

The Gold Standard

Building a World-Class Team

Mike Krzyzewski
With Jamei K. Spatola

Notes by Bob Richey

Chapter 1 – Time To Choose Your People

- When deciding which individuals to select to form a team, you have to ask the hard questions:
 - Who
 - Are we playing against?
 - Will we bring together to face that competition?
 - Do we represent?
 - What
 - Are our particular challenges?
 - Was missing in our recent losses?
 - Is our motivation?
 - When
 - Are we playing?
 - Do we assemble to grow together as a unit?
 - Where
 - Are we playing?
 - Is our venue and what particular challenges does it present?
 - Why
 - Was the old system not working?
 - Do we care?
 - How
 - Do we change a culture?
 - Do we prepare to meet our challenge?
 - Much time to we have to prepare?
- Guys who play together can beat a group of all-stars on any given night. Team over talent. Collective identity over individual ego. We borrowed from international teams like Argentina and Spain the need for familiarity with one another and for continuity.
- Jerry and I both believed that it was our current system that was flawed, not the players. This system was no longer conducive to winning.
- For one thing, there is no substitute for talent. And while a great attitude and a solid game plan will take you far, you cannot achieve at the highest level without having some aptitude.
- I also believe that a team needs some people with experience-veterans.
- Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that your group doesn't need a youthful element. It absolutely does. Youth brings a certain excitement to your undertaking that helps keep the team and you, as the leader, fresh.
- But in the basketball business, I have always felt that a great team is the one that can be unified on the defensive end of the floor.
- Personalities are also a factor.
- When building a team, the members of that team need to be explicitly told what the parameters of their commitment are going to be, what is expected of them. The honesty and openness of your initial communication with these individuals

lays the groundwork for the future of your relationship. In team building, you want this foundation to be one of trust and forthright communication. There shouldn't be any surprises.

- We wanted to select those individuals who had talent but who also had high standards.
- The bottom line was the desire to WIN. We sought out individuals with a standard of excellence. We had to be sure that we could operate with a common purpose.
- “The twelve players selected have incredible talent, and more importantly, we think this team has excellent leadership, great versatility and balance, and very good chemistry, which are critical in building a great team.” Jerry Colangelo

Chapter 2 – Time to Understand Context

- Often leaders reevaluate their positions only after that have suffered a defeat. I learned the lesson that you should constantly analyze and evaluate where you stand within the greater context of what you are trying to accomplish.
- It is your responsibility to teach your team enough context to ensure that they all understand their place within it.
- “They reminded us of what happened in the past and what the future could hold.” Jason Kidd
- “You can no longer beat great teams with just a group of all-stars.” Jerry Colangelo
- International teams were able to play together instinctively.
- I think it is a mistake to automatically preclude from your team individuals who have been involved in a past failure. In fact, failure can be an essential step on the path to success. It means you have tested your limits and likely learned a great deal. If failure does occur, a leader should use it productively.
- I told them that West Point taught me failure was not a destination; it also taught me how to test my limits and change them.
- Those who do not learn from the past are doom to repeat it.

Chapter 3 – Time to Gain Perspective

- No matter how important you believe yourself to be, there is always something bigger than you. As your team pursues its goal, it is vital that you maintain a sense of perspective.
- I subscribe to one of the most basic methods of teaching: hearing, seeing, and doing. The hearing and seeing are easy. Even the doing is easy on a logistical level—that is what practice is all about. But to get to this deeper level, to have this perspective I'm referring to, you have to give your team opportunities to *feel*, to experience the emotion that can accompany a team endeavor. Imagine how much better your team can become if you can engage the mind and spirit of each

- individual and, even more, imagine the level your team can achieve if you share the *same* mind and spirit.
- Colonel Brown spoke first, writing two words on the whiteboard in the meeting room: selfless service. “What makes teams great is selfless service.”
 - Colonel Brown told us three things about selfless service:
 - It’s about being a part of a cause greater than yourself
 - It’s what makes great teams and leaders, and
 - It’s tough.
 - If these three young men could do the heroic things that they did and continue to selflessly serve at the highest levels, we could certainly play good defense, we could dive on the court for loose balls, and we could surely represent USA Basketball in manner that would make our country proud.
 - I talked about how ego can be a good thing, but you have to come together to form a team ego that is greater than each player’s individual ego. I talked about two being better than one only if two act as one. And I talked about building a trust among team members that would create the ability to react at a moment’s notice with no questions asked.
 - As you give your team more and more opportunities to feel, those emotions come more easily.
 - When we were out on the court, I wanted our players to feel like winning the gold medal was the most important thing in the world. But when you step off the basketball court or outside of that boardroom, you have to realize that it’s really not. There are things that are bigger than you.
 - Ego and humility are not mutually exclusive. You can have both. You should have both.
 - To be a world class champion, you have to have both context and perspective. You have to understand how big and how small you are, and to be able to internalize both.
 - Context defines your moment, and perspective allows you to make the most of it.

Chapter 4 – Time to Form Relationships

- The single most important factor in bringing a team together is the formation of relationships. But in order to engage in a discussion of how great relationships are formed on a team, we must first define what a great relationship entails.
- The relationship that a leader wants to see develop among his or her team are based on communication.
- Talk is contagious. In building relationships with your team, you definitely want communication to spread. On my basketball teams, I try to instill 3 systems. Our offensive and defensive systems comprise those X and O strategies that we implement on the court. But most important of all is our system of communication.
- I emphasize honesty.

- Communication brings about trust. One facilitates the other.
- Eventually two people who communicate and trust one another develop the ability to act as one. In a trusting relationship, you attempt to have no surprises.
- In addition to communication and trust, respect is a fundamental building block for strong relationships. Jerry Colangelo says it best, “You don’t demand respect, you earn it.”
- As communication, trust, and respect improve over time, your team grows stronger.
- In a team environment, the talent and expertise of the person next to you is not a threat, but an opportunity.
- When a team first begins to form, there is always a learning curve. The learning curve has to do primarily with being in uncharted waters. Sufficient time must be spent getting to know one another and building a foundation. In basketball, this may mean focusing only on X’s and O’s too much to early on.
- *In my experience, you have to really know someone in order to bring out the best in them.*
- A team has to bond. And bonding does not just happen on its own. Time must be dedicated to the process. And remember that relationships cannot be cemented solely in your team’s meetings or practices.
- Give your team members these chances to interact off the court. In a less serious environment that allows for one of the greatest relationship builders of all: humor. Humor is also an effective tool in combating short attention spans. When you are speaking to your team and recognize their attention span is growing short, a well-placed injection of levity can reel your team back in.
- LeBron James expressed it perfectly when he said, “You have to be a family first to be a team.”
- As we settled into what our team’s customs would be, I wanted to immediately establish a set pattern of communication. For the next 3 summers, we would gather in a hotel meeting room prior to every single practice.
- Sometimes these meetings would be only five minutes long, but we maintained them as a consistent routine throughout our time together. These meetings were an integral part of instilling our system of communication.
- The importance of face-to-face communication is a very simple concept, but those opportunities are becoming more scarce in our fast-paced and increasingly technological society.
- Often leaders take for granted that gifted people like these NBA players automatically have the confidence that they need to perform at the highest level. But even champions need someone to believe in them.
- With the exception of our training meals on game days, our National Team did not typically eat dinner as a group. But, in the interest of always keeping my team informed, I would consistently tell our players of the coaches’ plan for the evening. We had agreed that there would be no surprises and I wanted the players to know that we were always available to them.
- I have always used the words “team” and “family” interchangeably. My family is a team and my team is a family. When you can incorporate the two together—

your team and your family—you create an opportunity for the relationships between everyone to grow even stronger.

- As team relationships grow over time and are built on that foundation of communication, trust, and respect, you can find that something else grows: caring.
- The players had formed an area on the concourse where the whole team could wait together. And he was right; it was much cooler and more comfortable there. The players did not have to seek us out, there was no expectation of them to do so. But just as they had wanted to join us for dinner in Macau, they wanted us to join them in the more accommodating spot they had found. Sincere care had developed among the members of our team. And it felt great.

Chapter 5 – Time To Develop a Support System

- But I do know that Coach Knight recommended a book to Kobe called *Lone Survivor*, by former Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell.
- The people at Duke were accustomed to my wife and daughters being at games, practices, trips, team functions, and recruiting dinners. They came to know over the years that they are a major part of what I do.
- I have been able to devote so much of myself to my teams over the years because of the support of my family. But this is not something that just happens naturally. When you are completely engrossed in what you do, there is always the potential that your family will resent your career, feeling that it gets the best part of you. I have always tried to keep my family completely involved in what I do and I have found that it pays off, not only in their lives but in mine.
- When a career is truly shared, a family never feels as if it has to compete.
- Take the time to develop a support system. Realize that no matter what it is, you don't have to do it alone. Feeling alone is a scary thing. But allowing those who have helped you along the way to make you stronger in the moment bring about confidence.
- When people feel alone, they have the tendency to put up walls. When you feel alone, you act alone.

Chapter 6 – Time to Establish Standards

- In developing teams, I don't believe in rules. I believe in standards. Rules don't promote teamwork, standards do. Rules are issued by a leader to a group and the group can either follow those rules or break them. When something is presented as a rule, you can't own it. You can't live it. Standards, on the other hand, are lived. This is what we do all the time. These are the things for which we hold one another accountable.
- A major part of becoming a team, then, is the establishment and collective acceptance of your standards, based on your team's makeup and centered on your

- unique goal. Once a group of individuals formulates and agrees to their standards, they become united, single minded in purpose.
- I also continually asked them for their feedback on scheduling, practice and any other plans (the team). If something wasn't working, we obviously wanted to fix it. Leaders should remember that not all the good ideas have to come from the top, and they should be secure enough to change plans based on the input of the team. Why would you have formed a team in the first place if you could do it all on your own?
 - Prior to our standards meeting, I had met individually with Dwyane, Kobe, LeBron, and Jason.
 - I let them know that I planned to open it up to the players and staff for input. "I need you to speak," I told them. "Say anything you want to say. But say something. And speak from the heart."
 - You cannot assume that people are automatically going to speak up. But by making certain that someone will, you create an atmosphere conducive to contributions from everyone.
 - After I had suggested communication and trust as two of our standards, I opened it up to everyone:
 - Jason Kidd – "I think being on time is going to be huge."
 - Dwyane Wade – "I think it's about being committed to one another and making sure we have each other's backs. No matter what."
 - Kobe Bryant – "No matter where you play—if you're playing here, if you're playing on Mars—if you can shut somebody down and rebound the basketball, you're going to win no matter who you're playing against. And I think that's a standard that we have to set."
 - Kobe Bryant – "I think when they look at us, they see guys that are talented and explosive offensively, but they don't think that we have the guts to lock down defensively and rebound the ball. In knowing a lot of guys who play overseas, that's what they think about us. They think we're a bunch of showboat players who score a lot of point and do a lot of things offensively but won't do the dirty work to win."
 - Michael Redd – "We need to have a special hunger."
 - I added to that, "No bad practices. NO bad games." We had to hold ourselves to a level of hunger in our performance that made us worth of winning.
 - Nate McMillan – "We need to be connected on both ends of the floor. If we communicate and we're connected, we can defend anything they put out on the floor."
 - Being connected as a unit means being unselfish. It's not about me, it's about us.
 - "And I hope you know me well enough by now to know that I'll talk to any of you face-to-face, I'll try to keep explaining your roles."
 - Related to being connected and being unselfish is being flexible.
 - I asked our team to be strong, to show no weakness, and to never complain about a call. Unselfishness and flexibility became our standards as well.
 - Wrapping up, I said to them, "You know what I want the new ring to be a reminder of? Of the brotherhood and the commitment and the fact that we had a

goal, a destination, we followed the road map, and we had standards. You'll remember that for the rest of your lives."

- When LeBron James spoke, everyone was silent. "I think we've got to be the no-excuse team," he said. "When we go across these waters and we go play, we've got to be a no-excuse team. What I mean is, it's going to be us against the world, and we've got to look at it that way. We can't blame the refs, we can't blame the crowd, we can't blame anything else on anybody. We're in a position right now where we control our own destiny."

USA Gold Standards

1. NO EXCUSES
 - a. We have what it takes to win
2. GREAT DEFENSE
 - a. This is the key to winning the gold.
 - b. We do the dirty work.
3. COMMUNICATION
 - a. We look each other in the eye.
 - b. We tell each other the truth.
4. TRUST
 - a. We believe in each other
5. COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
 - a. We are committed to each other
 - b. We win together
6. CARE
 - a. We have each other's backs.
 - b. We give aid to a teammate
7. RESPECT
 - a. We respect each other and our opponents
 - b. We're always on time.
 - c. We're always prepared.
8. INTELLIGENCE
 - a. We take good shots.
 - b. We're aware of team fouls.
 - c. We know the scouting report
9. POISE
 - a. We show no weakness
10. FLEXIBILITY
 - a. We can handle any situation.
 - b. We don't complain
11. UNSELFISHNESS
 - a. We're connected.
 - b. We make the extra pass.
 - c. Our value is not measured in playing time.
12. AGGRESSIVENESS
 - a. We play hard every possession.
13. ENTHUSIASM
 - a. This is fun
14. PERFORMANCE
 - a. We're hungry.
 - b. We have no bad practices.
15. PRIDE
 - a. We are the best team in the world and we represent the best country.

Chapter 7 – Time to Cultivate Leadership

- I think one of the primary mistakes that leaders make in team building is in believing that they have to be the sole provider of leadership. Great teams have multiple leaders, multiple voices. A major part of building a team is discovering who those voices will be and cultivating them.
- You have to have a trusting relationship with your internal leaders so that you can allow them to guide your team once the game clock has started. It is their feel for the game that should guide the way you coach as well.
- I am not the first to point out the attention spans seem to grow shorter and shorter with each generation. It has become increasingly true, then, that no matter who you are or what success you have achieved, there is only a finite period of time during which you can speak and expect a group to listen. There is a window.
- Let's say, for example, that you feel your team has a fifteen minute attention-span window. You can personally talk to that team for fifteen good minutes. But when you have established several different voices on your team, you can open that window a little more by utilizing those other voices.
- A leader doesn't have an exclusive contract on getting a point across. You have to have enough confidence in your leadership to share it.
- If you can make clear that it doesn't always have to be yours, you can more deeply ingrain the understanding that it is ours.
- LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, and Jason Kidd were the guys who I always went to when I needed to feel the pulse of the team or when I wanted to get a message across to the group, I never had to ask them twice to get something done. They were completely committed to the group, to me, and to our mission.
- The loss to Greece in the semifinals of the FIBA World Championship made all take a step back and examine ourselves more closely. One thing that I recognized immediately was that our relationships weren't strong enough to support the type of communication that you need from the bench to the court and vice versa.
- In team building, it is vital to recognize the need for moments like these, moments that may never come about as the result of a formal meeting.
- In part, it's making the members of your team realize that by being a part of a group, they can become better individually.
- If, like many teams, you have breaks between your time together, it is vital that you not take a step backward in your individual relationships. You may not be able to come together and practice or watch film during these breaks, but you can continue building your team by cultivating those relationships, and particularly those with your team's internal leaders.
- Often in team building, you can get someone on your team who is recognized as the most talented individual, and the leader may be envious of or feel intimidated by that person. A leader has to realize that he is not always the best, most talented, or smartest one in the room. But that leader must also realize that he or she darn well better have a great relationship with whoever that person is if the team is to

- be successful—a relationship without jealousy, built on trust and communication, and where you know that you can count on one another.
- “LeBron,” I said, “I know you are going to be nervous tomorrow. I’m going to be nervous tomorrow. It’s the biggest game that you will have played and the biggest game that I will have coached. Use your voice and your leadership to overcome those nerves. And I want you to know that I am here for you.”
 - About halfway through the meal, Kobe walked into the private room where we were dining and we made a place for him next to me. After we had talked for a few minutes, Kobe asked me, “Coach, can you do me a favor? I want you to let me guard the best player on every team we face. And I promise that I will destroy him.” He was probably the greatest offensive player in the game asking me for the opportunity to play defense at the highest level.
 - Where LeBron’s leadership was loud, Kobe led mostly through the strength of example. But I wouldn’t say he was quiet. He always had input for our staff during film sessions about how to best defend a particular player or an offensive play.
 - Motivating Kobe was never difficult because he gives himself to you.
 - He is incredibly unique because he is that rare breed of person who lives for the crucial moment. People like Kobe find the ultimate high in the big game, the big moment, crunch time. When others would be shaking, he smiles. When others would be hesitating, he can’t wait.
 - “You know what I need you to do?” I replied. “I need you to be instinctive. IN fact, the next hundred things you do I want them to be instinctive. And I’ll bet that ninety-nine of them turn out to be exactly what I would want you to do. You’ve played more games than I’ve coached. You know what needs to be done out there. I need you to lead us out on the court with you instincts. That’s one of the things we were missing last summer.” (to Jason Kidd)
 - *People are far more apt to develop a trusting relationship if they are allowed to be themselves.*
 - During one of these cerebral practices, I called Jason over. “Some of our guys need to get some extra running in,” I told him. “We need to be in great shape, and I think if the decision to do extra condition comes from the players and not the coaches, we will do it better.”
 - “I’ll take care of it,” he responded
 - If I had told the team, “Okay, I want you running sprints on the sidelines during downtime,” it would have seemed like an order. Because it came from Jason, it was more like “Hey, let’s do this, let’s get better.”
 - Jason’s mind is his best talent.
 - Take time to cultivate leadership. Recognize that yours is not the only voice that your team wants or needs to hear, and be unselfish with your leadership.
 - Don’t be intimidated by the talents of the other leaders among your team. Allow them to share your leadership. By cultivating your own relationship with your internal leaders, you can make a connection with them that ensures your group is unified in what you are doing and how you are doing it.

Chapter 8 – Time to Learn the Language

- When bringing together a group of individuals from various backgrounds, you cannot automatically assume that you all speak the same language.
- It is essential to develop a common vocabulary and incorporate methods of getting your messages across to one another so that there is never any internal confusion.
- Take the time to learn the language. First, make certain that your team is speaking the same internal language.
- Make sure you develop a common vocabulary.
- Once you are comfortable that your team is speaking the same internal language, take the time to learn the language of the competition, both the fundamentals and the subtleties for the environment in which you will be operating.

Chapter 9 – Time to Adapt Internally

- In the formation of teams, every single person must adapt. And for those who have met with much individual success, adaptability can be a challenge.
- Jerry was referring to a crucial concept of team building: the sacrifice of the individual ego and the establishment of a stronger, joint ego.
- You cannot simply ask your team to just adapt to you. As a leader, it is part of your responsibility to adapt as well. If everyone simply adjusts to the style of the leader, you are not getting the most of what everyone has to offer.
- Instead, a leader needs to be a part of a mutual adaptation that forms a combination of the best of everyone. That is the type of environment that encourages us all to become Superman.
- As a staff, we had to adapt to each other as opposed to submitting to the style of any one of us.
- A basketball team should check their egos at the door but should also pick them back up on their way onto the court. What I mean is, there is a delicate balance when it comes to asking people to adapt. You never want an individual to be so deferential to the team concept that they lose the part of their individual ego that makes them great. On our team we wanted to find the right mix of sacrifice and self-assurance that would allow each one of our guys to become Superman.
- “In the rest of our games,” I told those two guys (Chris Paul and Deron Williams), “I don’t want you to just take USA Basketball shots. I want you to take New Orleans Hornets shots, Chris. In other words, I wanted them to remember who they were: NBA All-Star players, franchise players on their individual teams. I wanted them to find the perfect place where the individual ego and the collective team ego meet to bring out the very best in an individual.
- When leaders make clear their willingness to change, it establishes an environment in which everyone can be comfortable adapting.

Chapter 10 – Time to Practice

- In planning for a team's progress, the leader has to examine how much time the team actually has to train before facing its challenge.
- I do believe that strong relationships are the foundation for great teams and that team bonding is essential. But there is also a time in which it is important to create competition among the members of your team. Just as a team gets better as a whole in the face of competition, players improve individually when internal competition is created during practice.
- I also used National team practices as an opportunity to get messages across to individual players. My goal was to seek out at least three guys at each practice and try to have personal interaction with them. Sometimes I had an agenda, a particular message that I needed to get across; other times I just wanted to touch them and let them know that they were on the minds of the coaching staff and that they were important to the team. A leader wants all members of a team to feel included and invested all the time.
- At the conclusion of every team practice, I spend time thinking about what we have just done and what we need to accomplish in the next twenty four hours. And part of what is included in my practice plan is what I will say to the team in our pre-practice meeting. That meeting is one of the times in which our relationships are cemented and lines of communication are established.
- The practice plan is a living thing; it is fluid and ever-changing. But writing out the plan beforehand is a step I always take. I can't ask my players to be prepared to improve and to pursue our goal if I am not prepared.
- But practice is also about developing your strengths. Having already analyzed our weaknesses and what the competition does better, we must also take time to determine where we find our competitive advantage. What are the things that your team can do better than the opposition?
 - All the coaches agreed that our team would find its competitive advantage on the defensive end of the floor.
 - Our athleticism lent itself to hard, aggressive team defense.
 - Based on this determination of our competitive edge, I constantly told our team, "We are not going to let them run plays. We want to force them to make plays."
- On our team, there were two things that we talked about every single day: the gold medal and defense, our goal and our competitive edge.
- Defense is always our bread and butter, always our starting point, because if we're playing good D, we're going to get out in transition; we're going to run because we're creating turnovers and forcing miscues.
- What made our competitive advantage especially difficult for the teams we faced was the fact that our intensity and athleticism could not be simulated.
- Leading the Olympic field in steals, block, two point defensive percentage, three point defensive percentage, forced turnover, and points off turnovers, we were able to disrupt the continuity of our opponents' carefully timed offense.

- Our defense had come a long way in the three years we spent as a National Team. Of the twenty four teams that had participated in the 2006 World Championship Games, our team had placed 16th in defending against our opponents' two-point shooting and 13th in defending against the three.
- We carried 2 athletic trainers. The two of them were always in tune with what was going on with our players and were an enormous asset in relaying that information to me. Our trainers would sit in the seat in front of me on the bus on the way to practice and games and, besides giving me updates on the team's physical status, they would let me know the team's mood. A trainer's job is to make a player feel good, so trainers listen with a sympathetic ear. Often the players will open up to a trainer more than they would to a coach.
- Even though the players were talking and laughing, they were stretching their bodies—and minds—before we began our drills.
- A leader can try his or her very best but will never know every single thing that is taking place in practice. Practice, then, is another time in which empowering members of your staff and the players themselves pays off.
- When a coach says something to a player on the court, you want that player to echo your message. LeBron did that naturally at practice.
- Practice, then, isn't just about playing the way you will in a game, it's about communicating the way you will in a game.
- When we first began working as a team in 2006, we started out practicing twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening.
 - It was not too long before we decided that this was not the best way and we adjusted, deciding to practice only once each day.
 - Even when you are trying to bring a group of people together to act as one, personal time is important. You cannot forget to allow people opportunities to improve on their own, because individual improvement also means team improvement.
 - When people take charge of their own progression, they can become more vested and feel more ownership.
- When a practice does not go as well as it should, you can't just pretend it didn't happen. You have to address what was wrong and you have to fix it.
 - I asked to meet privately with Kobe and LeBron. When I had them in front of me, I calmly told them what I thought. "I was not happy with that practice. It was disruptive. It wasn't tight. No one was talking."
 - Kobe responded, "Coach, I think we are getting disinterested."
 - It was a natural reaction. Competitors want competition and get bored in its absence. Looking back over the practice plan weeks later, I recognized immediately that I was partially to blame for the practice's slow pace. On that day, we spent 45 minutes explaining and instilling our team's zone defense before we stretched, because we had planned to practice zone defense and offense in our scrimmages against the Select Team. It was too much walk-through. We had been trying to create a habit of playing fast and defending hard, and all of the sudden I began a practice at a very slow pace. I should have done that differently.

- As our brief meeting concluded, I told Kobe and LeBron, “We’re not going to have a long meeting before practice tomorrow. We don’t need to talk. I am just going to say, ‘We need to be in the gym, not here watching tape.’” When both guys nodded their approval, I knew that was the right move. The first line of the practice plan I wrote up for the next day read, “11:00-11:05—Team Meeting.”
- Part of what makes practices successful is attention to detail and respect for the opponent.
- Each of the twelve players on the Olympic team had great basketball knowledge. They can also provide valuable input to the coaching staff. Mine was not the only voice heard in practice or timeouts.
- Throughout our time together, I always admired Tayshaun Prince as a true student of the game.
- Even more than before, when we got to Beijing, I used practice as a time to reach out and interact one-on-one with players on the team.
 - In these talks, I always tried to explain to the players their roles on the team, roles that were almost always evolving. I didn’t give them a static description of who they should be the first time we met. Job descriptions, just like the practice plan, should be dynamic. When you give time to a person and explain their ever-evolving role, it makes them feel good. It is a reminder to them that their role is important enough to warrant explanation.
- Practice is not only about preparing your bodies and minds but cementing your relationships within the context of what you are trying to accomplish, relationships in which your communication will be at its best in the environment where you do business.

Chapter 11 – Time For Self-Assessment

- How can a team reach its potential if it cannot look at itself with a critical eye?
- There is always a need to evaluate performance in battle or in business and then retrain based on your assessments. In team building, self-assessment must take place both at the group level and on an individual level for each of the team members. This does not exclude the leader, whose individual self-assessment may be the most crucial of all.
- On teams, self-assessment should take place not just from year to year or quarterly, but from day to day. In business, just as in sport, you can plan for a lot of things but you cannot allow yourself to become imprisoned by your plan. There has to be room for change.
- Improvisation and flexibility should coexist with planning and preparation. And, when you really think about it, it shouldn’t be hard. You should always want to find ways to get better.

- We made little changes along the way like changing from conducting two practices a day to one after having discovered that our players would work harder in one good, long practice than they would in coming back together for a second.
- After the loss to Greece in the 2006 World Championships, Carmelo was asked the first tough question. He made no excuses. He did not complain. And he recognized the Greek team's stellar performance. Even though he, individually, had scored 27 points in that game, he accepted responsibility for the loss on our team's behalf. In that moment, Carmelo Anthony was beautiful. No blame. No scapegoats. We felt the pain of that loss as a group. Even through the pain, we could see that our relationship and culture building was working because, while we were not yet ready to win, we were ready to lose together.
- I've always believed that failure can be an integral part of success. When you attempt something in which failure is possible, you test your limits. Failure requires you to reevaluate. To pass that point, we had to change who we were.
- Of all I learned that first summer, three things stand out:
 - First, it taught us that we may not have the personnel quite right. We were too young and we needed to bring in some experienced players. We needed to find a different mix of talent, character, and experience.
 - Second, we had to assess the way in which we prepared.
 - Third, and I think most important, I learned a great deal about the way I coached this team, what I personally had done wrong, and what I needed to change.
- In forming teams, leaders come to learn that they are not the most proficient members of the team in all competencies.
- Especially with NBA-level players, you never want guys to stand around. They want repetitions, they want constant action, they want to get the absolute most out of their practice time. As a result, every shooting drill we did when those coaches were around was intense, timed, and at game speed.
- Winning can mask your deficiencies. But it's the job of a team's leadership is to constantly self-assess, you have to be willing to look at yourself critically even in victory.
- Are we upholding our gold standards?
- I love the concept of team and I believe that true teams are ultimately very strong. But a leader must always realize the fragility of relationships and the potential vulnerabilities that exist in bringing people together. Leaders of teams cannot be blind to those things.
- Internal leadership is good for a lot of things, but the team leader is the one who needs to step up when it's time for confrontation. I have never thought of confrontation as a negative. To me, it just means coming face-to-face with the truth. And, while it can be difficult, facing the truth is never a bad thing to do.
- I opened the meeting with a highlight video put together by the coaching staff. The purpose of the video was to remind us of who we were and to present it in a manner that would get the attention of the players.
 - The highlights that followed showed our guys working together. The audio behind the footage was a song called "Hero" by Nas, interrupted intermittently by the voices of our players and coaches saying the things

each had contributed to our gold standards. It was a creative way of reminding our team what those standards were and what we looked like when our play was governed by those standards.

- After the video, I addressed the team, and I was the most passionate I had ever been with them. I used language that could not be misunderstood and was right to the point. “Those are the things we said. Those are the standards we established for ourselves. And, guys, I’m not going to hold anything back. I am going to coach you and you need to be prepared to be coached by me. I will not let you down. This means that I am going to hold myself and all of you accountable to those standards.
 - It wasn’t about embarrassing a guy or putting the blame on anyone—it wasn’t about that at all. It was about showing our team that it was time to be accountable.
 - I could feel myself even more emotional as I concluded my talk. “My family arrives tomorrow, and I know that a lot of your families will get here over the next few days,” I said to them. “My grandchildren aren’t coming all the way over here to watch us win a damn bronze medal. They’re coming here to see us win the gold.”
 - We had all gotten back on the same emotional page.
 - Afterward, Jerry Colangelo came up to me and said, “Mike, you listened to all of our input last night, you heard everything, and you found a way to cover everything we said.”
- While there is a great deal of habit in the way that you practice for competition, you can never become exclusively routine in your behaviors.

Chapter 12 – Time to Get Motivated

- As a leader, it is your responsibility to put your team in the moment, to ensure that they understand what’s at stake and the level of risk and reward.
- It’s about making sure, on a daily basis, that your team plays inspired, that they are at the level they need to be to fulfill your mission. There is a very specific, focused motivation that takes place prior to your team’s particular “tests,” but motivating your team for your mission starts from the first time that you assemble.
- Motivation is hard. It takes time and preparation.
- Being on a team can be fun and your mission can be exciting, but that doesn’t mean every individual walks into every team meeting ready to go. You can’t expect that people walk through the door fired up.
- That being said, you, as the leader, had better walk in there ready to go. That’s why leadership is not easy.
- I believe that a common mistake that leaders make is not motivating their best people. Everybody needs to be inspired.

- What you will find is that their positive reactions to your motivational efforts will serve to energize you. You recognize their ability to feel on a deeper level and the power their real emotions can have on their performance.
- Motivation can come from many different sources. One source is reinforcing that sense of perspective that you taught your team early on. Another source is reviewing your established standards.
- Another element of getting your team motivated is rallying support from the outside by broadcasting your group's message. Typically a group's message is some combination of your goal and your standards. This is what we are going to do and this how we are going to do it.
- That day it became about much more than showing up for the Dream Team, it became about taking pride in the way they showed up. They committed to doing that on the defensive end of the court, just as I hoped our players would do (after the Dream Team scrimmaged a group of college players almost losing, but then coming out the next day and winning by 40)
- When it comes to motivation, impact is key. Every company, organization, and team has their icons, the things that define them. Seek out creative and personalized ways to present your icons and symbols. It's okay to look for twists in the way you represent things, to be creative.
- Remember that motivation is not something that you simply hope occurs. It is something that a team's leadership must do, must actively work for, on a daily basis. It takes time and preparation.
- Take time to establish what your message is.
- When you work hard to motivate a team, that motivation comes back to you.

Chapter 13 – Game Time

- Competition has two purposes in the context of team formation. First, it gives you a platform for improvement. You can't reach your full potential without competition. Second, competition serves as a test for your team. The moments provided by the game time are moments of truth.
- When it comes to game time, there is another added element: pressure. How will your team handle it? Game pressure can do one of two things: it can inhibit you, or it can excite you.
- One thing that is important to consider is how and by whom that scouting report is presented. Remember your team's attention span and how essential it is to impart your message using your team's different voices. Also remember that you, the leader, are not necessarily the best person for every job.
- You have to inspire your team for this task, get them into this moment. Creativity becomes even more of a factor in game-time motivation
- "We can take nothing for granted," I told them team. "Our record is 0-0 now. We have been good up to this point, but we haven't done anything yet. You may be reading that we have been dominant; the media is saying that there is no way we can lose. But not long ago I showed you an article where a reporter selected us to

finish third. He said we don't have enough size and we lack continuity. People will say lots of things, some of them good and some of them bad. But we can't take any of that forward with us. This is our moment," I said emphatically. "Not anyone else's." Heading into our game-time moment, it was only about us.

- "It's not about what anybody else says. It's about what we do. Champions do."
- On our way to practice the day before the Australia game, those seat back signs echoed one of the messages from our meeting: "Take Nothing for Granted (We are 0-0)."
- On the day of our first game in the medal round we showed a video to our team. It was another highlight video set to music. The song we used was "One" written by Bono and performed by Mary J. Blige with U2. The dazzling basketball plays were interspersed with footage of the players celebrating together, showing their emotion for our mission.
 - I looked at the faces of the guys on our team when the video ended and I knew it had worked. It put them in the moment.
 - "Well, I didn't wake up motivated," LeBron said. "But I am now."
- Especially with a group of men, it requires a high level of individual security to allow yourself to become emotional. These guys had it.
- We put 2 signs on our bus that day: one on the way to the shoot around and one on our way to the game. The first read, "Defense: Five Guys Attacking as One," and the second read, "They Are in Our Way: Crush Them."
- (Before Argentina in the Semis) "We need to talk to one another," I told them. "We were quiet in the first half against Australia yesterday and that hurt us. If you get tired or nervous, talk more. It will keep you from failing victim to fatigue. When we're talkative, we create our own background music.
- We decided to show another video on that day. This one would be set to our "background music," the music we made on the court, the voices of our guys. So we showed three and a half minutes of clips from various interviews with our players, all of them talking about our goal.
- "If you make Ginobili play in a closet, he becomes a different player," said Kobe, over defensive stopper. "If there's no communication, we're going to get burned every time," said LeBron.
- "In twenty-four hours, we will be playing in the gold-medal game," I told my team. "Game day" is a full twenty-four hours, not just the day of the actual game but the twenty-four hours preceding game time. Since our Spain tip-off was at 2:30 on Sunday afternoon, our focused game prep had to begin on Saturday afternoon. There was simply not enough time before tip off to wake up unmotivated.
- "The main thing we've been during this time is honest. And to be honest with ourselves, we have to say that for one quarter last night, we didn't play well. We didn't meet our standards. Let's make tomorrow not just about winning but about living our standards."
- I also wanted to set a tone of reverence for the day that followed. As Tayshaun had said, we needed to have a serious practice. It would be a short one without much movement because of the late night against Argentina and the early game the following day, but it would be a focused one.

- “Let’s treat this 24 hours with dignity. Let’s practice like we’re going to play.” I remember making eye contact with LeBron after I said this; he was nodding agreement.
- When we got to practice I told the team, “I want your mind. I want your body. And I want your heart.” But the practice was more about them getting their minds in the right place than anything physical.
- “Right from the start of the game, we have to be together and tough. We’ve done three years of preparation for forty minutes of basketball.”
- What more motivation does your team need than your ultimate moment? A lot of people think that this is the time to give your Knute Rockne-type speech. You have been creative with your words and motivational strategies throughout your time together, but now the moment itself is what lifts you. I concluded our meeting by simply saying, “Let’s go win the gold.”
- Before every game I have ever coached, I have made handwritten notes for myself about the other team’s offense against our defense and, conversely, their defense versus our offense in sort of a move-countermove format. I have found that writing these things down—even things I’ve already heard my assistants say or have seen in the scouting report—cements them in my mind. Committing it to paper commits it to memory.
 - The notes I write on are my way of coaching myself. I lay them out in front of me and study them in the locker room before taking the court.
 - In a way, I play the game out in my head before we even take the court.
 - Those notes help me to not be distracted and to concentrate on what we have to do to be successful. I even refer back to them at halftime. On August 24, when I studied my notes before the gold medal game, I was reminded to think only about beat Spain. Don’t look at the American flag too long. Don’t get caught up arguing with a referee. Don’t think about the magnitude of it all. I had to resist those distractions as well as the other standard distractions that worry all coaches: that someone will get injured or that key player will get into foul trouble.
- The halftime locker room was calm. There was no panic. No one spoke the words, “Come on, guys, this is the gold medal game!” It didn’t need to be said; we already recognized the moment.
- With 8:23 left, I was a two point game.
 - Timeout USA
 - This was the most pressure our team had experienced in our three years together. It was at this moment that our character would be tested and ultimately revealed. The thought that kept running through my mind as the players came over to the bench was that this team was worthy of winning and that I trusted who we had become. There is a time to call a play and a time to let them play. As we huddled together before taking the court again, I told my team, “Just go out there and play.”
 - It was time to set the Mamba loose
 - My job as a leader was just to make Kobe comfortable enough to follow his instincts in leading us through these final eight minutes.

- On our first play out of the timeout, Kobe drove the ball into the lane with Spanish defenders all around him. I swear, he willed the ball through the hoop. USA up four.
- Having received his third foul early in the quarter, LeBron was called for his fourth with 7:43 still left to play in the game. The question in coaching is: do you take him out to prevent him from getting his fifth and fouling out of the game? The answer in this moment was no. You leave LeBron in.
- The 3 pointer Kobe hit with 6:02 to play completed a two and half minute stretch in which the Mamba (Kobe) had scored or been responsible for 10 straight points. USA up nine.
- USA wins 118-107 over Spain

Conclusion – Our Golden Moment

- Next, I shared a hug with Dwyane Wade, the guy who was arguably the MVP of our 2008 summer. I will always remember what he said: “Thank you for believing in me.”
 - When asked later about the pressure and feeling of that fourth quarter, Kobe responded as only the Mamba would. “It was fun. Coming out of a timeout into a 2 point game, looking around at the crowd and all the American flags waving. This is where we do it. This is what you dream about.” You could tell by his post game behavior that this may have been the most fun Kobe Bryant ever had.
 - I think Kobe did a great job of summarizing the feeling when he said to the media, “What you saw today was a team. Everybody wants to talk about NBA players being selfish, being arrogant, being individuals. What you saw today was a team bonding together, facing adversity and coming out of here with a big win...It’s an unbelievable feeling to win a gold medal for your country. I can’t begin to describe to you the feeling that we all feel right now.
 - Jason added to Kobe’s sentiment: “WE had one ego and that is the team ego.”
 - The world was indeed much improved, and no matter how talented the personnel we put on the floor, we can no longer, succeed without embracing the notion of team. There is no doubt in my mind that we could have lost both those games had we not together formed relationships, established standards, and engaged in some honest self-assessment.
 - As Kobe later phrased it, “You could see that the system worked. The process had built a team with camaraderie and chemistry. We were tested and we faced adversity and we were able to dig deep and work together to pull out that game.
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- I will remind people that there is no formula, no recipe, no easy step by step process. My story can serve only as a guide. Any advice I offer may give you

direction, but it will not make it easy. Team building is hard work. Take the time to:

- *Choose your people*
- *Understand context*
- *Gain perspective*
- *Form relationships*
- *Develop a support system*
- *Establish standards*
- *Cultivate leadership*
- *Adapt internally*
- *Learn the language*
- *Practice*
- *Self-assess*
- *Get Motivated*