

Coach John Wooden: A Leader's Leader

An Article for the Win-Win Workplace Solutions E-Newsletter

June 11, 2010

“Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to do the best of which you are capable.” — *John Robert Wooden (October 14, 1910 – June 4, 2010)*

- [**THE LEGACY OF THE LEGEND**](#)
- [**THE SOUL OF THE MAN**](#)
- [**ON TEAMWORK & LEADERSHIP**](#)
- [**SUCCESS “BY THE NUMBERS”**](#)
[**\(Including “The Pyramid of Success”\)**](#)
- [**“WOODENISMS”**](#)
- [**JOHN WOODEN BOOKS & WEB SITES \(Including a Book by Gail et al.\)**](#)
- Won seven NCAA championships in seven consecutive years (1967–1973).
- Earned the most appearances (16), the most consecutive appearances (9), and the most victories (21) in the Final Four.
- Won the most consecutive victories (88, extending from the 1971 through the 1973 season).
- Won 38 straight victories in NCAA tournament play (between 1964 and 1974).
- Completed eight perfect seasons in the PAC 8 (now PAC 10) Conference.

###

THE LEGACY OF THE LEGEND

In 2009, *The Sporting News* named John Wooden the “Greatest Coach of All Time.” Few would disagree.

Consider his record, as the winningest coach in the history of college basketball: Under his leadership, the UCLA Bruins men’s basketball team ...

- Won ten NCAA Men’s Basketball Championships.

No other coach or team has come close to those incredible, probably unbreakable records, which have given the UCLA basketball program the enduring reputation as top in the nation. It is not surprising then that the equivalent of college football’s Heisman Trophy awarded to the top college basketball player in the nation each year is named the John R. Wooden Award.

What’s more – as if that were not enough to have earned “The Wizard of Westwood” (a title the humble coach eschewed) sports immortality – John Wooden became the first person ever

inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame not only as a coach but also as a player.

After leading his Martinsville, Indiana, high school basketball team to the state championship finals for three consecutive years, and winning the tournament in 1927, John Wooden – nicknamed “The Indiana Rubber Man,” for his “suicidal” dives on the hardwood floor – helped lead the Purdue University Boilermakers, under legendary coach Ward “Piggy” Lambert, to the 1932 National Championship.

But there was more to John Wooden than his incomparable contributions to the sport of college basketball – something about his character and values that would shape more than one generation of American leaders, from all walks of life.

It was perhaps most telling that he did not consider the greatest honors of his life any of the most highly publicized awards he won – not even the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, which he so deservedly received in 2003. Rather, he cherished the most being named the 1969 “Outstanding Basketball Coach of the U.S.” by his religious denomination, the Christian Church (He once said, "If I were ever prosecuted for my religion, I truly hope there would be enough evidence to convict me."), as well as the honor of having his hometown, of Martinsville, name a street after him, and serving as the 1969 King of the Morgan County Fall Foliage Festival, and Grand Marshal of the Festival Parade.

America loved John Wooden the way America loves Norman Rockwell. He personified the best of what our nation has to offer. No wonder he has served as a role model to millions, both as a team player and as a great leader.

[↑ Back to Top](#)

THE SOUL OF THE MAN

John Wooden once said: “My father, Joshua Hugh Wooden, was the one who set me on the right path. He had a common sense kind of wisdom and profound decency that has always been my inspiration.”

One of John Wooden’s favorite verses, which he remembered from 1936 until late in his long life, was about a son following in his father’s footsteps, which begins ...

A careful man I must always be;
A little fellow follows me.
I know I dare not go astray,
For fear he'll go the self-same way.

When asked what the most important word in the English language was, he unhesitatingly answered: “love. ... [W]e’d always have problems, but they’d be more manageable if we didn’t disagree with others because of race or religion or things of that sort, which we do, unfortunately.”

What most of us fail to remember or realize is that in the 1960s, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was delivering his “I Have a Dream” speech – but crowds in arenas across the nation

were often very vocally and occasionally violently opposed to integrated sports teams – Coach Wooden put together ultimately the greatest teams in the history of college basketball by practicing what he preached, picking whites, blacks, Gentiles, and Jews – the best team players in the nation regardless of race, religion, or any other nonsports-based criteria.

Consider that Coach Wooden's selections gave us Lewis Alcindor, eventually Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, as well as Bill Walton – two of the greatest college and pro players of all time. The sport, all races, and our nation as a whole benefitted profoundly from the exemplary professionalism, “color blindness,” and basic decency of the coach.

Moreover, John Wooden said: “Love is lasting; it's enduring. Now, passion is temporary. But love, true love, is enduring.”

In July of 1926, John Wooden met Nell Riley at a carnival; in August, 1932 they married in Indianapolis. John and “Nellie” remained together, very much in love, until her passing, in 1985. On the 21st of every month thereafter (his health permitting) he visited her grave and wrote her a love letter, which he would later place in an envelope atop all the others he kept, on her pillow at home.

In 2003, when UCLA was dedicating the basketball court in Pauley Pavilion to him and his wife, John insisted her name go first: It is thus named the “Nell & John Wooden Court.”

Although he never made more than \$35,000 a year in salary, and never asked for a raise, he was proud to say that the money he earned from speaking engagements, and TV commercials for the NCAA and even Hartford Insurance, allowed him to establish education accounts for all his grandchildren.

As heroic as his legend is, there was even more to the man: the same sort of “common sense kind of wisdom and profound decency” that he had seen in his father and that has inspired his teammates, his players, and his millions of fans for decades.

[↑ Back to Top](#)

ON TEAMWORK & LEADERSHIP

“The journey is better than the end.”
– *Cervantes, as quoted by Coach Wooden*

In a series of interviews recorded on his official Web site, <http://coachwooden.com>, John Wooden shared his views on some of the major aspects of good teamwork and leadership, summarized here. Note it is well worth viewing those brief recordings, not only to hear more instructive details but also to hear and see for yourself that most elusive, most powerful quality of leadership – charisma – which imbued the coach with greatness, ironically, through humility.

“The real reward is in the effort, the journey, the hard fight. Trophies are a byproduct of success.”

“I never stressed winning. ... I wanted the score to be a byproduct of the preparation. ... And from the time I retired ... I haven't missed games or the tournaments ... but practices and working with the players daily. That's where you establish real rapport that will be lasting, long after they're gone.”

“No coach ever did very well unless he has the talent.”

“I was able to ascertain from the squad who would work in the best, make the best team. ... Very seldom do the best players make the best team. And I had to be concerned in the total product, rather than in just the individual. ... I wanted each individual to work and develop his own individual abilities to the best possible way, but then I wanted that to be put to the welfare of the team. And that was my job to do that.”

“I think the main thing is to get anyone under your supervision, whether it be in athletics or whatnot, to know that you care for them more than just in what they're doing. ... Now, I got acquainted with them early because [of] their athletic ability; and I wanted them because of their athletic ability. But from then on I wanted them to know that I was concerned about them personally and their family and all the things that might have any affect upon them in any way. And I think that will come through — it won't come through just by your saying so; it has to come through, through your action.”

Among his other strengths: “I think my real strength was practice organization — getting things done in practice [so that they] were not

the waste of time — and sticking to a schedule very much.”

On his weaknesses: “I wasn't much of a strategist. I didn't make a lot of changes. And I probably should've made more changes at times.”

And in earlier times, a weakness that he later overcame: “Lack of patience; I expected too much too soon. ... There was a time when I permitted the things over which I had no control to affect the things over which I have control.”

“Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best that you are capable of becoming.”

[↑ Back to Top](#)

SUCCESS “BY THE NUMBERS” (Including “The Pyramid of Success”)

Trained from his earliest days to be an inveterate listmaker, John Wooden often counted, and recounted, maxims “by the numbers.”

His dad's “Two Sets of Threes” ...

1. Don't lie.
2. Don't cheat.
3. Don't steal.

... and ...

1. Don't whine.
2. Don't complain.
3. Don't make excuses.

In other words, Coach Wooden said: "Just do the best you can. And you know, nobody can do more than that." [In one form or another, that has been this author's motto his entire adult life; like countless others, I am in debt to the Coach.]

Upon graduating from grammar school, John received a card, on one side of which was a verse by the American clergyman, educator, and author the Rev. Henry van Dyke ...

Four things a man must learn to do,
If he would make his life more true:
To think without confusion clearly,
To love his fellow men sincerely,
To act from honest motives purely,
To trust in God and Heaven securely.

... and on the other side of which was *The Seven Point Creed*, which Wooden would also quote down through the years ...

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Help others.
3. Make each day your masterpiece. [He called this his philosophy in teaching, which he explained as, do your best, don't try to be better than someone else, do a little each day, and little by little it will all add up.]
4. Make friendship a fine art.
5. Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible.
6. Build a shelter against a rainy day. [He made of point of saying this meant internally, not just materially.]

7. Give thanks for your blessings and ask for guidance every single day.

Most notably, by the numbers, Coach Wooden developed his "Pyramid of Success," which he called "my own personal roadmap to pursuing and, at times, achieving Competitive Greatness" and which informed and inspired countless competitors and leaders, in all walks of life.

Again, I refer you to

<http://coachwooden.com>, for more information as well as a graphic representation of this iconic teaching aide — as referenced in everything from symposia for CEOs to [a delightful picture book for children](#).

THE PYRAMID OF SUCCESS

On the Bottom Tier, the Foundation ...

- **Industriousness:** "Worthwhile things come only from real work."
- **Friendship:** "The two qualities of Friendship so important for a leader to possess and instill in team members are respect and camaraderie."
- **Loyalty:** "First, do not betray yourself. Second, do not betray those you lead."
- **Cooperation:** "The sharing of ideas, information, creativity, responsibilities, and tasks. ... The only thing that is not shared is blame. A strong leader accepts blame and gives the credit (when deserved) to others."
- **Enthusiasm:** "[Y]ou must love that which you do."

On the Second Tier ...

- **Self-Control:** “I prized intensity very much – controlled focus and directed energy. Self-Control makes this possible.”
- **Alertness:** “Be observing constantly, quick to spot a weakness and correct it or use it as the case may warrant.”
- **Initiative:** “[H]aving the courage to make decisions and take action. ... Use good judgment. ... Be quick, but don't hurry.”
- **Intentness:** “Be completely determined to reach your goal.”

On the Third, Central Tier ...

- **Condition:** “Practice moderation and balance in all that you do.”
- **Skill** [at the center of the Pyramid]: “[G]reat leaders are lifelong learners. They also take measures to create an organization that fosters and inspires learning throughout.”
- **Team Spirit:** “a willingness [later “eagerness”] to sacrifice personal interest or glory for the welfare of all.”

On the Fourth Tier ...

- **Poise:** “not being thrown off stride in how you behave or what you believe because of outside events.”
- **Confidence:** “the knowledge that your preparation is complete. ... All opponents have been respected, none feared.”

On the Fifth, Top Tier ...

- **Competitive Greatness:** “A real love for the hard battle, knowing it offers the

opportunity to be at your best when your best is required.”

And all that builds up to Success, which he famously defined as “peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to do the best of which you are capable.”

[↑ Back to Top](#)

“WOODENISMS”

Unlike the likewise wise and quotable baseball legend [Yogi Berra](#), Coach Wooden — a teacher of English with a master's degree — did not utter humorous malaprops; rather, he famously, appropriately articulated sincere, astute observations on life. Here (in alphabetical order) are some of his insightful, well-worded “Woodenisms.”

“A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment.”

“Ability is a poor man's wealth.”

“Adversity is the state in which man most easily becomes acquainted with himself, being especially free of admirers then.”

“Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”

“Be prepared and be honest.”

“Be quick, but don't hurry.” [“By that, I meant make a decision, take action; decide what you're going to do and do it.”]

“Before you can lead, you must follow.”

“Consider the rights of others before your own feelings, and the feelings of others before your own rights.”

“Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.”

“Don't measure yourself by what you have accomplished, but by what you should have accomplished with your ability.”

“Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.”

“Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be.”

“Failure to act is often the biggest failure of all.”

“Flexibility is the key to stability.”

“I'd rather have a lot of talent and a little experience than a lot of experience and a little talent.”

“If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?”

“If you're not making mistakes, then you're not doing anything. I'm positive that a doer makes mistakes.”

“It isn't what you do, but how you do it.”

“It's not so important who starts the game but who finishes it.”

“It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen.”

“It's what you learn after you know it all that counts.”

“Material possessions, winning scores, and great reputations are meaningless in the eyes of the Lord, because He knows what we really are and that is all that matters.”

“Never mistake activity for achievement.”

“Success comes from knowing that you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.”

“Success is never final; failure is never fatal. It's courage that counts.”

“Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best you are capable of becoming.”

“Talent is God-given. Be humble. Fame is man-given. Be grateful. Conceit is self-given. Be careful.”

“The main ingredient of stardom is the rest of the team.”

“The worst thing about new books is that they keep us from reading the old ones.”

“There are many things that are essential to arriving at true peace of mind; and one of the most important is faith, which cannot be acquired without prayer.”

“Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.”

“What you are as a person is far more important than what you are as a basketball player.”

“Winning takes talent; to repeat takes character.”

“You can't let praise or criticism get to you. It's a weakness to get caught up in either one.” [He also quoted Kipling: “If you can meet with triumph and disaster / And treat those two imposters just the same.”]

“You can't live a perfect day without doing something for someone who will never be able to repay you.”

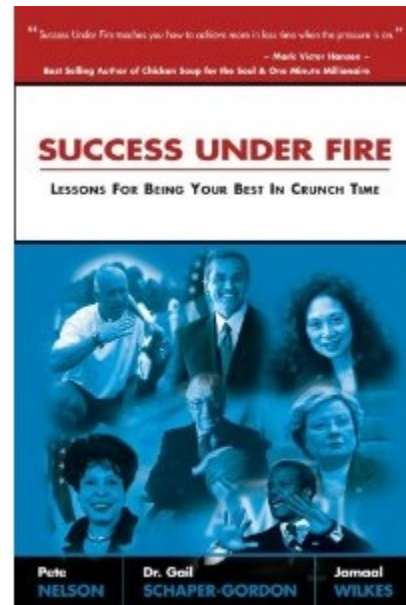
Coach, for a lifetime of such days, we will never be able to repay you. Thank you.

SOURCES

- <http://coachwooden.com/>
- <http://sports.espn.go.com/ncb/news/story?id=5249709>
- http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/john_wooden.html

[↑ Back to Top](#)

JOHN WOODEN BOOKS & WEB SITES (Including a Book by Gail et al.)



SUCCESS UNDER FIRE: LESSONS FOR BEING YOUR BEST IN CRUNCH TIME

By Pete Nelson, Dr. Gail Schaper-Gordon, and Jamaal Wilkes

From the Book Description

Ever wonder how is it that some people manage to consistently achieve successful results at the moments they absolutely need them while others freeze when the pressure is turned up? In this ground-breaking book, authors Pete Nelson, Dr. Gail Schaper-Gordon, and Jamaal Wilkes bring together 28 inspiring and true-life experiences of some of the world's top Crunch Time Performers.

You will learn from religious, business, sports, and political leaders, such as J.D. Power, Marilyn Tam, Mark Victor Hansen, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Congresswoman Diane Watson, Dr. Robert H. Schuller, Rabbi David Baron, Cal Ripken Jr., and Coach John Wooden.

Effectively woven into the fabric of these stories are 15 in-depth strategies and action steps, based on five simple principles, designed to help you apply the lessons they've learned from the stories and be able to successfully handle pressure-filled moments in your own life. Whether you're looking to build a business, grow your career, or enhance your personal life, *Success Under Fire* is your blueprint for succeeding by design.

Here's a brief sampling of what you'll discover:

- How to apply the 5 Principles of Crunch Time Success to your business and life.
- Create a vision for consistently achieving your best when it's needed most.
- Develop a powerful system for replicating your success under pressure.
- Build relationships that support you during both tough and easy times.

“Crunch time is when the adrenaline starts pumping. *Success Under Fire* helps you prepare for that one moment when you need to pull your resources together and get the job done.”
— *Patty DeDominic, Founder & CEO, PDQ Careers*

“*Success Under Fire* teaches you how to achieve more in less time when the pressure is on.”

— *Mark Victor Hansen, Best-Selling Author of Chicken Soup for the Soul*

About the Authors

Pete Nelson is one of North America's top sales and marketing consultants and the founder of Everywhere Marketing, an agency that creates business makeovers for women entrepreneurs and the creator behind the popular sales training program Selling In Color.

Dr. Gail Schaper-Gordon is a renowned business psychologist and recognized leader in the area of emotional intelligence, business leadership, and corporate team-building. She is the managing partner for Win-Win Workplace Solutions, a top organizational consulting firm that works with business owners to transform their individual and organizational potential into business success.

Jamaal Wilkes is the UCLA basketball and NBA legend who redefined grace under pressure during his illustrious career. Today, he is the CEO of Jamaal Wilkes Financial Advisors, a wealth management company, and a highly sought-after motivational speaker.

BOOKS BY JOHN WOODEN

- [*Coach Wooden's Leadership Game Plan for Success: 12 Lessons for Extraordinary Performance and Personal Excellence*](#), by John Wooden with Steve Jamison, 2009.

- [*The Essential Wooden: A Lifetime of Lessons on Leaders and Leadership*](#), by John Wooden with Steve Jamison, 2006.
- [*A Game Plan for Life: The Power of Mentoring*](#), by John Wooden and Don Yaeger, with foreword by John Maxwell, 2009.
- [*Inch and Miles: The Journey to Success*](#) (a children's book), by John Wooden with Steve Jamison and Peanut Louie Harper, illustrated by Susan F. Cornelison, 2003.
- [*My Personal Best: Life Lessons from an All-American Journey*](#), by John Wooden with Steve Jamison, 2004.
- [*They Call Me Coach*](#), by John Wooden, 2003.
- [*Wooden: A Lifetime of Observations and Reflections On and Off the Court*](#), by John Wooden with Steve Jamison, 1997.
- [*Wooden on Leadership: How to Create a Winning Organization*](#), by John Wooden, 2005.

WEB SITES ABOUT COACH WOODEN

- <http://www.coachwooden.com/>: his official Web site, with links to the John Wooden Leadership Course, books, and much more.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wooden
- <http://www.uclabruins.com/sports/m-baskbl/spec-rel/ucla-wooden-page.html>

[↑ Back to Top](#)