

## EPISODE 193 - Developing a Program Identity - Part I

- The Difference Between Culture and Identity
- Why Team Identity Matters
- How to Start Forging an Identity
- Special Guests: Boomer Roberts & Will Rey

**Prologue** - Listen to Matt Campbell's complete pregame speech before Iowa State faced Oregon in the 2021 Fiesta Bowl [HERE](#).



### The Difference Between Culture and Identity

**Culture** is “how we do things around here.” It describes behaviors, beliefs, traditions, and customs. It’s what we do.

**Identity** is who we are. It’s how we see ourselves. Identity drives your culture. It’s the essence of who you want to be as a team / program.

### Identity asks, Who do we want to be?

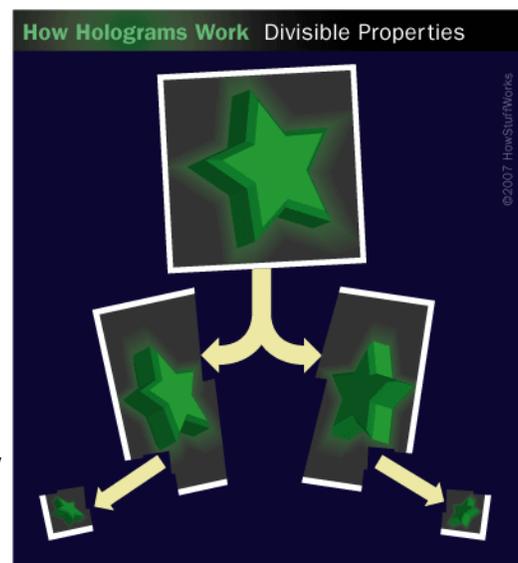
Identity is what ties everything together - your culture, strategies, standards, etc. It’s the vision for who we want to be.

### The Hologram

A hologram is the appearance of a 3-dimensional image. When it is broken into smaller pieces, each fragment contains the original image.

Cultural identity is similar - wherever our team exists there should be a consistent representation of who we are.

It is similar to DNA in that our identity should be present in every manifestation of our team - in practice,





the film room, the weight room, on the court, on the bench, etc.

**“Who we are” should be instilled in every moment of our existence together.**

### Why Team Identity Matters

Identity goes beyond a few key values, the words on the walls, or “culture speak”.

Identity is both ASPIRATIONAL and INSTRUCTIONAL. It casts a vision of who we want to become and informs our standards, behaviors, and decision-making along the way.

It becomes a culture-driver when the team begins to see themselves in this way.

Consider the difference between “this is important” and “this is who I am.” The second is more powerful than the first.

**If you know who you are, you know what to do.** - Cody Royle, [The Tough Stuff](#)

Focusing on identity can be freeing psychologically because it allows players to strive toward something that is both under their control AND produces results without being affected by the scoreboard.

As a team experiences more and more success by focusing on identity it also has a dramatic impact on confidence. “Let’s just do what we do.”

A strong identity informs behaviors even in times of turmoil and crisis.

### How to Create a Team Identity

Create a process that involves both the coach’s vision AND player input.

Mike Abrashoff, author of [It’s Your Ship](#), interviewed every single sailor on the failing USS Benfold. His original vision was to become the “Best Damn Ship in the Navy” but pursued that vision by listening to the input of his crew.

Listen to Mike on Episodes [157](#) & [158](#) of the Coaching Culture Podcast.

**Nate** - At Springville our identity evolved organically as I used this phrase spontaneously during a pregame talk in 2015.



## **Play Hard - Love Each Other - Do What We Do.**

I had a sense of who we wanted to be, but lacked the best language to describe it until that day.

**JP** - Mark Cascio settled on **“Meaningful and Memorable”** to describe the essence of his program.

## **Where do you start?**

### **Boomer Roberts - Know yourself.**

- Know who you are and why you coach.
- Understand your WHY
- Identify your purpose in coaching
- Ask those who are closest to you for their opinion
- **Be true to that vision**

### **Will Rey - Spend time in solitude.**

- Take time to think everyday
- What do you see - what is your vision?
- Include reflections on strategy, team interactions, parents, etc.
- You cannot mirror what someone else does - it must be yours

### **You must begin by understanding yourself.**

## **EPISODE 194 - Developing a Program Identity - Part 2: The Coach's Vision, The Players' Input**

- Examples of Program Identity
- The Importance of Simplicity
- Incorporating Player Input
- How Identity Evolves Over Time

*Special Guests: Boomer Roberts, Mike Avery, TJ Rosene, Will Rey*

**Prologue** - For Mike Avery, former head men's soccer coach at Valparaiso University, the process of forming an identity started with a stack of yellow legal pads and a long list of everything he wanted to accomplish at Valpo.



Every morning after that, he read through his vision and acted like the coach of the team they were trying to become.

*"All I tried to do was make a clear picture of what we were trying to be, and act like that."*

### **How would you define or describe your program identity?**

#### **Boomer Roberts, Purdue NW Men's Basketball**

Two phrases define us:

- Love, Joy, Toughness
- In the Fight

We examined what made the program at Vanguard successful (NAIA D-1 National Champions, 2014) and found we loved each other more, they had great joy every single day, and we were physically and mentally tougher.

At Trinity International, we had to find something that separated us from everyone else. We decided we could run, lift, and condition with our guys. Anything we ask them to do, we will do.

We are 100% in the fight with each other.

#### **Will Rey, Northridge Prep HS Men's Basketball**

We are a program focused on helping others - teammates, younger players, etc.

We want to have a great experience while giving one's self for the benefit of others.

That started as a coach-directed approach when I began at Northridge, but has since evolved into a joint effort with the players. Many of our customs, traditions, and rituals have come from the players during my 17 years.

#### **TJ Rosene, Emmanuel College Men's Basketball**

We are a blend of coach-led and player-led. There is an established identity, or foundation, we want every team to have, but we also want each team to have their own expression of that identity.



Gratitude & Attitude. This is who we are.

We landed on these two words because we wanted something simple, sound, and solid.

**JP** - Determining your identity is not something that happens overnight, but evolves over time as we gain experience and perspective as coaches.

Simplicity of language is extremely important, as is allowing each team to decide what those values will look like for them.

**Nate** - The challenge is to go from brainstorming to three words that say, "This is who we are."

Those three words become invitational - they can be used to invite fans, parents, players, coaches into a common experience.

**JP** - A great example is from a high school principal who used the phrase, "For the higher good." Every student could articulate what that meant to them.

### **How do you incorporate player input into the formation of your identity?**

#### **Boomer Roberts**

We recruit to our identity. We will not recruit a player who doesn't love hoops, and doesn't love their teammates.

We ask ourselves, "Can we do life with these guys?"

Once guys arrive on campus - we meet about it, we talk about it, we emphasize certain things in practice every day until it becomes a habit.

#### **Mike Avery, Head Men's Soccer Coach at Fort Wayne FC**

I am more collaborative now than I was when I started. However, leadership isn't direction. It's about guidance.

I am more willing to consider player input because we are in this together. I want to create dialogue with my players to better understand their perspective.

#### **Will Rey**



Many of our customs, traditions, and standards are the result of players who have come before.

It's the job of the seniors to educate the other players about who we are, and who we are not. Much of this happens when the coach is not around.

### **TJ Rosene**

We start practice by celebrating one another, or talking about things we are grateful for.

Culture and identity really shows up in the little things. We had several players come up to coaches and thank them for working hard, or thanking them for practice.

**Nate** - What all these examples have in common is that each program has a consistent DNA. It is similar to my hair color being consistent over time, but my *hairstyle* might vary from year-to-year (when I had hair).

**JP** - Many of our coaches have successfully implemented the talent assessment tool to evaluate core values in addition to skills and athletic ability.

When onboarding new team members it becomes especially important to have consistent conversations about your identity, and what it looks like on a daily basis.

### **EPISODE 195 - Developing a Program Identity - Part 3: Identity, Standards, and Decision-Making**

- How Identity Informs Decision-Making
- Standards as a Reflection of Identity
- Balancing Competing Values
- Coaching Your Team's Identity with Jerry Lynch

*Special Guests: Boomer Roberts, Mike Avery, TJ Rosene, Will Rey, Jerry Lynch*

**Prologue** - So many people work for something, but there is power and purpose when you work *from* your identity... From a place of knowing who you are, whose you are, what your identity is, and why you do what you do. - Boomer Roberts

Our guests will discuss two critical steps to operating from your identity:

- 1) Determine the type of program you want to lead



- 2) Use that identity to guide your behaviors, decisions, and the standards of your program

### Two Key Phrases

- “Working *from* your identity...” - Boomer Roberts
- “If you know who you are, you know what to do” - Cody Royle

### Will Rey, Northridge Prep HS Men’s Basketball

There are three types of players in our program:

- Former Players
- Current Players
- Future Players

The program belongs to all three. My role as coach is to be caretaker of the culture and identity from one year to the next. Our best senior classes have taken responsibility for teaching and living that identity as a model for others.

### How does your identity influence your decision-making as a coach?

### TJ Rosene, Emmanuel College Men’s Basketball

How do we play with a chip on our shoulder without being dirty, while playing the game the right way, and not disrespecting our opponent. Many of our conversations stem from questions like this.

We don’t need to talk trash because our game will speak for itself.

We even have gratitude for our opponent and their preparation as well.

When you know who you are, you show up and do your business.

### Boomer Roberts, Purdue NW Men’s Basketball

Once you are about something, and are surrounded by people committed to the same values, it takes the decision-making out of it. If you know the type of person you want to be, the things you will do and will not do, then there aren’t a lot of decisions left to be made.



The players police that identity. When they say, “We don’t do that...” it ends right there.

We ask our guys, what do you need from us as leaders? Do you feel that we are “In the Fight” with you? We have a constant self-check with each other. This helps make sure everyone is going in the same direction.

**JP** - Players are more likely to take ownership when they are part of the process of setting standards derived from your identity.

We encourage coaches to do a Standards Review throughout the season to find greater clarity as to what that identity should look like in various situations.

**Nate** - We started with three words at Mount Vernon, Gratitude, Effort, and Love. Our first application of these values was to Open Gym and how we want to welcome our freshmen into the program.

### **Mike Avery, Head Men’s Soccer Coach at Fort Wayne FC**

The more clear the picture of who I am, or who we are, the easier it is to live up to that.

We’ve all seen coaches yell at their teams to [“Stay calm!”](#)

The more self-reflection I engage in the more I learn about who I am and what’s important to me. The more time I spend in introspection, the easier it is to impart those values to my team. In that regard, I have become more of a mentor than a director.

**Nate** - Another thing that I’ve discovered over the years is how to ask the right questions, both of myself and of my team.

**Mike** - How do we balance competing goals such as...

- Being ultra-competitive while having fun
- Being ultra-confident yet be humble in what we do

**Nate** - Steve Kerr once asked his team, “How do we have fun around here?” Is it just silliness and being goofy, or is basketball fun? Is competing fun? Is improving fun? We deliberately tried to unpack what that looked like for us at North Linn.

**JP** - Mike gives us a great reminder that identity formation is an on-going conversation.



Sometimes we need to see ourselves less as a traditional coach, but more as a mentor that helps others discover more about themselves.

### **What advice would you give to a coach about why it's important to find an identity, and where to begin?**

For transformational coaches, start by asking, "Why do I coach?"

We have all seen great talent underachieve, typically because they have human problems and haven't taken the time to build relationships, culture, etc.

If you want to win championships, you would want a team with close bonds, that played hard, etc.

If you are a transformational coach who sees "multiple wins" you can build a team that will enjoy the process, will love one another, and will grow more if you are willing to invest in this process.

To me, this is the most fun part of the journey.

**Nate** - It truly is a performance advantage.

**TJ** - When you are trying to get more out of less, it matters even more.

**JP** - When everyone aligns with that vision of who we want to be, everything gets easier.

On a personal note, I have become a "5am Guy" - that's how I see myself. It's become a defining characteristic of my personal identity. It's helped me get out of bed, and can help our teams as well.

### **Jerry Lynch on how to teach your values...**

Often our team identities will be a direct reflection of who the head coach is. Steve Kerr came up with Joy, Enthusiasm, Compassion, Selflessness. That's who Steve Kerr is.

You cannot implement values that are not your own.

Just because you have identified values doesn't mean that they will be effective.



When you see a value demonstrated in practice, blow the whistle and recognize it.

You can coach it, and players can learn it, while you practice.

You must start with:

- Who am I?
- What do I value as a person?

The coach may choose 3-4 and the players may choose 1-2, and then coach those in practice. Each week you can emphasize one specific value.

**Note** - Your identity as a program will always be a manifestation of who you are as a coach. It can't be copied, stolen, or quoted from Twitter. You have to figure out who you are and work from there.