



## **6 Steps To Repair or Develop Great Culture**

1. Get Curious - learn about the people, the story, the purpose, the pain points, etc. This may include a pre-survey assessment
2. Set the objectives - In other words, determine what better will look like
3. Create Momentum - start with an event to layout the vision of better culture/environment
4. Establish Conversation Topics - this step is with the leadership team or single leader/this is the step that we will decide if DISC assessments will be a helpful tool and if so, when in the timeline we should do them
5. Facilitate regular healthy group conversations to move the group toward a psychologically safe environment
6. Check In - evaluate progress and adjust objectives if needed.

## **3 Habits for Establishing your Values and Mission**

It is safe to say there is no one right way to plan for a season, and coaches do not generally have the benefit of rubrics and curriculum provided to teachers. Therefore, many coaches find themselves going day to day, reacting to what happened the day before to plan their practices or even worse, they just wing it. However, regardless of level, your success and the growth of your team will vastly improve if you take a little bit of time to practice these habits before your season begins.

### **Discover and Articulate WHO you are and WHO your program will be.**

Core Values provide the anchor of WHO you are as a team. Discovering the true timeless principles that you and your team stand for is the first step to planning your season. This is



the defining the road map part of the process that Stephen Covey discussed early on in the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

University of Minnesota football coach articulates his culture with the phrase “Row the Boat”. Coach Fleck further defines what this means to him, and how it relates to his program. He is also a passionate and repetitive messenger of the mantra. Broken down simply, there is the oar, the boat, and the compass. The oar symbolizes the energy behind the program, the boat symbolizes the sacrifice that the people in and around it give to the program, and the compass symbolizes the common purpose everyone in the program is striving for. If you haven’t yet allowed yourself to be mentored by Coach Fleck, search him on YouTube. He breaks down his culture specifically in a handful of videos. More than that, it oozes out of him in his pre and post-game press conferences. Watching these press conferences is like taking a free master class on coaching, regardless of the sport you coach.

Your map can be as complex and symbolic as Coach Fleck’s where each part of the boat carries its own significance, or it can be a simple collection of values you list. The most important element of the idea and why it’s important is best explained by Jim Collins, the author of best-selling book Good to Great, in his forward to the 25th edition of Stephen Covey’s The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. He said, “In a world of change, disruption, chaos, and relentless uncertainty, people crave an anchor point, a set of constructs to give them guidance in the face of turbulence.” These anchor points will be the literal foundation and filters for all decisions made by you, your staff and your players, so they must be who you truly are, not what you aspire to be. Returning to Coach Fleck for a moment, those three parts of Row the Boat fit him, as a person, perfectly. He is full of boundless energy and resilience (the oar), his life has been about sacrificing normal to pursue his lifelong passion of leading people (the boat), and I’m not sure I’ve ever seen a more driven connector of



people with intense direction (the compass). Row the Boat works, against all odds, because it is who he is through and through.

There are resources in existence designed to help coaches and teams in search of identity through this process, but in my opinion, and through many years of trial and error, nothing can replace sheer introspection. Asking yourself what you've held dearest, looking back on yourself as a player on formal and informal teams, and talking to those around you are the best ways to form this construct. These answers are going to evolve over time, but if you take a hard look back at your own story and themes from your life all along, you will probably find clues to this answer if you haven't already articulated it. Some questions to help you investigate this within yourself might be: What, besides winning, would you say your program strives for? In other words, how will you define success? What were you known for on the teams you played on, or on the playground in unofficial games? What teammates and coaches along the way bothered you most? Why? What have those in your life said about you?

For me, it took several years before I felt even remotely satisfied with the simplicity of my team culture construct or coaching philosophy. Furthermore, I believe it will continue to evolve. Having said that, I started the process before I coached my first team as an eighteen-year-old rookie, and I think it is important every coach, regardless of level, take a little time to do that same.

About fifteen years ago, just as I was coming onto the college coaching scene, a handful of teams tried to use the amazing work of Coach John Wooden's pyramid to work as their team's cultural construct. While this may have given those teams some guideposts along the way, it wasn't sustainable over the long haul. That is because that pyramid, however genius and comprehensive it is, was not the actual value system of the coach using it. The same



result is true for those who have tried to use Row the Boat with their teams. It's cool for a short-term pump up, but it's not the long-term solution. With that being said, let me share the cultural construct I have developed over time for you to use as example in the construction of your own.

The construct that I would build my program around can be summed up with this words: Committed & Courageous, Tenacious & Tough and a Worthy Teammate with Work Ethic or CTW<sup>2</sup> for short. CTW has a double meaning that points to reason for building the program based on those qualities, it also stands for Change The World. It is my belief that learning life through sport has the ability to shape people in such a way that they can and will then go out and change the world for the better.

This construct is anchored with values, just as a tree stands on the strength of its roots. To further this construct, I lean heavily on the elements of a tree. It is true and fortunate that I am known to others mostly as 'Tree' so that helps with the stickiness of the construct. As you work to create and evolve your own, look to find a way to make it stick in the minds of others, as well.

This framework may seem underwhelming because of its simplicity and idealism. Simple and idealistic are the goals, along with sticky. Remember, you are creating not only an anchor point for reference as you make decisions regarding your program, but a vision for those in your charge to see, hold on to and be inspired by. It must be both worth inspiration and simple enough for people to understand and practice if they are to adopt it themselves.

Simple is hard to do. One of my favorite illustrations of this comes from a man who spoke just before Abraham Lincoln in Gettysburg in 1863. Edward Everett spoke for two hours prior to Lincoln's two-minute Gettysburg address. After both men spoke, legend has it



that Everett said to Lincoln, "I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes."

The point Everett made to Lincoln is the same one that applies to both the construction of your coaching philosophy as well as the construct of your program. The genius is in the simple. Coaches are often guilty of over-coaching, over-talking and over-complicating the simplest of things either because of insecurity or lack of discipline. Your aim in this endeavor is to cover more ground with less.

To the point about it the Change The World part being too idealistic, I would point you back to the football story that started this book. The world has been changed because of that moment in practice, it shaped me and is a part of my daily interactions with thousands of student-athletes and coaches. That is the power a great experience can have for a person on a team during the journey of a season. At the end of the day, week, month and season my first evaluation will be based on CTW<sup>2</sup> and on whether or not we are shaping people to change the world for the better. Wins and losses are the results of the product we created for the court, but they are only one part of the evaluation of the good and bad of a season.

### **Define WHERE you are going.**

Look to the end. In order for your team to go in the right direction, it helps to know what the final destination is. Now that you have taken some time to develop the map, even if it's a crude outline of a map at this point, you can start to pick the spot on the map you'd like to end up.

Coaches are often tempted to assume that winning is the final destination. They set win/loss goals and talk about where they'd like to see their team end up in their championship tournaments. There are two fundamental problems with this definition of success: 1. Unless you remove the officials and opponent, you cannot control whether or not



your team will win or lose. 2. Results of the game are the byproducts of the team you put on the court, much like money for business, they point to the quality of the product, but winning and losing is not THE product. Can we all assume that everyone who ever starts a season *wants* to win? Right now, just decide that that is the given goal of all the people playing at all the levels in all of the sports. Whew! Thanks! I'm glad we got that out of the way. Now that we've assumed winning is wanted by everyone, let us take the time to define what your product will look like and how that product (your team) will compete. This will give you a guidepost to aim for which will be the end point on the map you're heading toward.

One way to think about this is by visiting your future self the day after your last game. What are the things that the team will have to have done in order to get the results you want? If you're a college coach heading into the training season, aka spring season for volleyball coaches, asking yourself where your team needs to grow based on the results you earned in the fall and where you need to grow based on the players whose careers are over because of eligibility. These all can be answered for on and off the court considerations. Off-court examples: At the end of the year will we have grown in our ability to perform under pressure, we will have become a unified team, our benchmarks for hard work and attention to detail will be consistently met by coaches and players, the people in the program are fighting hard to keep the season alive, etc. On-court examples: we will become efficient enough in our first contact that our side out percentage is near the 65% mark in 60% of our matches; our set distribution will be spread somewhat evenly between four of our five hitters, our dig quality will be good enough to allow our dug balls to result in a jump and swing 75% of the time, etc.. Later in the book we will get into some specific scenarios to help you through this process a bit more.

**Determine HOW your team will get there.**



This is the stage many coaches start with. This haphazard way is a little like playing the lottery. Sometimes the right thing pops up and the right time and everything is awesome, and sometimes the team's progress drives around in circles until the season comes to an early, but predictable end. These coaches pick up the latest book, technique and training video and inject it into their team's plan. They do this regardless of the values they are hoping to instill and in spite of the actual destination they're heading for. In some cases, they see a successful coach do something at their annual convention and they adopt it, without introspection and make it part of their team's make up. The major problem with that is, of course, your team may or may not be physically and mentally similar to that other coach's team. We see this often with well-meaning clinicians sharing what is done in their elite gyms with high school and club coaches. Those coaches in turn take those drills and standards home to athletes who are not only less experienced, but also less elite. Further, their concepts are less often questioned by these coaches because of the success they've had at their level. This can stunt the development of the game by merely producing swarms of cookie cutter defensive systems and statistic considerations. The game grows best, the profession of coaching grows best when more questions, more critical thinking and more open-ended discussions and learning labs are interjected.

If you have started with the first two habits, this can be a fun experience. One way to complete this habit is to simply get a calendar out, draw a timeline on a whiteboard, and go through injecting your ideal development plan onto the timeline. I normally do this working backwards setting progress dates for the various areas of growth the team will ideally see. It allows for a clearer picture as the appropriate drills and classroom exercises are added along the way. This allows a coach to go from macro to micro getting more and more detailed as



the timeline and calendar are filled in. Think of it like building your route on a map once you've pinpointed the address. Drills, game concepts and cultural classroom sessions are simply the turn by turn instructions.