

Discipline Is Necessary for Good Leadership

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Coach Wooden felt strongly that discipline was essential for any group whether it was a business, family or sports team to be successful.

In his book, *Wooden*, with Steve Jamison, Coach summarized his perspective:

Leaders have to discipline. Those who dispense discipline must remember that its purpose is to help, to improve, to correct, to prevent, not to punish, humiliate, or retaliate.

You are not likely to get productive results if you antagonize. Punishment antagonizes.

Self-control is essential for discipline and mastery of emotions, for discipline of self and discipline of those under your supervision.

Former player Kenny Washington described Coach's style of discipline: "He would never degrade, abuse or humiliate individuals, even though he had the power to do it. He gave respect, even when discipline was doled out."

Former player and assistant Coach Gary Cunningham described Coach Wooden's disciplinary style as: "not emotional, just very intense."

Former player Keith Erickson described it as: "Not with any anger, just very stern."

Discipline becomes less effective when you speak with anger and/or question the character or intent of the person you are disciplining.

The boss who yells at the tardy employee “You’re late again...you are irresponsible and obviously don’t care about this job.” has attacked that person’s character (you are irresponsible) and intent (you don’t care about this job). The boss has antagonized the employee and limited the effectiveness of the follow up discipline.

The boss who calmly advises the tardy employee “I’m sure you are not doing this on purpose, but you were late again today. The position we have to offer at our company requires that you are on time for work. How can we fix this?” keeps the focus on the behavior/action and moves the employee into the solutions department.

When star player Bill Walton told Coach that he did not have the right to tell him how long he could wear his hair, Coach Wooden did not respond with an angry diatribe about Bill being disrespectful or selfish. He simply told him:

Bill you’re right, I don’t have the right to tell you when to cut your hair but I do have the right to decide who plays on this team, and we’re going to miss you.

Coach did not question Bill’s intent or character. He calmly and directly dealt with the behavior and consequence. Bill quickly got a haircut and returned to the team, his pride intact; ready to play.

Coach summed it up this way: “When discipline was required, I tried to dole it out in a manner that was firm but fair, with no emotionalism or anger attached. Anger prevents proper thinking and makes you vulnerable.”

Yours in Coaching,
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