project. Reviewing school policy, school board policy, and state legislation with the officers is more than appropriate. A student officer proposing a project that is against state law (e.g. a school sponsored lottery in the State of Florida) will not only be rebuked but, it will also, make administrators question the capability of the student leader.

Identifying the potential problems before starting work on a project is much like reviewing a scouting report. It allows you to play to your strength. If the coach/advisor plays the "Devil's Advocate" with regard to projects it will force

PRINCIPLE TWELVE: CONT.

students to think of answers to the potential problems before they are presented by administrators or real life.

This is an area in which success breeds success. The more students approach administrators well-prepared, the more they will receive positive responses to their proposals. There are two old coaching quotes which apply here and to life in general:

- The Six P's-Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance.
- Fail to plan; plan to fail.

**PRINCIPLE THIRTEEN: EVALUATE PAST PERFORMANCE; BUT
DON'T LIVE IN THE PAST. THE
SEASON'S NOT OVER YET.**

Any coach can tell you the value of watching the game films and of evaluating the team and each team member's performance in each game. The coach/advisor will usually not have film of an event (although, video taping a meeting or two is not a bad idea) to grade, but taking notes during the event and having a formal evaluation immediately after is almost as good.

The thing to remember is, that once the evaluation is over, move on. Every football coach knows how long the season is and that one game will not make or break the entire season. The student government season lasts for the entire school year (and in many cases for a number of weeks over the summer). One unsuccessful project or one mistake should not ruin a whole year. Neither will one success make a whole year successful. Evaluate, criticize and praise and move on to the next event.

**PRINCIPLE FOURTEEN: ULTIMATELY, IT HAS TO BE FUN (OR
SIGNIFICANT.**

Participation in co-curricular activities is not, usually, a graduation requirement and even in those few schools that have such a requirement, participation in a specific activity is not mandated. Students play football, basketball, volleyball, participate in band, chorus, year book or become members of student government because they want to, not because they have to. Students continue to participate in those activities because they are having fun or because they are accomplishing something significant.

Don't confuse "having fun" with not working. Students, even more so than adults, are capable of working very hard, accomplishing meaningful things and having a great deal of fun at the same time. Just observe a high school car wash to verify this concept.

The simple fact is that if an activity is neither fun nor significant, students will find something else to do.

PRINCIPLE FIFTEEN: LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

The team is always watching the coach. If a coach shows fear, the team will be afraid. If the coach does not believe in what he/she is doing, neither will the team. If a coach is disorganized and confused, the team will be disorganized and confused. If a coach doesn't obey the rules, neither will the team. If the coach loses focus, so will the team. Obviously, the same concepts hold true for the coach/advisor.

The coach/advisor must set an example. Be on time. Be prepared. Be knowledgeable or know where to find the information. Stay focused on the primary objective. Stay team oriented. Coach and advise with the fifteen principles in mind.