

# A Book Report on Wooden - A Lifetime of Observations & Reflections On and Off the Court

By Coach John Wooden & Steve Jamison

(Book Report by Gary Tomlinson)

**Preface:** John Wooden was a three-time All-American while playing basketball at Purdue University. He is the only man ever elected to college basketball's hall of fame as both player and coach.

As a coach of UCLA's basketball team he produced ten national championship teams in twelve years. Seven of those national championships came in a row. (1964, 1965, 1972 – 1973, 1975)

He had 88 consecutive victories (previous record, 60), 38 straight NCAA tournament wins (previous record, 13), and eight undefeated Pac-8 crowns. Undefeated season after undefeated season bringing coach of the year award after coach of the year award, including selection as Sports Illustrated sportsman of the year in 1972. A lifetime winning percentage of over 80 percent.

Wooden: A Lifetime of Observations & Reflections On and Off the Court is a vehicle for Coach Wooden to teach. Below are notes from his book.

Wooden's priorities are – family, faith, and friends.

His favorite maxims:

- “Be quick, but don't hurry”
- “Failing to prepare is preparing to fail”
- “Never mistake activity for achievement”
- “Discipline yourself and others won't need to”

## **Nothing is Stronger than Gentleness:**

We had a team of mules named Jack and Kate on our farm. Kate would often get stubborn and lie down on me when I was plowing. I couldn't get her up no matter how roughly I treated her. Dad would see my predicament and walk across the field until he was close enough to say “Kate.” Then she'd get up and start working again. He never touched her in anger. **It took me a long time to understand that even a stubborn mule responds to gentleness.**

## **The Real Coaches & Teachers:**

Are the parents! **Being a role model is the most powerful form of educating.**

Wooden's Two Sets of Threes:

Never lie.

Never cheat.

Never steal.

Don't whine.

Don't complain.

Don't make excuses.

## **Help Others:**

The basic precept of all the great religions is the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Simply stated, it means, "Help others." You can never acquire happiness without giving of yourself to someone else without the expectation of getting something back.

## **Give It Away to Get it Back:**

There is a wonderful, almost mystical, law of nature that says three of the things we want most – happiness, freedom, and peace of mind – are always attained when we give them to others.

## **Life's Puzzlers'**

- Why is it easier to criticize than to compliment?
- Why is it easier to give others blame than to give them credit?
- Why is it that so many who are quick to make suggestions find it so difficult to make decisions?
- Why can't we realize that it only weakens those we want to help when we do things for them that they should do themselves?
- Why is it so much easier to allow emotions rather than reason to control our decisions?
- Why does the person with the least to say usually take the longest to say it?
- Why is it so difficult to realize that others are more likely to listen to us if first we listen to them?
- Why is it so much easier to be negative than positive?
- Why is it so difficult to motivate ourselves when we know that results come only through motivation?
- Why is it so difficult to say thank you to someone when those are two of our own favorite words to hear?
- Why do we dread adversity when we know that facing it is the only way to become stronger, smarter, better?
- Why is it so hard for so many people to realize that winners are usually the ones who work harder, work longer, and as a result, perform better?

- Why are there so many who want to build up the weak by tearing down the strong?
- Why is it that so many non-attainers are quick to criticize, question, and belittle the attainers?
- Why is it so hard for us to understand that we cannot antagonize and positively influence at the same time?
- Why is it so much easier to complain about the things we do not have than to make the most of and appreciate the things we do have?

### **Trusting Others:**

Trusting is part of our higher nature. Doubting is a lower instinct.

### **Politeness and Courtesy:**

You get more than you give when you are polite and courteous. You don't pay.  
You are paid.

### **What You Are:**

"Never believe you're better than anybody else, but remember that you're just as good as everybody else." No better, but just as good!

### **Character:**

Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Character is what you really are. Reputation is what other people say you are.

### **The Fundamental Goal:**

The goal in life is to make the effort to do the best job you are capable of doing. The effort is what counts in everything. Perfection is what you are striving for, but perfection is an impossibility. Failure is not measuring up to your ability because you haven't prepared.

### **Learn Forever, Die Tomorrow:**

Always be learning, acquiring knowledge, and seeking wisdom with a sense that you are immortal and that you will need much knowledge and wisdom for that long journey ahead. Know that when you are through learning, you are through.

### **Timeless Traits:**

People like to help, to be polite, to be considerate. I believe it's basic human nature. When you start displaying courtesy, politeness, and consideration, people start displaying them right back.

### **Giving & Receiving:**

“No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor had been the reward for what he gave.” (President Calvin Coolidge)

### **Apples:**

Every year we hear about a few bad apples. The percentage of good apples is large. We just don't hear about them. The media will play up what's wrong more than what's right. As we work to correct what is wrong, we must always keep in mind all the things that are right with America and Americans.

### **Bringing Out the Best in People:**

People want to believe you are sincerely interested in them as persons, not just for what they can do for you. It always comes back to courtesy, politeness, and consideration.

### **The Greatest Joy:**

I believe the greatest joy one can have is doing something for someone else without any thought of getting something in return.

### **A Reminder: Be True to Yourself:**

In life, we're not always lucky enough to have someone help us with important decisions. Most of the time you have to figure it out for yourself and it may be confusing and difficult. You'll usually do all right, though, if you have the courage to be true to yourself.

### **Make Fate Your Friend:**

I believe that things turn out best for those who make the best of the way things turn out.

### **Young Folks, Old Folks:**

The young must remember that all good and worthwhile things take time. Their elders must remember that although not all change is progress, all progress is the result of change (and to resist or fear change is often to get in the way of progress).

### **Six Ways to Bring Out the Best in People:**

1. Keep courtesy and consideration for others foremost in your mind, at home and away.

2. Try to have fun without trying to be funny.
3. While you can't control what happens to you, you can control how you react. Make good manners an automatic reaction.
4. Seek individual opportunities to offer a genuine compliment.
5. Remember that sincerity, optimism, and enthusiasm are more welcome than sarcasm, pessimism, and laziness.
6. Laugh with others, never at them.

### **A Successful Journey is the Destination:**

Try your hardest in all way and you are a success. Period. Cervantes wrote, "The journey is better than the inn." Set your compass in a chosen direction and then focus your attention and your efforts completely on the journey of preparation. A successful journey becomes your destination and is where your real accomplishment lies.

### **The Realistic Optimist:**

I believe one of my strengths is my ability to keep negative thoughts out. I am an optimist. I believe this results from the fact that I set realistic goals – ones that are difficult to achieve, but within reach. You might say I'm a realistic optimist.

### **Details Create Success:**

Question: How can I become an optimist?  
Answer: Proper preparation and attention to details!

You will find that success and attention to details, the smallest details, usually go hand in hand.

### **Paying the Price:**

People usual know what they should do to get what they want. They just won't do it. They won't pay the price. Understand there is a price to be paid for achieving anything of significance. You must be willing to pay the price.

### **A Worthwhile Goal:**

The goal I believe is important is the goal of making the most of your abilities. That goal is within your reach.

I believe you can do more good by being good than in any other way.

**Individual Honors:** It is best not to drink too deeply from a cup full of fame. It can be very intoxicating, and intoxicated people often do foolish things. Fame is just something

other people perceive you to be. You're no different. You're still you. It's their illusion; don't make it your illusion.

### **Eight Suggestions for Succeeding:**

1. Fear no opponent. Respect every opponent.
2. Remember, it's the perfection of the smallest details that make big things happen.
3. Keep in mind that hustle makes up for many a mistake.
4. Be more interested in character than reputation.
5. Be quick, but don't hurry.
6. Understand that the harder you work, the more luck you will have.
7. Know that valid self-analysis is crucial for improvement.
8. Remember that there is no substitute for hard work and careful planning.  
Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.

### **Why Teams Fail:**

Understanding that the good of the group comes first is fundamental to being a highly productive member of a team. No matter how great your product, if your sales department doesn't produce, you won't get the results you want. Different departments must all function well for the company to succeed. Different individuals must also function well for the departments to succeed. It takes all doing their best.

### **Adversity:**

Adversity often produces the unexpected opportunity. Look for it. Appreciate and utilize it. This is difficult to do if you're feeling sorry for yourself because you're faced with adversity. We get stronger when we test ourselves. Adversity can make us better. We must be challenged to improve, and adversity is the challenger.

### **Tricks of the Trade:**

If you spend too much time learning the tricks of the trade, you may not learn the trade.

### **Failure Is Not Fatal, But Failure to Change Might Be:**

Failure to change is often just stubbornness that comes from an unwillingness to learn, an inability to realize that you're not perfect. There cannot be progress without change – even though not all change is progress.

### **Character Creates Longevity:**

I believe ability can get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there. A big part of character is the self-discipline needed to avoid complacency, resist temptation, and understand that past success doesn't guarantee future success.

### **Persistence is Stronger than Failure:**

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.” (President Calvin Coolidge)

### **A Sacred Trust:**

A leader, particularly a teacher or coach, has a most powerful influence on those he or she leads, perhaps more than anyone outside of the family. Therefore, it is the obligation of that leader, teacher, or coach to treat such responsibility as a grave concern.

### **Who Can Lead?**

Leadership is the ability to get individuals to work together for the common good and the best possible results while at the same time letting them know they did it themselves.

Some people are automatic leaders. Some can never be leaders. But many who don't think of themselves as leaders have the potential to become such if they understand the fundamentals of getting individuals to work together. Those fundamentals can be learned. I learned them.

### **A Leader's Difficult Task:**

A person in a position of leadership must make decisions. Making decisions is a tough job. Those under a leader can make suggestions. Making suggestions is an easy job. Everybody has a suggestion. Not everybody has a decision. Perhaps that is why there are so few good leaders.

### **Respect:**

The most essential thing for a leader to have is the respect of those under his or her supervision. It starts with giving them respect. You make it clear that you are working together. Those under your supervision are not working for you but with you, and you all have a common goal.

If they don't respect their leader, people just punch the clock in and out. There is not clock-watching when a leader has respect.

### **Walk the Walk:**

A leader's most powerful ally is his or her own example. Leaders don't just talk about doing something; they do it.

### **Pride as a Motivator:**

Pride is a better motivator than fear. I never wanted to teach through fear, punishment, or intimidation. Remember, pride comes when you give respect.

### **Leaders Listen:**

Listen to those under your supervision. A good motto is "Others, too, have brains."

### **Another Golden Rule:**

Reward individuals for things well done. It doesn't have to be in a material way. Sometimes a pat on the back is more meaningful in many ways than something material. A smile. A nod.

### **Leadership and Punishment:**

Leaders have to discipline. Those who dispense discipline must remember that its purpose is to help, to prevent, to correct, to improve, rather than punish. You are not likely to get productive results if you antagonize. Punishment antagonizes. The only goal of criticism or discipline is improvement. It may hurt in the short term, but it will pay dividends in the future.

### **Leadership is More Than Facts:**

There is a vast difference between leaders in their ability to teach and to motivate those under their supervision. Knowledge alone is not good enough to get desired results. You must have the more elusive ability to teach and to motivate. **This defines a leader; if you can't teach and you can't motivate, you can't lead.**

(To be a good teacher, you must be a good student. To be a good motivator you must be able to understand the human system side of business.)

### **Spiking, Dunking, Taunting, Flaunting:**

Your reaction to victory or defeat is an important part of how you play the game. I wanted my players to display style and class in either situation – to lose with grace, to win with humility.

### **Being Prepared:**

The time to prepare isn't after you have been given the opportunity. It's long before than opportunity arises. Once the opportunity arrives, it's too late to prepare.

### **The Value in Feeling Valued:**

Everyone on the team, from the manager to the coach, from a secretary to an owner, has a role to fulfill. That role is valuable if the team is to come close to reaching its potential. The leader must understand this.

Every single member of your team needs to feel wanted and appreciated. If they are on the team, they deserve to be valued and to feel valued.

### **The Laws of Learning:**

The four laws of learning are explanation, demonstration, imitation, and repetition. The goal is to create a correct habit that can be produced instinctively under great pressure.

To make sure this goal was achieved, I created eight laws of learning; namely explanation, demonstration, imitation, repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition, and repetition.

People learn more effectively if information is given in bite-size amounts rather than everything all at once.

### **A Leader Can Be Led:**

The leader must make the final decision, but it should be based on his or her evaluation of the best way. The suggestions and ideas of others should play an important part in the decision. That's why a leader needs to retain an open mind.

### **Criticism and Praise:**

Your strength as an individual depends on how you respond to both criticism and praise. If you let either one have any special effect on you, it's going to hurt us. Whether it's criticism or praise, deserved or undeserved, makes no difference. If we let it affect us, it hurts us.

It goes back to what my dad used to say. “If you get caught up in things over which you have no control, it will adversely affect those things over which you have control.”

### **Dealing with Big-Headedness:**

“Talent in God-given: be humble.”  
“Fame is man-given: be thankful.”  
“Conceit is self-given: be careful.”

### **Recalling Dad’s Words:**

“Always try to be the very best that you can be. Learn from others, yes. But don’t just try to be better than they are. You have no control over that. Instead try, and try very hard, to be the best you can be. That you have control over. Maybe you’ll be better than someone else and maybe you won’t. That part of it will take care of itself.

“Remember, you’re just as good as anyone, but you’re not better than anybody.”

### **My Definition of Success:**

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

### **The Pyramid of Success:**

Faith / Patience  
Competitive Greatness  
Poise / Confidence  
Condition / Skill / Team Spirit  
Self-Control / Alertness / Initiative / Intentness  
**Industriousness** / Friendship / Loyalty / Cooperation / **Enthusiasm**

### **Industriousness:** (Cornerstone of the Pyramid)

I mean very simply that you have to work and work hard. There is no substitute for work. Worthwhile things come only from work.

### **Enthusiasm:** (Cornerstone of the Pyramid)

By that I mean simply that you have to like what you’re doing; your heart must be in it. Without enthusiasm you can’t work up to your fullest ability.

Enthusiasm brushes off on those with whom you come into contact, those you work with and for. You must have enthusiasm, especially if you're a leader or if you wish to become a leader.

### **Leadership Requires Enthusiasm:**

People in positions of leadership have many responsibilities. They have to influence those under their supervision in a positive way. They must be interested in finding the best way rather than having their own way. Leaders must make sure that those under their supervision understand that they're working with the leader, not for the leader.

But, most important, leaders must always generate enthusiasm if they wish to bring out the best in themselves and those under their supervision.

Regardless of whether you're leading as a teacher, coach, parent, or businessperson, or you're a member of a leadership team, you must have enthusiasm. Without it you cannot be industrious to the full level of your ability. With it you stimulate others to higher and higher levels of achievement.

### **The Apex: Success:**

The highest point of a pyramid is called the apex. In our Pyramid, it is success. What is so important to recognize is that you are totally in control of your success – not your opponent, not the judges, critics, media, or anyone else. It's up to you. That's all you can ask for; the chance to determine your success by yourself.

The potential is within each of us waiting to come forth. That's what you must always keep in mind. You have success within. It's up to you to bring it out.

### **Some Favorite Maxims:**

- The best way to improve the team is to improve our-self.
- Big things are accomplished only through the perfection of minor details.
- Ability may get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there.
- If I am through learning, I am through.
- Time spent getting even would be better spent trying to get ahead.
- Be most interested in finding the best way, not in having your own way.
- What is right is more important than who is right.
- You handle things. You work with people.
- Do not permit what you cannot do to interfere with what you can do.