

Many Shining Moments

[David Handler](#)

It's the most wonderful time of the year, at least in my opinion. Basketballs fill the air and airwaves as the NCAA tournament takes center stage in the sports world this month. As always, some unexpected team will make a Cinderella run and fans across the nation will climb aboard its bandwagon, like they did with obscure George Mason in 2006. A coach you've never heard of will rise to prominence, then leave for a better paying job at a bigger school. In the end, one team will experience the thrill of cutting down the nets as college basketball's new champion.

The NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship is so popular that CBS pays \$545 million in rights fees each year for the privilege of broadcasting it into your living room. Consider the size of that number when you write the next check for your biggest lease payment.

Coach Mystique

One of the unique things about college basketball is that coaches—who stick around for decades—typically are better known than players, who arrive and depart within a few years. That's why Bob Knight in his red sweater, Mike Krzyzewski kneeling courtside, and Roy Williams clinching his fists are images we see every year. In fact, a lasting memory of my youth is watching UCLA coach John Wooden, winner of 10 championships in 12 seasons, sit calmly on the bench with a rolled-up paper in his hand.

"A player who makes a team great is more valuable than a great player," said Wooden.

That's a lesson every quick printing business owner needs to learn. Your role, as the coach of your employees, is to mold them into a great team. One that executes with the same precision as the UCLA players who ran Wooden's legendary high-post offense. From your outside salesperson, to your graphic designer, to your press operator and others you depend on for success, it's essential everyone work together as a cohesive unit.

Basketball coaches learn strategies and techniques from mentors during stops on the way up the ladder and blend them together to develop their own philosophy.

Similarly, as a professional business coach, I utilize knowledge gained during my business career and in coaching training to let clients discover a higher level of performance. By combining three of these coaching skills with the wisdom you've gained over the years as a business owner, you'll create an environment that moves forward a lot faster.

Skill One: Familiarize

When team members approach you to discuss things they consider important, do you block out all the thoughts swirling inside your head and focus on their words? Often, owners of quick printing businesses are balancing so many things that employees' needs become distractions rather than opportunities for improvement.

Basketball coaches, on the other hand, have daily practices to work with players. While that's unrealistic in our world, adapting the way you react to employees will immediately make you a better leader.

First, allow yourself to be fully present for them. When employees come into your office, get out from behind your desk and stand or sit side-by-side. They'll be more comfortable and the phone or email won't distract you. If someone interrupts, ask them to come back later. Lean forward in your chair, look your employees in the eye, and listen closely to what they're saying. Mirror or paraphrase their words to ensure you fully understand the situation: "What I hear you saying, Susie, is you would like more training on pricing. Is that it?" Ask open ended questions to clarify important points: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Remember, a good rule of thumb is to let employees do 80% of the talking.

Skill Two: Focus

Sometimes your team members truly are too close to the forest and they simply can't see the root of the problem. Your role is to help them identify the gaps—or big holes—that exist in their current approach, so they can adjust accordingly.

Of course, there will be roadblocks or barriers in their way. It's important to use your 50,000-foot vantage point to help employees understand how to overcome them.

Skill Three: Feedback

Most situations you will deal with as the coach of your team will require you to provide direction so employees discover the specific steps they need to take to grow. Instead of falling into the natural tendency to lecture or impose your opinion on their issue, stay neutral. Help them stretch by painting a picture of something they might not have considered: "Joe, what would it look like if, when you arrive each morning, you make a list of everything that needs to happen?" Draw a distinction for them between two possibilities: "Is this about Bill being on time or his attitude?" Also, help them look at the other side of issues: "So, what would be the opposite of that?"

A career or two ago, I spent 15 years in sports television, producing more than 300 college basketball games. This provided me frequent access to coaches. From speaking for several hours one night at a snowed-in hotel with then Indiana coach Bob Knight, to sitting in the stands alone one day watching a young Roy Williams conduct practice at Kansas, I experienced a side of the game fans seldom see.

In each discussion and every practice the great coaches are always teaching, always driving those around them to higher levels. While their methods and personalities differ greatly, the calling remains the same: Work hard each day to help others improve.

Making the same commitment to your employees will take your quick printing business to new heights. Stick with it and you'll enjoy many shining moments.

David Handler is the founder of the professional business coaching firm Success Handler, LLC, and previously served as a senior executive at ICED. He leads clients in the quick printing industry to explore their professional and personal dreams. The past seven years, David has experienced the ups and downs of coaching his now 12-year-old son's basketball teams. Visit www.successhandler.com to learn more about coaching, or contact David at coach@successhandler.com.