

Wisdom From Wooden

John Wooden is someone I have always looked up to as a role model and a hero. Coach Wooden, who was nicknamed the “Wizard of Westwood,” led the UCLA Bruins basketball teams of the 1960s and 1970s to a never-since-equaled 10 NCAA National Championships.

All those titles came during his last 12 coaching seasons, including seven in a row from 1967 to 1973. His UCLA teams also had a record-setting winning streak of 88 games and four perfect 30-0 seasons, and won 38 straight games in NCAA tournament play.

Without question, Wooden currently is the greatest college basketball coach in history. Despite such success, for him it wasn’t about winning as much as about bringing out the absolute best in his players and compelling them to perform at their highest level. He believed if he did that, the winning would follow.

How he did what he did and what we can learn from that is the basis of a book I wrote about Wooden’s life, *How to Be Like Coach Wooden: Life Lessons From Basketball’s Greatest Leader*. Shortly before it was published, I asked Wooden to reflect on the topic of character: what it is, where it comes from and how it can be maintained.

Here’s what he told me.

“I first became aware of the importance of character in my grade school days. From the time I was very young, my father would say, ‘Be more concerned with your character than your reputation.’

“When I graduated from grade school, my father gave me a piece of paper that he had written out, and he said, ‘Son, always try to live up to this.’ Today, I call his advice the ‘Seven-

Point Creed.'”

For years, Wooden carried in his wallet the very sheet with the creed his father had written for him. Eventually the paper worked itself thin, and the words faded. While he could still read it he made a copy for himself, as well as additional copies to hand out to others.

I happened to be one of the fortunate ones who received a copy from him. While he was telling me about his dad’s counsel, Wooden handed me a printout of the Seven-Point Creed.

Here is what it says:

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Make each day your masterpiece.
3. Help others.
4. Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible.
5. Make friendship a fine art.
6. Build a shelter against a rainy day.
7. Pray for guidance and give thanks for your blessings every day.

Wooden was a role model of character because he lived by what his father had taught him by example and by word. “Your character is what you really are. Your reputation is merely how you are perceived by others,” his father told him.

Think about that.

A politician may have a great reputation for character until he is caught taking a bribe. An author may have a great reputation for character until he is exposed as a plagiarist. A pastor may have a great reputation for character until he is caught in a tryst with the church secretary.

Your reputation is your outer image. Your character is your inner reality. One is what people think you are. One is what you really are.

It's possible to live for years behind a facade, with no one suspecting who you actually are. You can pretend to have integrity while living a lie—for a while. You might even fool your family and friends.

But the facade will eventually crumble. The dissonance between the real you and the pretend you will become visible sooner or later.

The Bible puts it this way: "Be sure that your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23, NIV).

And if your failed character is exposed in the form of ethical corruption, dishonesty, sexual immorality, substance abuse or moral cowardice, it will cost you. It might cost you your career, your marriage, your family or even your civil freedom. It will certainly redefine your reputation and rob you of your self-respect.

Don't let that happen to you. Be a person of character. Pray for God to make your character like His.

Then, like Coach Wooden did, teach and exemplify and live out authentic character every day of your life.

Pat Williams is senior vice president of the NBA's Orlando Magic and one of America's best-known sports executives. He drafted Charles Barkley and Shaquille O'Neal, and 12 of his former players have become NBA head coaches. He is the author of more than 50 books. As one of America's top motivational speakers, he travels the U.S. speaking to companies, associations, churches and schools. For information about scheduling Pat, [click here](#).