



## Episode 175 The Cost of Transformational Coaching

## Episode 176 Lessons from a Season of Challenges

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### Part 1 - Notes

Transformational coaching requires sacrifice and often comes at a high cost personally and professionally due to resistance from players, parents, and sometimes even administrators and staff. The question many of us will eventually face...

### Is it worth it?

Nate's Year Three Goal: To develop a Culture of Earning - playing time, starting positions, varsity jerseys would be earned through competition.

The challenges Nate faced last season:

- High expectations for a .500 team that brought almost everybody back
- A significant shooting slump to start the first third of the year led to a 2-5 start
- Disparaging remarks by one player toward another on social media
- Parents complaining to coaches and administrators about playing time after wins
- An atmosphere in the stands described as "the most negative environment I've ever experienced at a high school sporting event."
- An anonymous letter from "concerned parents" sent to the coaching staff and administration with suggestions on how to improve the offense, defense, rotations, practices, etc.
- The Parent Meeting from Hell featuring a four-page, single spaced list of complaints of everything we've done wrong toward the player in my three years as head coach.
- Players venting frustrations about the season with the administration, but being unwilling to communicate those directly to the coaching staff
- Captains who were reluctant to find solutions to our many challenges



- Pressure to play upperclassmen
- Players threatening to transfer, parents threatening to boycott senior night and the banquet

There's a difference between allowing people to be heard and feeding a narrative. The story people tell themselves within a team culture can change very quickly, and that story is influenced by parents, players, and administrators for better or worse. A few people can have a dramatic affect on a team's narrative.

### **What's it feel like?**

- Lost confidence as a coach in our process and how we thought about... everything
- The physiological effect of anxiety
  - An inability to fall asleep - followed by the challenge of getting out of bed
  - Racing heart rate and tension in the chest, back, shoulders, and neck
  - Loss of appetite
  - Consumed mentally and emotionally by the pressure and the unknown
- When players were free to log their complaints without us knowing who said what, we didn't know who to trust.
- Avoiding the "walk of shame" through the entryway where parents waited for players after the games

### **The Need for a Support System**

My "Board of Directors" included people who knew me - my philosophy, purpose, and mission - people who could speak life back into me:

- My Wife
- My Dad
- My Best Friend from Childhood
- A Pastor
- Two Current Staff Members
- One Coaching Mentor (Will Rey)
- One Former Player / Coach
- JP Nerbun
- Two Coaching Peers

### **Hubie Brown on Losing Your Job**



Losing your job will either come as a total shock or a complete relief, and for me it was an immediate sense of relief.

You will be tempted to become angry and bitter, but you have to guard against that anger being directed at the coaching profession. Too many good people have left coaching because they could not reconcile with the profession after being let go.

### **The hardest moment?**

The first game night when we were home as a family. It was the first time in 20 years that I wasn't on the sideline on a Friday night in January. My five year-old daughter was hiding under her sleeping bag in her tent, crying because she didn't understand why she couldn't go see her best friends on the basketball team. That was really hard.

At the same time, we were overwhelmed with how many people reached out in support as we have always tried to "make friends before we need them."

### **The Cost of Transformational Coaching**

There is a price to be paid for fighting the good fight. It can be emotionally exhausting. It can take a toll on a person's family and health. This isn't about Nate's story as much as it gives a voice to the reality many will inevitably face when they encounter resistance to a transformational approach.

**At the end of the day, it's still worth it to try.**

### **Part 2 - Notes**

**Thrive on Challenge was born out of failure.** JP's first blog was called "[My Guide to Losing](#)" written when his team was 4-15. Our work at TOC is all about helping coaches stay true to who they are and why they coach.

Growth happens in the midst of challenge.

### **Nate's Reflections on the Season from Hell**

- We lost the flow of information when players ceased to dialogue with the coaches, and captains refused to voice the team's concerns / frustrations. Without the updraft of information flowing from the team to the staff we were unable to



problem solve with our captains council as we normally would when challenges arose.

- We took our culture for granted and did not revisit our standards and expectations prior to the start of the season, particularly when it came to how we wanted to handle playing time issues as a team. We never talked about who we want to be when facing disappointment, competition for spots, etc.

### **JP's Early Season Survey**

What are the three top issues our culture is likely to face this season?

Playing time was a common concern, so in response the team created the "Playing Time Standard" to identify what it should look like / who we want to be when we don't get what we want?

The key is using your core values to identify standards in areas that are likely to cause drama before those issues arise. These conversations should be tailored to each individual team's needs from year-to-year.

### **How have I become a better coach as a result of this experience?**

I am even more committed to the things that matter most.

Our values became even more crystallized:

- We expected great effort.
- We would love each other.
- Playing time would be earned.

These were my non-negotiables, and we would not compromise under pressure. This also gave us peace of mind in the aftermath knowing that we stood firm on the things we believed in most.

### **When players resist the responsibility that comes with a player-led culture.**

It is surprisingly common for athletes and captains to deflect responsibility for decision-making when building a player-led culture.



The challenge for coaches is to create enough psychological safety where concerns can be shared, and for players to recognize the impact that their input can have on the team (not to mention the personal development that occurs when serving in a leadership capacity).

### **Be committed to the path you believe in.**

Head football coach [Matt Campbell](#) was not hired at Iowa State to continue to do what his predecessor had done. He was brought in to change the culture and the program. He was hired to do what he believed in, and the results have been stunning.

### **There will be a storm.**

One of the coaches in the TOC community took over a high school program after dropping down from the college level. She built a five-year plan with her AD that included standards, systems, values, etc. Once the plan was in place, the AD told her “at some point a storm will come and we will have to go to war to defend the plan. Once we get through the storm, real change will start to take hold.” They weathered a storm in Year Three and now have a successful program built on a strong cultural foundation. Once players and parents learned that this was how things were going to be, they were free to choose whether or not the program was right for them. That is when you know the culture has taken hold and will begin to bear fruit.

### **Lessons From an Optometrist**

For nearly 30 years, Dr. Corpi has organized trips to underserved parts of the world. His goal is to visit as many schools as he can during a 7-10 day period to examine the eyes of students and send back prescription glasses to those who need them.

Each visit allows him to see approximately 1,000 kids. 99% of those students have minimal issues with their sight. But that does not discourage Dr. Corpi because he understands his mission. His purpose is to find the 10 kids whose eyesight is so bad that without glasses, they will never learn to read, they will never be able to operate a car or hold a steady job. He knows that a pair of glasses will change the trajectory of their lives forever, and that is worth the cost of sifting through hundreds of kids to find those who need him the most.

Dr. Corpi understands the personal cost, but the reward for others makes it worth it for him. As coaches we need to reflect on what price we are willing to pay to make a difference in the 1% of athletes whose lives might be changed forever because of our influence.

### **Do I regret taking the job?**



- I have much to be thankful for during my time at Linn-Mar. We got to be innovative, to coach a higher level of basketball, to lead a larger staff, to face all kinds of unique challenges that have made me a far better coach today than I was when I left Springville in 2017.
- I have a new perspective on how much I love coaching. It is my best fit in life, and I appreciate every opportunity I have today as an assistant to coach and build relationships through the game of basketball.
- The story of our decision is one I am proud to tell. We took the job because we believed we were called to go with no guarantee of success. We wanted to be obedient to our faith and set an example for our kids to follow.