

“Dean possessed one of the greatest basketball minds, and was a magnificent teacher and tactician...All of his players benefited greatly from his basketball teachings, but even more from his ability to help mold men of integrity, honor, and purpose. These teachings, specifically, will live forever in those he touched.”

**Mike Krzyzewski**

Duke University and USA National Team men's basketball coach

“Coach Smith taught me about the game of basketball. He taught me more about how to live life. He influenced me like no one else. I wish everyone could have known and learned from him. The world is a better place because of his life.”

**George Karl**

Head coach, Sacramento Kings

“Coach Dean Smith was a hero of mine growing up...What I loved about him as a basketball coach was that he cared about his players on and off the court. Not only did he want to win ACC titles and NCAA championships, but he cared about his players' character development...I will always remember Coach Smith and what he did for the good of the game of basketball.”

**Webb Simpson**

Professional golfer, winner 2012 US Open

“Coach Smith changed me as a person, not just in his words but also his actions. More importantly, he taught me to be loyal to those who believe in you, and no matter what for any of us in his fold, he was the one constant pillar of support without judgment. A remarkable man!”

**Brad Daughterly**

12-year NBA veteran, Cleveland Cavaliers, ESPN commentator

“The legacy that Dean Smith left behind should never be measured in wins and losses but in the character building he achieved while teaching young men teamwork, leadership, and the reward of hard work. *It's How You Play the Game* captures the essence of what one of our greatest coaches wanted to convey and leave as a gift for us all.”

**Rick and Dee Ray**

Cofounders Raycom Sports, producers of ACC Sports  
Television

“Coach Smith always stood for the equality of all people, whether he was Charlie Scott, Bill Chamberlain, no matter what the color of his skin. He was an incredibly consistent man who treated others how he wanted to be treated.”

**Bill Chamberlain**

UNC all-American, MVP 1971 NIT championship

“It was a privilege to have been recruited by Coach Smith when I was a high school basketball player. He inspired his players to develop their God-given talents as well as their character. He taught them the valuable life lesson of how to work together as a team. He was simply one of the finest men who ever coached the game of basketball.”

**Greg Keith**

President and CEO, The Keith Corporation

“Listening to David preach, I could tell how much Dean Smith impacted his life. Then I realized that as David was impacting my life with his preaching, Dean Smith was impacting me too through David! From living in the state of North Carolina, I saw what a great man Coach Smith was. I hope readers will be similarly touched as they read *It's How You Play the Game*.”

**Angie Harmon**

Actress, 2015 winner People's Choice Award for *Rizzoli & Isles*

“In his book *It’s How You Play the Game*, David Chadwick shares the leadership legacy that Dean Smith left with him—timeless principles of how to lead both on and off the court. This book will sharpen your leadership skills and give your teams the gift of this legacy as well.”

**Frank Harrison**

CEO/Chairman of Coca-Cola Bottling Company  
Consolidated

“David Chadwick’s unique relationship with Coach Dean Smith was instrumental in David’s development as more than just a basketball player; God used Dean Smith in his life to teach him lessons that he now passes on to us. David has been a friend, coach, and mentor to many, and I count myself blessed to be among that number. Through this book, he can now coach thousands more with timeless leadership principles.”

**Clayton King**

Founder and president,  
Crossroads Camp and Crossroads Mission  
Teaching pastor, Newspring Church

“I had the privilege of meeting Coach Dean Smith only once, but I see his influence at work in the life of my pastor David Chadwick quite often. This book will allow you to explore and apply some of Coach Smith’s simple and powerful leadership principles in your own life.”

**Rick Eldridge**

Film producer, *The Ultimate Gift*, *Bobby Jones: Stroke of Genius*

“Coach Dean Smith is a national treasure. David Chadwick, one of Coach Smith’s former players, does us a huge favor by opening the treasure chest of Coach Smith’s leadership

principles. As you read *It's How You Play the Game*, you will feel as though you are at Coach Smith's practices learning from the man himself. This book will inspire you."

**Derwin L. Gray**

Lead pastor, Transformation Church

Author of *Limitless Life*

"Every human being, especially young men, should read this book at least twice."

**Jimmy Wayne**

Musician and *New York Times* bestselling author

IT'S HOW YOU  
**PLAY** THE **GAME**

DAVID CHADWICK

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**IT'S HOW YOU PLAY THE GAME**

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*To Marilyn*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dean Smith's vision throughout the years has been that the team is more important than the individual. Without the team that helped me finish this project, it would have been impossible. Therefore, as Coach Smith always taught us to thank the teammate making an assist by pointing to him, I point a "thank you" to the following:

My close friend Rick Ray, who read the first draft of the first chapter and put more red marks on it than any teacher I've ever had! Suzanne Martin and Christina Wilking, my two administrative assistants over the last two decades, both of whom tirelessly helped me pull together material. Thank you, Kathleen McLendon, for all your help with endorsements. Many thanks to Ron Smith and Robbi Fischer for doing research, finding quotes, and updating players' and coaches' present positions. Your help has been invaluable.

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All the interviewees, whose lives have been touched by Coach Smith, especially Coach Guthridge, whose first year at UNC was my first year.

Coach Smith, who let me write the book despite his desire for privacy and his sincere humility, and for whom it was difficult, knowing people were talking to me about him. I hope this book allows many to learn from Coach Smith, as I have. And thanks to him for his

profound, principle-centered life and leadership. It's a wonderful gift to a leadership-starved world.

My kids, Bethany, my beautiful daughter, and “adopted son” Ryan, you have made me proud. Thanks especially for the grandkids. To David, my very gifted and persevering basketball-playing son, and his amazing bride Jessie, you exemplify all I believe and stand for. To my committed, competitive swimmer Michael, thank you for living for God's glory alone. I'm very, very proud of and thankful for you all!

Finally, this book is dedicated to Marilyn, my life partner and best friend. She was the first person with whom I shared this idea, and later, when I doubted I could do it, she insisted I go ahead. It was not an easy project, and I simply couldn't have finished it without her. Thanks for the incessant encouragement. Thank you for being the love of my life. Life has been brilliantly beautiful with you by my side.



# CONTENTS

Foreword by Roy Williams . . . . .	13
Foreword by Pat McCrory . . . . .	17
Introduction: It's How You Play the Game. . . . .	21
<b>1. Leadership Principle 1:</b> Be Loyal. . . . .	29
<b>2. Leadership Principle 2:</b> Provide a Family Environment. . . . .	53
<b>3. Leadership Principle 3:</b> Be a Friend Forever . . . . .	75
<b>4. Leadership Principle 4:</b> Put the Team Before the Individual . . . . .	95
<b>5. Leadership Principle 5:</b> Be Flexible with Your Vision . . . . .	119
<b>6. Leadership Principle 6:</b> Get Better, and the Team Gets Better. . . . .	139
<b>7. Leadership Principle 7:</b> Speak Positive Words . . . . .	153
<b>8. Leadership Principle 8:</b> Pass On What You Know. . . . .	175
<b>9. Leadership Principle 9:</b> Be a Person of Good Character . . . . .	191
<b>10. Leadership Principle 10:</b> Make Failure Your Friend. . . . .	213
<b>11. Leadership Principle 11:</b> Know Who Really Is in Control . . . . .	229
<b>12. Leadership Principle 12:</b> Commit Yourself for the Long Haul . . . . .	245
Notes . . . . .	261



## Foreword by Roy Williams

I WASN'T READY TO receive the news. I had known for several years that the day was inevitable. The dementia was ravaging his body's health. He was becoming weaker and weaker. All who knew and loved him knew the day was coming.

But I still wasn't ready. When I received the news at 11:19 pm, after a road victory against Boston College, I struggled to grasp the reality that he was truly gone. He always seemed invincible to me. But this time he wasn't invincible. Death had robbed this great man from all of us.

Memories flooded my mind. Specifically, I remembered when I called Coach Smith the night before I went to Kansas for my interview to become its head coach. And I asked him, "Are you sure you want me to do this? This is your school, your alma mater. You're screwing them up here, telling them I can do the job. Are you sure you want to do this to your school?"

"You can do this job," I remember him saying to me. "And you're

going to be the best.” He was such an encourager, believing the best in everyone.

I told him when I returned to UNC twelve years ago, “I really want to do this the right way. I want to make you proud.” Coach Smith responded, “I’m already proud.” I’m sixty-four years old and I still want to make him proud in everything I do in my own personal life and for the University of North Carolina.

Coach Smith was not perfect. No one is. But Coach Smith possessed far more positives than any other person I’ve ever known. He set the standard for loyalty. One time I told him that I thought he was loyal to a fault. He said to me, “Don’t ever use those same two words in the same sentence.” He didn’t think you could ever be too loyal. As was most often the case, he was correct.

He was my mentor. He gave me my first chance to coach. I was never on the varsity, playing only on the freshman team. But he let me watch and learn from him. He gave me the greatest gift he could ever have given me: his knowledge. I learned the game from him. I learned how to live life from him. I try to coach like he coached.

He was the greatest there has ever been on the court. And he was even better off the court. He was a man of the highest integrity. He never wanted acclaim. It was all about his team. It was all about his players. They were always first in his heart.

But he cared for people behind the scenes in ways people never knew. He would write personal notes to fans who had cancer or who had just lost a loved one. He was extremely generous with his financial resources. His care and compassion for the poor and others knew no bounds.

His players and those who coached with him know he is the finest example of what college basketball should be. I hope future coaches will continue to examine and study his life. We can all

continue to learn from him and make ourselves, and the game of college basketball, all it should be.

I am privileged to write the foreword for David's book about Coach Smith. I was a year behind David at UNC. We knew each other then and have stayed in touch through the years. I know Coach Smith's principles on how to lead and live have greatly impacted him, as they have me and countless others.

We all love Coach Smith. We miss him greatly. I hope generations to come may also learn how Coach Smith influenced people's lives.

He did mine. I'm a better man for knowing Coach Dean E. Smith.

ROY WILLIAMS  
Head Basketball Coach  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina



## Foreword by Pat McCrory

I WAS BORN A Buckeye, in the great state of Ohio. I moved to North Carolina when I was nine years old.

North Carolina is now my home. It's my passion. And, as the UNC fight song says, "When I die I'll be Tar Heel dead." As mayor of North Carolina's largest city for four terms, Charlotte, and now the state's governor, I'm indebted to all of North Carolina's great citizens who have made this state what it is.

One of those citizens is recently deceased Coach Dean Smith. Practically everywhere you go throughout North Carolina you can see his imprint. Whether it's this state's love for college basketball, or its passion for caring for the poor, or its desire for racial equality, all these things and many more, in one way or another, can be traced back to Dean Smith's influence.

After moving to North Carolina, I came to love the game of basketball. I vividly remember adopting Charlie Scott as my favorite player. I had pictures of him all over my walls at home—#33 was my favorite number. When he made the clutch shot over Davidson

in the '69 Eastern Regionals to send UNC to the Final Four, I was yelling at the top of my lungs, fist-pumping in the air, like all other UNC fans throughout the state.

At the time, it never dawned on me that Charlie Scott was black. In fact, I attended an integrated elementary school. All I knew was that he was simply the best basketball player I'd ever seen. And UNC was my team.

I can remember standing outside the Sedgefield Inn in Greensboro at the ACC tournament in 1971 when #32 Dave Chadwick played for the Tar Heels. I even asked him for his autograph! Sorry, David, but #33 was still my favorite number! I greatly admired Coach Smith and his teams.

Later, I was a water boy for the Carolina Cougars of the old ABA. I served Billy Cunningham and Larry Brown, two of Coach Smith's greatest former players. I marveled at how well they played the game. They even pointed to the person who gave them the pass then when they were pros! I knew it was Coach Smith who taught them how to play the game so well.

When I was seventeen, I was the ball boy for the famous NC State–Maryland game in the ACC finals in 1974. Some still call it the greatest ACC game ever. All I remember is how physical it was. And how great a player David Thompson was.

Then I started refereeing high school basketball games. As I did so, I would often find myself asking, "Why doesn't that coach act like Dean Smith? Why doesn't he teach his teams to play hard, smart, and together like Dean Smith did his teams?"

I also remember refereeing a game at AL Brown High School in Kannapolis, North Carolina. Michael Jordan was a part of a UNC senior lettermen team barnstorming around the state against local squads. I called a traveling violation against Michael. He disagreed

with the call. Later, in Charlotte in 1984, I ran into Michael. I reminded him of the call. He said he remembered it and told me I blew it. I don't know if he really remembered it. But he was convinced he hadn't been traveling. In a friendly but rather intense way, we argued about it for a bit. To say he's competitive is an understatement!

Before Coach Smith's private memorial service in the Dean Smith Center, I presented to Linnea Smith the North Carolina state flag that flew over the capitol building at half-mast all week long. That was appropriate. For many years, the key person responsible for job growth and the positive notoriety of the state of North Carolina around the nation was Dean Smith. People everywhere thought well of the state largely because of him.

I love basketball. I love UNC basketball. I loved Coach Dean Smith.

That's why it's a privilege to write a foreword for this book. The principles by which Coach Smith coached and lived are my principles too. I believe in them. I try, to the best of my ability, to live by them. Anyone who practices them will become a better leader and person. Especially, I wish politicians in both parties would learn to care less about their own partisan politics and point to the people who make things happen for the good of our cities, states, and nation.

David Chadwick is a good friend. I've seen him live out these principles. He's helped teach them to me. I've tried to teach them to others. Therefore, hopefully, because of this book, Dean Smith's legacy will continue to live for decades to come in the lives of future generations.

And as you read this book, my greatest hope is that you understand and practice Coach Smith's life principles. Especially, I hope

you realize what's most important in life is "how you play the game."  
Coach Smith played his game of life very well. Very well indeed!  
May you do so too.

PAT MCCRORY  
Governor of the state of North Carolina  
Raleigh, North Carolina

## INTRODUCTION

# It's How You Play the Game

**I**n 2008, the word spread quickly among all the UNC lettermen. Our coach, friend, and mentor had been diagnosed with a neurocognitive disorder that was slowly robbing him of one of his most precious life commodities: his memory. It was an especially cruel disease for a man who could remember the name of someone he'd met twenty, even thirty years earlier. We all knew that one day this hideous disease would rob our friend of his life. We just didn't know exactly when that day would come. It finally did.

February 7, 2015 is a day I'll never forget. I was getting ready to preach at the church I pastor, Forest Hill Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, where I've been its pastor for over three decades. As I readied myself to enter the commodious sanctuary, one of my production assistants said, "David, I think you should know that Coach Smith just passed away." He knew of my great love and respect for my former coach and life mentor. He didn't want me to be blindsided by someone in the congregation randomly sharing the news with me before or after the service.

My mind swirled with memories. This great coach and mentor was no longer on earth. All the former players knew the day would come. Dementia had been diagnosed seven years earlier. Slowly, we watched him evaporate from notoriety. Yet it was still hard to comprehend and digest that he was now gone.

News of Coach Smith's death spread rapidly. Personally, I conducted twelve interviews within twenty-four hours with different local television and radio stations in the Charlotte area after his death became public. Newspaper headlines across the nation shouted out in bold type that Coach Smith was dead.

Over the next few weeks, I kept asking myself, "What made him so great? Why did I cry when I heard he had died, similar to when I knew my mom and dad had passed? What made him the great man he was?"

The more I pondered these questions, the more I returned to this simple answer, found in the following phrase:

### **It's How You Play the Game**

Dean E. Smith was extraordinarily successful because he knew what's most important in life is how you play the game.

Let's see if you can complete this phrase: "It's not whether you win or lose..."

If you have a modicum of understanding of the American competitive sports scene, you undoubtedly are able to supply the ending: "...it's how you play the game." Reflecting on this thought, the great football Coach Vince Lombardi purportedly said, "If that's true, then why keep score?" Lombardi is also credited with having said, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing."

Yet are these ideas—that the goal of sporting events is to win or that it is in the manner of playing—mutually exclusive? I don't think so. Perhaps it's because I played for Coach Dean Smith, one

of college basketball's greatest coaches. His number-one priority was developing his players as people—teaching us how to play the game rightly on and off the court, showing us how to be persons of integrity. He doggedly believed it is how you play the game that counts the most. In fact, if any phrase encapsulates Coach Smith's leadership, it's this one: it's how you play the game.

What then, was the result of Coach Smith's placing the emphasis on how the game should be played?

The numbers say it all: 36: seasons as head coach at UNC. 879: the number of career victories. 2: national championships. 11: Final Fours. 1: Olympic gold medal and championship. An NIT championship. He's the only college coach who has won the championship trinity of the NCAA, NIT, and Olympic gold.

At one point, the number 879 made him college basketball's all-time wins leader. Since his retirement from college basketball in 1997, this record has been passed by such prominent, coaching luminaries as Bob Knight and Mike Krzyzewski. It is still a remarkable achievement.

However, in my opinion, it's not just *that* he won, it's *how* he won that should be exalted. It's how he lived his life, how he distributed accolades and deflected praise, how he represented the university, how he cared for his players, staff, and the people with whom his life had intersected through the years that had set him apart from others in the coaching profession and leaders in general.

US Army general George S. Patton defined leadership as the art of getting subordinates to do the impossible. Someone else has said that leadership is the expression of courage that compels people to do the right things.

In the business world, the difference between an effective or ineffective corporation is leadership. In the military, the difference between a good unit and a bad unit is leadership. In sports, the

difference between a successful team and an unsuccessful team is leadership.

Author and leadership expert Peter Drucker has defined leadership simply as getting things accomplished by acting through others. Warren Bennis, another who has studied leadership, writes, “Around the globe, we face three threats: the threat of annihilation as a result of a nuclear accident or war, the worldwide plague of ecological catastrophe, and a deepening leadership crisis. In my mind, the leadership crisis is the most urgent and dangerous of the threats we face today.”<sup>1</sup>

In a world starving for effective leadership, Coach Dean Smith has proven to be a very effective leader. Therefore, I believe there’s enormous value in looking at his life and leadership style. As one of his former players, I have seen up close and personal the practical, transferable principles by which he lives. These principles, consistently practiced over almost four decades as a leader, have been the foundation for his outstanding success.

Coach Dean Smith’s goal was not to become college basketball’s most winning coach. Indeed, many of us former players had to convince him to surpass former Kentucky Coach Adolph Rupp’s record. Over and over again Coach Smith had threatened to retire when he was one game behind Rupp. We had to beg him to stay at it, to break the record for all of us who had played for him, if not for himself. Fortunately, he finally agreed.

But breaking the record and winning the most games was not his life’s goal. I firmly believe his intent was simply to teach basketball to young men through systematic, disciplined life principles. He would have been happy doing this at any level. The wins followed naturally. Sure, he enjoyed winning. He was extremely competitive. When he played golf against someone, he would never give

mulligans. He would always demand you attempt every putt. You had to beat him fairly and squarely. Yes, he wanted to win. But 879 wins was never the end goal. His players and those who worked for him were his real motivation. Playing the game rightly was more important to him than the final score.

What are these principles Coach Dean Smith imparted to his players? That's the reason for this book. For thirty plus years I've known and observed him, originally as a player and then later as a friend. I believe these principles encapsulate why he was extraordinarily successful as a leader and a man. They are not principles he thought up or invented. They are natural laws, inviolate principles of the human, relational dimension, as real as gravity is to the physical reality. These principles guide civilization. Every positive, meaningful human relationship throughout history observes them. When disobeyed, there is disharmony, disintegration, and destruction.

Indeed, I would suggest that when people see someone committed to living by these principles, an instinctive inward trust motivates them to follow. Again, I believe this is the real reason for Coach Smith's effectiveness as a leader. Those who knew him well consistently saw these principles in action. We instinctively sensed he was a man of character and ability. We therefore trusted him and desired to emulate and follow him.

This is not to imply that he was perfect. He had flaws, some of which I will point out in this book.

In fact, years ago, when I first approached Coach Smith about his permission to write this book, he quickly granted it. "David," he said, "it's a free country. You can do whatever you wish." Then he paused for a moment. Silence engulfed his office. An uneasy look crossed his face. I sensed his discomfort. Finally, he spoke, "Please, please don't deify me!"

I don't think I did, although you'll consistently witness my sincere admiration for him. I'm sure, like all of us, he was forced to live in the fog of deep convictions that at times he didn't necessarily practice. Surely, like most of us, he had disappointed friends, family, and followers. But when his life was shrouded in uncertainty, these principles grounded him on a firm foundation and allowed him to persevere. When life did not make sense for him, or when he made mistakes and was forced to face consequences, these principles continued to guide him.

When I asked Coach Smith about these principles, he asked, "From where did you get these?" He wasn't even aware of them being in his life. Yet they're there. They were probably indelibly etched into his character from an early age by his parents, undoubtedly then reinforced by formative mentors like his high school and college coaches. They're obvious to anyone who examines his life. Ask any former player. Ask any of his assistants. We would all extend super-human effort for him. Why? We believed in him. We saw his life principles lived out.

Outside of my father, Coach Smith may have had the greatest impact on my life, especially in the area of leadership. That's the real legacy I think he left. Leaders in the twenty-first century need to know this man and the principles by which he lived. Unless someone spends time to put these insights on paper, future leaders will miss his wonderful example of leadership. That's the reason I have spent countless hours writing and rewriting this book.

As I traveled around the country and interviewed people and players who have been profoundly impacted by Coach Smith's life, three different core values kept arising that seemed to define his leadership. These three core values are what Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, in their highly successful book *Built to Last*,<sup>2</sup> state are the

kind of successful habits every visionary company possesses and drives deep into its corporate culture.

First, he placed people above everything else—yes, including wins and losses. People were first in his life. Second, he believed the team is more important than the individual. The individual talents of the player, even if a superstar, must be submitted to the good of the team. Third, personal integrity and character were very important. The leader leads by conviction, care, and character. Then people will trust him and naturally follow.

From these three core values I have identified what I refer to as twelve principles that have undergirded Dean Smith's successful leadership. If read and practiced, these principles should help anyone become a better and more effective leader.

That's the legacy I hope to leave about Coach Smith to generations that have admired and venerated him, and to future generations that can learn and grow from his extraordinary life and leadership.

Coach Dean Smith's accomplishments as a man and coach were extraordinary. Who is the man behind those successes? What allowed him to be so successful? How did he last for so long in a sports climate that often imbibes cheating and scandal? How was he able to send so many guys to the NBA, many of them having outstanding pro careers? How did 97 percent of his players graduate, almost half of whom later earned post-graduate degrees? How did many of these players become fine citizens, leaders, in their communities? What were his secrets for successful leadership for the long haul?

It is my privilege to try to answer these questions for you. And in the process I believe we'll discover that it is, after all, how you play the game.

—DAVID CHADWICK



## LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 1:

# Be Loyal

*“If you ever need me, call!”*

WHEN DEAN SMITH SAID, “If you ever need me, call!” he genuinely meant it. Everyone who played under Coach Smith heard him make this statement at one time or another, and many of them went on to discover firsthand that the invitation was for real. While he might not have thought about it in such terms, when Dean Smith extended the offer to call him whenever you might have a need, he was expressing the reciprocal law of loyalty to his players.

It’s an immutable law. Others have stated it differently through the ages. “You get what you give.” Or, “You reap what you sow.” Or, “If you want to be loved, be lovable.” Or, as the Hebrew Scriptures say, “Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered” (Proverbs 11:25). Or, as Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

It doesn’t matter how you say it, the principle still operates the same way: *If you are loyal to people, they’ll be loyal to you.* If you put

others first, they'll work and play hard for you. Dean Smith understood and practiced this reciprocal law of loyalty, and every player returned his loyalty. His wasn't a blind loyalty that allowed people to take advantage of him. Rather, it was a genuine caring for others that fostered mutual care.

When John Calipari, the head coach of men's basketball at the University of Kentucky, heard about Coach Smith's death, he tweeted, "Dean Smith was the most innovative and player-loved coach of his time." In my opinion, Calipari is correct. It was because Smith practiced the reciprocal law of loyalty.

Upon learning Coach Smith had passed on, present UNC basketball coach Roy Williams said, "He set the standard for loyalty and concern for every one of his players, not just the games won or lost. He was the greatest there ever was on the court but far, far better off the court with people. His concern for people will be the legacy I will remember most."

Coach Smith gave his players advice, guidance, and access. In exchange, we gave him hard work, respect, and deference. He set standards and expectations for us, both on and off the court. He never demanded perfection. He did ask for a quest for excellence and accountability. Knowing his care and loyalty for us, we easily complied.

When I asked Coach Smith about this principle, he shared with me what led him to reach the conclusion that loyalty to others mattered more than success. "I loved to win and hated to lose," he said. "Yet for years I struggled with something internally. We would play poorly and win, and I'd feel great. We'd play well and lose, and I'd feel terrible. That didn't make sense to me.

"If two of your children were playing tennis against each other, would you really care who won? Is winning all that important in

the scheme of things? No. That's why I have ultimately placed compassion above competition. I want to win, but caring for people is much more important to me. I finally concluded that success is not defined by winning or losing, but in doing the best you can, where you are, with what you have."

### **Putting People First**

The reciprocal law of loyalty begins with putting other people first, even above your own success. People were Coach Smith's most important products. He knew that everything meaningful in life flowed out of relationship, and he steadfastly refused to manage people as things. Before considering the product, or profit, or goals, or objectives, or outcomes, or action plans—or, especially in his case, wins and losses—he was most concerned about the players who played for him and the people who worked with him. He poured his life first and foremost into them. His greatest desire was that they succeed, as players and people, even above his own success.

One of the ways Coach Smith demonstrated this desire was by counseling gifted players such as James Worthy, Jerry Stackhouse, Rasheed Wallace, Antawn Jamison, Vince Carter, and, yes, even Michael Jordan, to forfeit remaining years of eligibility for their own financial security. If they had stayed at UNC, Coach Smith's chances for more victories and more golden national championships would have been greatly increased. But he was more concerned about the individual players and their future careers.

After Antawn Jamison and Vince Carter announced their decisions to forego their senior seasons and enter the NBA draft, Ademola Okulaja, another member of that team's starting five, was asked about coaches Smith and Guthridge encouraging those players to leave early. Okulaja said, "It's different here than anywhere else.

The coaches really do put us number one. Many programs squeeze the players out like an orange and then throw them away. But there is respect and honor here—the players have it for the coaches, and the coaches have it for the players. Therefore, there is a certain obligation not to let each other down.”

Bobby Jones, the great All-American from the 1970s and generally considered one of the greatest NBA defensive players ever, personally experienced the value Coach Smith placed on caring for people. When Jones was playing for the Denver Nuggets, he began to suffer from epilepsy. The team doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong with him, and the managers just wanted him to play. He was really feeling the pressure. “Then I got a call from Coach Smith,” Jones said. “Coach wanted me to come see this doctor in North Carolina that he knew. I did, and he's the one who helped me the most. In fact, he is still my doctor today. When Coach Smith does things like that for people—and he does it a lot—it communicates that he cares for you as a person far beyond an NBA player. That meant a lot to me.”

For John Swofford, Coach Smith's practice of putting his players first often meant going to the end of the line himself. Swofford, formerly the UNC athletic director and now commissioner of the Atlantic Coast Conference, was Smith's boss for seventeen years. Swofford told me, “Sometimes I think the Carolina basketball program was wrongly caricatured as IBM. It suggested the program was structured like a corporation. A very cold image. It was intended as a compliment because of its wonderful organization. But what got lost was the way Dean always made sure the players came first, before the athletic director, the chancellor—anyone! There were times I would call him about something and he would politely say, ‘John, I'm in with a player right now, so we'll need to talk later.’ I

always understood. He was loyal to his players. They came first. It sent a tremendous message to the players, and it's why they were so loyal to him."

Evidently this reciprocal law of loyalty worked with his assistants too. Bill Guthridge, Coach Smith's assistant for thirty years, would do anything to protect Coach Smith. For example, when former Maryland coach Lefty Driesell lost to Carolina in a heated game in Carmichael Auditorium, he refused to shake Coach Smith's hand after the game. In Coach Guthridge's eyes, that was a huge mistake. He chased down Driesell and chewed him out for his lack of courtesy and respect. Driesell later said, "I really respect Bill. He's a good man, and if he ever got mad at me, well, I must have deserved it."

That's the reciprocal law of loyalty: If you are loyal to people, they will be loyal to you.

### **Accepting Others Unconditionally**

Not only did Coach Smith always put his players first, he also demonstrated that he accepted them unconditionally. That's another aspect of the reciprocal law of loyalty.

Dave Hanners, who played for Coach Smith in the early 1970s and then became one of his assistants in the late 1980s, said that Smith's loyalty knew no bounds. "Most loyalty tends to float to people who can help you the most. This was not so with Coach Smith. He was loyal to us all, superstar or sub alike."

In 1982, Hanners called Smith and announced he had quit his job because he just didn't want to work there any longer. Sensing that Hanners needed to talk about it, Coach Smith had his secretary set up an appointment as soon as possible.

"We talked about what made me quit my job," Hanners said, "and what I planned to do. He was very understanding, but also very tough

with me. Frankly, he told me I was fairly stupid to quit my job without having another one lined up. He then evaluated my strengths and weaknesses, not as a player, but as a person. He knew them intimately!

“But when I left his office, I felt great. I didn’t have a job. I didn’t know where I was headed. But he helped me believe in myself. He didn’t offer me a job as one of his assistant coaches. That didn’t happen until seven years later. I just knew that Coach Smith believed in me, and I would be all right.”

What struck me most about my interview with Dave Hanners is what happened while he was talking about his meeting with Coach Smith—tears formed in his eyes. He was so overcome with deep emotion that he had to stop for a moment and compose himself.

I couldn’t help wondering, *Would any of my staff break down and cry when talking about my leadership and loyalty to them? What a supreme compliment!*

That’s an important question for every leader to ask. How would those who work under you feel when describing their relationship with you? Would they be overcome with deep emotion while recalling the ways you had loved and treated them? Would they unabashedly acknowledge your absolute loyalty to them as people first, then as employees? Would their eyes tear up when talking about you? If not, why not?

When I asked Hanners why he teared up, he said, “It’s this sense of unconditional love from him toward us. The world doesn’t understand it. Everything is performance-based. But that’s not the case with Coach Smith’s loyalty. It’s not baloney. I go to the staff meetings. He doesn’t say we’ll treat the twelfth man one way and the superstar another way. He makes sure every player is treated the same way. It is unconditional loyalty. I think that is what separates him from all the other coaches.”

## Caring for a Lifetime

Another element of the reciprocal law of loyalty as Coach Smith practiced it is the fact his unconditional acceptance was not a one-time event. It lasted for a lifetime.

John Kilgo, longtime host of the *Dean Smith Show* and also the author of Coach Smith's biography *The Carolina Way* (which was published back in 2004), calls this player-coach loyalty "mesmerizing." The loyalty was so strong, according to Kilgo, that people "want to repay him double. They just don't want to disappoint him. That even goes on long after they leave the university. Along with practically all his former players, I still call him to seek counsel for difficult life decisions. How many people, after they have left a company, would call their former boss and ask for counsel, twenty, thirty years later?"<sup>1</sup>

That's the kind of impact Dean Smith's loyalty had. He influenced people for a lifetime.

Richard Vinroot, a former mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina, played for Coach Smith in the 1960s. "I feel incredible loyalty to him," Vinroot told me in 1998. "But that's because I know how much he cares for me, how loyal he is to me. When I was in Vietnam, he regularly wrote me and checked on my parents. I teasingly say that Michael Jordan and I are the two bookends of the Carolina basketball program. That's how little I played. I appeared in only nine games, over two seasons, scoring a single point. Yes, I scored only one point in my entire career! Yet Coach Smith still treated me like a superstar."

After his return from Vietnam and attending law school, Vinroot moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, to begin a very successful practice. Eventually he became Charlotte's mayor and a very successful and admired one at that. In 2000, he decided to seek the

Republican nomination for the governor of North Carolina. He asked for Coach Smith's endorsement, and Coach Smith obliged. Then Vinroot asked him to make a television commercial for the general election. Coach Smith again obliged.

Secretively, Coach Smith said to Vinroot, "Richard, you need to know I'm really catching it up here in Chapel Hill for endorsing you." Coach Smith was a lifelong Democrat, and in liberal Chapel Hill, his endorsement of a conservative Republican made no sense. Coach Smith's liberal friends let him hear about it.

But it made sense to Vinroot. Coach Smith was simply practicing the reciprocal law of loyalty. Loyalty to his players was much more important to Coach Smith than loyalty to a political party.

After Buzz Peterson finished his playing career at UNC, he was in Coach Smith's office. "All right," Coach Smith said to him, "you worked hard for me for four years. Now I want to work hard for you. What do you want to do?"

Peterson responded, "I want to coach."

Then Coach Smith spent the next fifteen minutes trying to talk Peterson out of it. He went on to help Peterson get every job he pursued thereafter. Even if it meant Peterson would end up coaching for an intense rival located only thirty miles away.

Les Robinson, then the coach at NC State, asked Peterson to come and be his assistant. Peterson said, "I called Coach Smith first. I was worried about what he'd say since it was State."

Smith simply responded, "Buzz, it's a great opportunity for you. Do it. But be loyal to them." Coach Smith told Buzz he must be loyal to State! That is how important loyalty was to Coach Smith.

Here's an insight into how loyalty worked for Coach Smith even after he retired in 1997. In 2001, Peterson was coaching Tulsa. They were having a fine season. Coach Smith asked to view his game films. So Peterson had his assistant send them to Coach Smith.

“One time he called me right before the NIT and said he was going to send me some ideas we should consider on offense if we wanted to win that tournament.

“I got his input a couple of days later—four sheets of paper. He had written all sorts of new wrinkles, based on putting four players further from the basket because we had a small team and doing more dribble-drives. We had a good team already. But we won the NIT that year, mostly because of those four sheets of paper.”

Even in his retirement Coach Smith was loyal to his former players, helping them win games and national tournaments!

### A Personal Experience

I experienced this kind of loyalty in my own relationship with Coach Smith. When I talk about his putting people first, about his unconditional acceptance, about his caring for a lifetime, I am describing leadership traits that are personally well-known to me.

I first met Coach Smith in December 1966. He had come to Orlando, Florida, to observe my basketball talent. He was extremely businesslike, dressed as if he had just stepped out of *Gentleman's Quarterly*. His dark black hair was slicked back from his forehead. A decided Midwestern twang was evident in his voice. I can't remember being that impressed with him. He seemed nice enough, perhaps a bit stuffy, maybe even distant. But in the recruiting deluge going on during my senior year, I was not particularly impressed with any coach. I had averaged twenty-two points and eighteen rebounds and been selected first team all-state for the second consecutive year. One hundred and thirty schools wanted my services, and I was absolutely convinced that any school would be lucky to have me.

Was Dean Smith a good coach? At this point, no one really knew. He had recruited some good players during his first five years at UNC, but he had yet to win an Atlantic Coast Conference title,

much less make it to the Final Four. I was most concerned with his coaching and recruiting ability; I wanted to win, and winning took good recruiting and good coaching. After narrowing my final three choices to Florida, Vanderbilt, and North Carolina, I eventually decided that everything felt right about North Carolina.

So I signed a letter of intent in the spring of 1967. I was so brash about my basketball ability that when I called Coach Smith to announce proudly that I had decided to come to UNC, I also informed him that I wanted to play in the NBA.

Looking back, I realize he must have been laughing on the other end of the line. He had seen me play. He most certainly saw the athletic gifts...as well as the limitations! But he politely said, “Well, David, we want to help all our scholar-athletes to achieve their life ambitions.” That was vintage Dean Smith. He wanted me to be successful, and he did not want to squash my dreams. But he undoubtedly knew my potential. So he gave me a political answer. Every reporter who has ever asked him a pointed question has experienced what I was feeling. He was a master at refusing to overstate!

In 1967, freshmen were ineligible to play on the varsity team in all Division I athletics. Our freshman team played a sixteen-game schedule that was designed to allow eighteen-year-olds the opportunity to concentrate on academics without the pressure of big-time collegiate athletics.

I thought I had an outstanding freshman year. We went 12–4, capturing the mythical “Big Four” championship among Duke, Wake Forest, North Carolina State, and UNC. I was the team’s leading scorer, averaging nineteen points per game, and the second leading rebounder, averaging almost eleven per game. My dream of playing in the NBA kept appearing before my eyes. I couldn’t wait for my sophomore year, when I would join a returning team

of veterans who the year before had gone to the Final Four. *Why*, I thought to myself, *with me and these returning veterans, we could win the national championship!*

### Being Honest with Everyone

During the first day of practice of the 1968–69 season, I learned another aspect of Coach Smith’s loyalty: He was honest with everyone.

In the first scrimmage the ball was thrown to me. I wanted to show what I had to offer. I drove to the basket. Jumping as high as I could, I stretched my arm toward the basket, nerves tingling as the ball slipped off my fingertips. I envisioned it nestling softly into the basket to the sound of oohs and aahs from my team members and, especially, from Coach Smith.

You can therefore imagine my stark surprise when the ball ricocheted off my face, spiked downward by Bill Bunting, the team’s 6’9” all-Atlantic Coast forward. My face turned red from the ball, but also from embarrassment. I recall a few chuckles. Coach Smith’s face hardly changed as he looked at me. “That’s not a good shot,” he said. “We can do better than that.”

The season went downhill from there for me. The team was quite successful. Once again we won the ACC tournament, the Eastern Regional, and went to the Final Four for the third straight year. However, I hardly played. I was a seldom-used reserve who was best known around campus as the one who scored the hundredth point in several of our blow-out wins.

I was so frustrated that I amassed a list of my concerns; there were about twelve. Then I made an appointment to see Coach Smith. I needed to find out how he felt about me. I said to myself, “If he can’t convince me that these concerns are invalid, I’m outta here!”

As always, he was very cordial when I arrived at his office. I immediately launched into my diatribe. Months of frustration spewed forth as I ticked off point after point with lightning precision. With each item I raised my voice a decibel or two. After about my fifth point, he tried to offer a response. I arrogantly snapped back and said, “Coach, would you mind letting me finish my list. Then we can talk!”

He nodded politely as if to say, “That’s okay. I understand.”

I finished my list, threatened to transfer, then folded my arms in picturesque exasperation, waiting for some plausible explanation.

To this moment my face flushes in embarrassment when I think about my adolescent outburst. I was an impatient, petulant child. Life had not gone as I’d wanted; therefore, I threw a temper tantrum. At the time, however, I felt totally justified.

Coach Smith patiently waited for me to finish. A few moments of silence passed after I stopped talking. He had undoubtedly never seen this side of me before. But with a quiet confidence, he said, “David, you are an important part of this program. I think you possess many fine gifts as a basketball player. You have some weaknesses you need to work on. But every player does. If you’ll continue to work on those areas, and continue to strengthen the positive parts of your game, I don’t see any reason why you can’t be a contributor to the success of this program over the next two years. I don’t want you to transfer. I hope you’ll stay. But if you do transfer, please know I’ll always want the best for you.”

Coach Smith then waited for me to respond. I didn’t know what to say. Then he got up and ushered me to the door. He told me if we needed to talk further, he would be willing. I left confused. My concerns were not fully answered. But he had given me a fair hearing and an honest answer.

For the first time I began to wonder if maybe I was the problem. Perhaps my lack of maturity as a basketball player and as a person was what was at least partly holding me back. I wrestled with the possibility of transferring for about a month. Finally, I simply felt an overwhelming conviction that I was supposed to return to Chapel Hill for my final two years. I had made a commitment and needed to honor it. I'm so glad I did!

Between my sophomore and junior years I worked hard and felt some steady improvement. My junior year was more successful. I moved up to the seventh man on the team. I actually started four games and had some moments when I knew I was a big part of helping the team win a game.

The success in my junior year spurred me to work even harder for my senior campaign. In the summer of 1970, I ran and lifted weights every day. I went to the inner city and played against the best players in Orlando, Florida. I told them they could do anything they wanted to me and I would never complain, never call a foul—even if blood were spilled! I knew I needed to become quicker, stronger, and more aggressive.

I put on fifteen pounds. I got tougher. I came back and ran the preseason mile in five minutes and twenty-six seconds—the second-fastest time on the team and well ahead of any other big man. In the first preseason practice, Coach Smith always allows the seniors to be on the White Team, the first team. They stay there until an underclassman beats them out. I stayed there the entire preseason. I played so well they couldn't get me out.

It was a terrific season. We finished 26–6 and won the National Invitational Tournament postseason championship in Madison Square Garden when the NIT was still a very prestigious tournament. We blew by Massachusetts and Julius Erving in the opening

round. Then we proceeded to eliminate Providence, Duke, and Georgia Tech for the championship.

I averaged almost nine points per game, was able to start eleven games, and was the first forward substitute off the bench. As I cut down my part of the net after beating Georgia Tech in the NIT championship game, I felt great pride—for playing for UNC and this man named Dean Smith. What he had told me was true. I worked on my game, became better, and he gave me every chance to show my talents.

But the NBA didn't draft me. I had played very well in the NIT tournament, and a couple of free agent offers appeared. But my high school dream no longer looked like a reality. It was hard to admit, but I knew I did not possess the physical skills necessary to play in the NBA.

As I began to explore other vocational opportunities, a team from Europe contacted me. They had seen me play in the NIT and were impressed. They flew me over. I tried out. They offered me a contract. I returned home and, naturally, counseled with my dad and Coach Smith. Both thought it would be a tremendous opportunity and adventure. So I seized it. I played in Europe for three years without any regret, three of the most enjoyable years of my life. One was spent in Ostend, Belgium, the other two in Nice, France. I know it's difficult to think about a young man living for two years on the French Riviera, but someone had to do it!

Right before I flew overseas for my first year, I went by the basketball office at UNC to say good-bye to all the coaches. As I shook Coach Smith's hand, I'll never forget his final words to me: "If you ever need me, call." At the time I thought these to be perfunctory, hackneyed words from a former coach. I didn't think he really meant them. But I thanked him and went on my way.

That was more than thirty years ago. At different junctures of my life, I've had to make crucial decisions. Whom did I call? My dad and Coach Smith were the first people. As it turned out, "If you ever need me, call" were not worn-out words from a polite well-wisher, but a sincere invitation from one who had moved from being my coach to being my friend. Countless other former lettermen share the same experience. He had said the same thing to them, and backed it up when they called.

In my opinion, reciprocal loyalty was the primary principle Coach Smith lived by. Loyalty was foundational to him. When we were hurt, he was hurt. When we were struggling, he struggled. Because of this unconditional loyalty, we were very loyal to him. While at Carolina, we played very hard. We adopted his concepts. Then, after we left, we would do anything to help him and the program. That's why I've called it reciprocal loyalty.

### **Another Personal Example**

My son David started throwing balled-up socks into lampshades when he was two years old. It was obvious from his earliest days that he would love basketball. He was also going to be tall like his dad. Everything seemed to suggest a potentially fine future in basketball.

In 2003, when he was thirteen, while I was teaching at the church, a staff member came to me and said I needed to go home immediately. David had hurt his knee. When I arrived, I found my son stretched out on the couch, his knee wrapped in ice. The sad, forlorn, scared look on his face said it all.

The next day we received the diagnosis: a dislocated kneecap that had shaved off a piece of cartilage. Surgery could repair it. The doctor thought he'd be able to play again. But he made no promises. It was not a sure deal.

Desperately, I wondered how to encourage David. Finally, I remembered Coach Smith's words to me when I left Chapel Hill years earlier: "If you ever need me, call." So I called Coach Smith. I asked him if he'd be willing to call my son and encourage him. He had seen others return from scary knee injuries. Would he do this favor for me?

Coach Smith didn't hesitate. He said he didn't know when he could do it. But he would call the first chance he got.

The next day the phone rang at the house. The answering machine kicked in. On the other end was Coach Smith's unmistakable voice. "David," he said, "it's Dean Smith. Are you there? Would you pick up the phone if you are?"

David looked at me, thinking the call was for me. I signaled to him to pick it up. "I think it's for you, son," I said.

For the next ten minutes I listened to my son engage in a mostly one-way conversation, saying, "Yes sir" and "No sir" over and over again to Coach Smith. After he hung up, I asked him what Coach Smith had said to him.

"Dad, he was just encouraging me that I could come back from this injury. He said he'd seen many players do so."

My heart warmed with thanksgiving. Out of curiosity, I then asked him, "What was the first thing Coach Smith said to you?"

"Dad," he responded, "he asked me how my grades were."

That was classic Dean Smith. It's why all who played for him cared for him as they did. He was loyal to them and was available whenever they needed him, as he promised. He cared about them as people. And I'll never forget that his primary concern that day was for my son's academic prowess, even above him ever playing another minute of basketball.

## Empathy for All

Mitch Kupchack, former all-American and now the general manager of the Los Angeles Lakers, told me that players from other schools on the 1976 Smith-coached Olympic team also felt like they were a part of the Carolina family and regularly called Coach Smith for counsel. One former ACC player, who spurned Carolina to go to a rival school, told me, “The biggest mistake I ever made in life was not to go to Carolina. Yet, recently, I called Coach Smith and asked him to help me obtain a job—and he did! He interceded on my behalf.”

That was Coach Smith’s *modus operandi*. He put people first. His primary concern was their success, not his. His first priority was to serve, not to be served. He lived by this law: If you are loyal to people, they will be loyal to you.

Let me give you a final example of Coach Smith’s reciprocal loyalty and his great empathy for others.

When the desire to write this book hit me, I knew I had to have Coach Smith’s permission. I therefore made an appointment to see him. Yet as I thought about visiting him, a strange uneasiness overtook me. It grew more and more, to the point where I contemplated not going. I searched my soul. What was going on? Finally, I was able to discern what was bothering me. My mind flashed back to 1969 and the time I entered Coach Smith’s office with my notorious list of grievances. Would he remember that horrid encounter? Might he possibly hold it against me and not permit me to write this book?

It was a cool spring day when I arrived at his office. He graciously received me, as always. For the first fifteen minutes of our time together, we talked about family. He expressed concern for my aging parents, and shared with me the agony he endured as he watched his mother struggle with Alzheimer’s disease and eventually lose the battle. He had also recently lost his father. He shared how no one is

ever prepared for this and exhorted me to enjoy my parents while they were living. Then we talked theology, our similarities and differences. Our differences were always shared with love and respect for each other. It was a deep, delightful conversation.

Yet I continued to have a gnawing discomfort. I could not believe I was still bothered by my adolescent outburst in his office thirty years earlier! I knew I had to have some peace. I waited for the right opportunity. Finally, a pause in the conversation occurred. I sighed deeply, garnering courage before I spoke. “Coach, one of my most embarrassing moments was at the end of my sophomore year when I came to you thinking about transferring.” I then retold the story in vivid detail, graphically remembering every painful minute of what had happened. Then I apologized for it.

When I finished, I felt a burden lift off my shoulders. I peered into his eyes. Did he remember? I couldn’t tell.

He finally spoke. “David, look behind you.”

On the wall behind me hung the composite pictures of all the players who had ever played for him. He continued, “There’s hardly one player up there who, at one time or another, hasn’t thought about transferring from this program. And most, if not all, have been really mad at me because they didn’t think they got enough playing time. We all learn from past experiences. What you did was just part of growing up.”

In his empathy, Coach Smith tried to put me at ease. I was one of his former players, a part of the Carolina basketball family. Mostly, however, I was his friend. To him, my angry outburst was in the past and didn’t really matter. He simply reaffirmed his loyalty to me.

Peter Drucker, the management guru, once said that efficiency is doing the thing right, but effectiveness is doing the right thing.

Dean Smith was very effective as a leader. Why? Because he did the right thing. He cared for his players above all else. People were his most important assets, his most valuable product—even ahead of wins and losses.

### Profits or People?

What would happen in companies and organizations across America and the world if leaders viewed their people as their primary product? What would happen if every leader desired above all to see his underlings succeed and be happy in life? What would happen if reciprocal loyalty became a core value of all managers and their organizations?

Here is a good example of the potential of this principle to affect a corporation. Slumping sales of athletic shoes and the sullied reputation of sports figures had forced Nike and its competitors to examine whether they wanted to continue signing athletes to multimillion-dollar promotional deals. Expense cuts, even layoffs, loomed on the horizon. What should be done?

At Nike's quarterly international sports marketing meeting in January 1998, managers discussed the relative merits of signing the two most promising players in the NFL draft: Ryan Leaf versus Peyton Manning. Someone finally suggested the company save money and not sign either one. Sources at the meeting told the *Oregonian* newspaper that Nike CEO Phil Knight said he would rather cut athletes than lay off a single employee.

I personally think Phil Knight was thinking rightly. But if he did this, would Nike's profits shrink or diminish? I dare to imagine that a company's profit margin and success would exponentially increase when people are placed first. Right principles, especially being loyal

to people and caring for them above all else, are certain to foster closeness and a greater desire to succeed.

All the other leadership secrets outlined in this book are rooted in this one principle of reciprocal loyalty. If this one falls, like dominoes, all the other ones do too. If the leader is not loyal to his underlings, teammates, and associates, then success—especially over a long period of time—simply will not follow.

I certainly understand that sometimes, albeit painfully, leaders are forced to prune people for a variety of reasons. For example, in the business world, that could include deregulation, new technologies, or international trade, to mention a few. No one can argue that business leaders have a duty to their shareholders. But is profit the entire ethos of business? Is “shareholder value” the primary or only concern? Aren’t there other expressions of value—especially the people who make the company what it is?

Or, as Jim Collins and Jerry Porras suggest in *Built to Last*, successful visionary companies never fall prey to the “tyranny of the OR.”<sup>2</sup> They believe you can pursue both caring for people and profits at the same time, all the time. As Don Peterson, former CEO at Ford, said in 1994, “Putting profits after people and products was magical at Ford.”<sup>3</sup> Yet Ford was still very profitable!

Is profit the leader’s primary duty? Isn’t there also an especially high calling to the workers? Aren’t they a company’s most valuable asset? In a different time, the chairman of Standard Oil said in a 1951 address, “The job of management is to maintain an equitable and working balance among the claims of the various directly interested groups: stockholders, employees, customers and the public at large.”<sup>4</sup>

More and more leaders today are becoming concerned about the fact that making a profit is now considered much more important than people. They are concerned that the mean salary of the

contemporary chief executive is approximately 190 times the salary of the average worker, up from 40 times in the 1970s. Nearly 50 percent of America's stock is owned by 1 percent of Americans. In fact, according to the Federal Reserve, 60 percent of American families own no stock at all.

Perhaps leaders today would be wise to study role models such as Robert W. Johnson, the founder of Johnson & Johnson in 1886. His vision for his company was "to alleviate pain and disease." By 1908, this view evolved into a business strategy that put the satisfaction of employees ahead of profits for shareholders. J. Williard Marriott Jr. said the motivating factor in his company is not the money but the pride of accomplishing a task and doing it well. He points out profit to shareholders naturally follows.

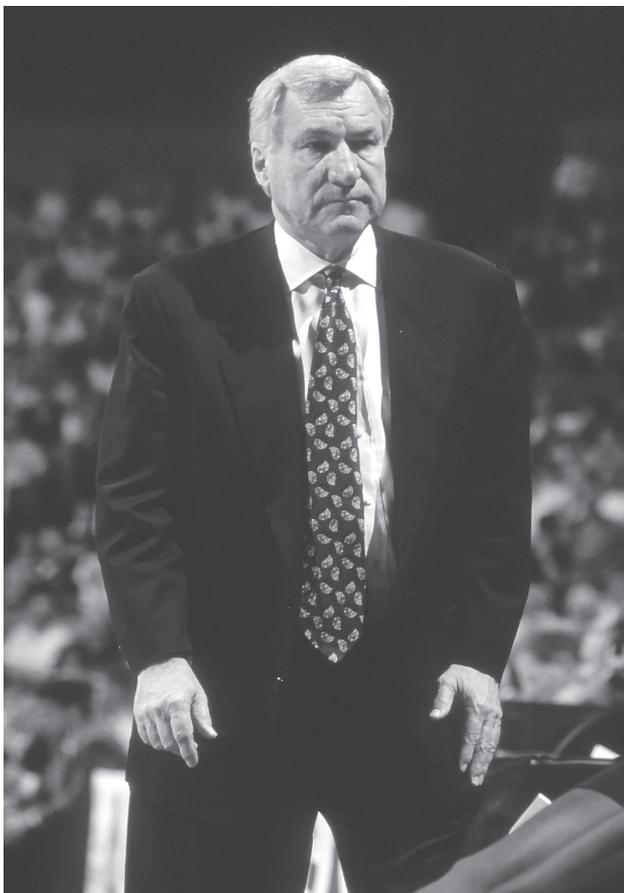
Winston Churchill once said, "The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries."<sup>5</sup> There is no magic solution for how to prioritize people over profits and still keep shareholders happy. But I think one way is to apply Coach Smith's reciprocal law of loyalty.

Dean Smith coached for almost forty years with unparalleled success. The results are now legendary, for the ages. They will be talked about and analyzed for decades to come. Why was he so successful? I'm convinced it's because he placed others before personal gain. He lived first by the law of reciprocal loyalty.

By the way, when I left his office that spring day with his permission to write this book, I shook his hand and exchanged final pleasantries. You know what his final comment to me was?

"As you develop this project—if you ever need me, call."

I knew he meant it.



*Coach Smith in 1997 in the final moments of the NCAA Final Four loss against Arizona—the last game he ever coached. His forlorn look says it all.*

Used with permission of Ron Smith.

## INSIDE COACH SMITH

### Caring for Others in Need

What Coach Smith did behind the scenes to care for people may be his greatest gift to humankind. Few ever saw these special acts of kindness and compassion. He didn't do them for anyone else to know about.

Mark Quincy was the son of Bob Quincy, the former Sports Information Director at UNC when Coach Smith began his career. Later in his career, he became an award-winning writer for the *Charlotte Observer*. Coach Smith and Bob Quincy were very close friends.

When Bob Quincy died in 1984, Coach Smith became a father figure to Mark. He helped get him admitted to UNC, where he could keep a watchful eye over him. "I was the only nonbasketball player that he sent to study hall with the team on a regular basis. He knew I needed this structure. It was also a way he could keep track of me and know how I was doing academically.

"He once gave me a large financial gift to go on a mission trip to Nicaragua. He wrote me a letter and told me if it wasn't enough, to let him know. And about a year ago his wife, Linnea, called my mom and said there was an award named after my dad that Coach Smith had won years ago. That desktop clock is now on a table at home."

When my dad was still alive, he was having his house painted. The painter was a huge UNC fan. My dad told him I played there. For the next fifteen minutes, the painter told the story of how his father was in the hospital with cancer. He was a huge UNC fan. Somehow, some way, Coach Smith found out about him. Smith visited him in the hospital to encourage him. The entire family was blown away by the fact that a man as busy as Coach Smith would take the time to visit a person he didn't even know.

Jeff Bardel, at age 18, lost his right arm in an accident at a glass plant. He was devastated, for he was soon to begin playing baseball at a university.

Bardel was a rabid UNC basketball fan. All during his recovery at Duke University Hospital, he wore his UNC gear. Coach Smith heard about Bardel's story and wrote to him, "I probably can't imagine the feelings you are having right now. But I do know that, as hard as it may be, if you can try to focus on the things you have, you will be able to go to school and move into other things that will be rewarding."

"It took away the pain for a while," Bardel wrote on Facebook after learning Coach Smith had died.<sup>6</sup>

Daniel Johnson graduated from UNC in 1998. Immediately, he joined the navy. Later, because of an accident at sea, both his legs had to be amputated.

When Coach Smith heard of Johnson's misfortune, he wrote him a letter that now hangs in Johnson's law office in Raleigh, North Carolina. On a daily basis, it reminds him that he should never be so busy that he can't care for others in need.<sup>7</sup>

The names aren't publicly known. They are of no notoriety. They couldn't do anything to repay Coach Smith. But the list is incalculable—the number of people Coach Smith reached out to when they were going through a very tough time.

But that was Coach Smith's heart. It was his *modus operandi*. It's the way he lived life. It's what he saw as his primary purpose for being on this planet. People were his most important product. He treated them the way he'd want to be treated—with compassion and care.

It was this outward expression of his heart that made him so special and so loved by so many.

## LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 2:

# Provide a Family Environment

*“I’ll never be your real father, but I guess we do have a large Carolina family.”*

IT WAS NO DIFFERENT than any other practice session. At least, that’s what we thought. The 1971 season had been a surprise. No college basketball pundit had anticipated that at this point in the season North Carolina would be on top of the Atlantic Coast Conference standings. Yet there we were, a testament to Coach Smith’s leadership ability and our playing together as a team.

We were all seated in our chairs that day, ready for Coach Smith to enter. We regularly assembled like this, either to go over the practice plan, study an upcoming opponent, or watch game film. The coaches entered the room and everyone fell quiet. But Coach Smith did not begin talking. Something was eerily wrong. He remained quiet for several seconds. Tears filled his eyes. We had never seen him like this. He cleared his throat, in obvious discomfort. The silence was suffocating.

“Gentlemen,” he finally began. “This is very difficult to talk about. But we’re all family here.” Every man inched to the edge of his chair.

Personally, I expected Coach to share that he was accepting a job somewhere else. Or perhaps someone on the team had gotten into trouble and needed to be disciplined. I would never have imagined he was about to share that *he* was the one in trouble.

“I know that if I’m struggling, it is going to affect you,” he said. “I wish it wasn’t so, but I know it is. Since we are family, I want to share with you what’s going on in my personal life.” He then shared with the entire team how he and his wife were having problems in their marriage. He said it had been going on for some time and that it was tearing both him and his wife apart.

Then, in closing, he admitted he didn’t know what eventually would happen. They were seeking counseling, but he freely confessed that the marriage might very well end in divorce. Then he bravely asked if anyone had any questions. He said he wanted to be above board in every possible way, and if anyone had any reasonable questions, he would try to answer them as honestly and forthrightly as possible.

I don’t remember whether anyone had any questions. Frankly, I don’t recall much more about that afternoon than what I’ve described. I remember feeling sadness for him, his wife, and the children. They did ultimately divorce, and he shared that, too, when it finally happened. To him this was a significant failure, one I’m sure he wished he could change. He was not a perfect man. He had failures in life, as we all do.

But what I do remember very vividly about that day is the fact that he openly shared his own private struggles because he believed we were a family. He believed that his personal life affected us, so he wanted to keep us abreast of whatever was happening.

As I have examined Coach Smith's leadership skills, I have come to realize that one of the reasons for his great success is that he created a family environment for his players. In fact, he created a family before he created the team. That's the context in which loyalty prospers: family. Functional families care about one another and openly share their failures and their successes, their happiness and their hurts.

The first thing Coach Smith did to create that family environment was to be vulnerable before his players and staff.

John Maxwell, in his book *Developing the Leader Within You*, recognized this same principle. He wrote:

Long ago I realized that in working with people I have two choices. I can close my arms or I can open them. Both choices have strengths and weaknesses. If I close my arms, I won't get hurt, but I will not get much help either. If I open my arms I likely will get hurt, but I will also receive help. What has been my decision? I've opened my arms and allowed others to enjoy the journey with me. My greatest gift to others is not a job, but myself. That is true of any leader.<sup>1</sup>

This is what Coach Smith was doing when he shared with the 1971 team about his marital problems. He gave us the gift of himself.

Through the years, the family atmosphere Coach Smith nurtured evolved to the point where he became a surrogate father to many of his former players.

### **Being a Surrogate Parent**

Take Michael Jordan, for example. After his junior year, Jordan left UNC to enter the NBA. "I was unsure, nervous, scared—going

into a situation I didn't know if I was ready for," he told me. "But Coach calmed me down with a fatherly attitude, taking me under his wing and teaching me a lot of things about being an adult."

Then came perhaps the most trying moment of Jordan's life. His father was mercilessly and senselessly gunned down while sleeping in his car. After that tragic event, Jordan turned to Coach Smith over and over again for counsel and condolences. How did Jordan characterize his relationship with Coach Smith? "Since my father's death we have grown even closer," he said in 1998. "He's very much like my father to me. I love him."

After learning of Coach Smith's passing on February 7, 2015, Jordan gave this statement: "Other than my parents, there is no one bigger influence on my life than Coach Smith. He was more than a coach—he was my mentor, my teacher, my second father. Coach was always there for me whenever I needed him and I loved him for it, teaching me the game of basketball while he also taught me about life. My heart goes out to Linnea [Coach Smith's second wife of thirty-eight years] and their kids. We've lost a great man who had an incredible impact on his players, staff and the entire UNC family."

Jordan may be the most famous player to regard Dean Smith as a surrogate father. He recognized the "UNC family." But he is far from the only one.

Buzz Peterson, the 1981 North Carolina high school player of the year who also coached at several Division I schools, also viewed Coach Smith as a father figure. "Every major decision I have made in my life—sports, marriage, everything—I have gone to him. When I was about to be married, he listened to me and gave advice. You almost feel like you are one of his kids.

"Several years after Coach Smith had retired, when I won my first conference game as the coach at Appalachian State and I walked

into my office early the next morning, the phone was ringing. It was Coach Smith congratulating me on my first conference win. That meant a lot to me. It was as exciting for me as the win itself.”

Perhaps the most poignant story I heard came from Pat Sullivan, a former player and a graduate assistant under Coach Smith. Sullivan’s alcoholic father left the family when Pat was about fifteen. “During my sophomore year,” he told me, “I was really struggling with it. My mom was great. She handled it well. But I just didn’t feel comfortable talking to my mom about something like that. I didn’t know where to turn. I was also angry. Did he not love us? I just didn’t understand.”

Then Coach Smith came to Sullivan and initiated a conversation about his father. They started to meet regularly, to help Pat work through his feelings.

“He told me my dad had a disease,” Sullivan said. “It wasn’t that he did not love us. It wasn’t that he chose alcohol over the family. Coach Smith gave me a bunch of tapes to listen to. Some of them were spiritual and some of them on the medical side. Then, every week or two, he would call me into his office and simply ask how I was doing. He asked me if I needed to talk to some of his friends who were psychiatrists. Without him, I would have stored a lot of grief and anger in my heart.”

Gradually, Coach Smith convinced Sullivan to contact his father. “He made me think about how hard it probably was for my dad not to talk to me, how hard it must be to try to overcome a problem with no one supporting you. That really got me thinking. I realized I needed to love him even though he was sick. So I wrote him a letter and we corresponded after that. I was really glad Coach Smith encouraged me to do that.”

Sullivan’s father passed away during his son’s senior year. They

had never had the chance to talk personally again, but they had stayed in touch through the mail. “I came home late from the movies one night and received the news from my roommate,” Sullivan said. “The next morning, Coach Smith wanted to see me. He said at least my dad wasn’t suffering anymore, and I would be able to experience some closure on the situation.

“Later, I realized that in all those times we talked before my dad died, Coach Smith had been preparing me for it. By helping me deal with my anger and encouraging me to contact my dad, he was preparing me for whatever might happen, even his death. Coach refused to let me feel guilty. He simply helped me understand that my dad was sick. That was the greatest thing he helped me understand.”

When I asked Sullivan if Coach Smith was like a father to him, he immediately responded, “Oh, yes. I look at him like my father. He knew about my dad’s problem during the recruiting process. I think he knew even then that he would need to care for me during my years at Carolina. He was just so caring.”

Similar sentiments flow from one of my lifelong friends, Bill Chamberlain. Few people would have expected us to become close. Chamberlain was a gifted, highly skilled, 6'6" African-American forward from New York City. I was a 6'7" white preacher’s kid from the suburbs of Orlando, Florida. But for whatever reason, we became fast friends at Carolina. He spent several hours with me sharing about his relationship with Coach Smith for this book.

Chamberlain was the most valuable player of the 1971 NIT playoffs. He scored thirty-four points in the final game, exhibiting a dazzling display of skill and athleticism. He went on to play in the old ABA and the NBA. When he talked about his relationship with Coach Smith, there was a hushed awe in his voice, an almost

reverent tone. At times he even became misty-eyed. “I remember,” he said, “how much my parents liked him. He came across as a person with great character and integrity, unlike many of the other recruiters. His approach was humble, warm, and genuine. He came to my parents’ apartment in Harlem, which I’m sure was not an easy trip for him!”

Chamberlain shared about some of the different episodes in his life when Coach Smith’s friendship meant a great deal to him. “Probably the most difficult time in my life was when my wife of seventeen years, Wheatley, died in November 1988. We were very close and really loved each other. She had just given birth to our second child. About five weeks later, a congenital brain aneurysm erupted and she died. That night Coach Smith was on the phone to the hospital. He was there for me.

“It’s like a blur right now as I talk about it because of the pain. But Coach was constantly there,” Chamberlain said. Coach Smith called the hospital, came by the house, and attended the funeral. “He basically held my hand. I was an emotional wreck. We had no previous knowledge she was sick. We were amazed that she didn’t die in childbirth, exerting so much pressure. But she didn’t. And when she died, Coach Smith was there, by my side, caring for me, loving me like a father loves his son.

“During all my life’s trials and circumstances, Coach Smith was like a father to me. I don’t know too many players who go to a university and feel like their coach is a father they can call whenever they need him. But I felt that way about Coach Smith. There’s nothing I wouldn’t have done for him. He has long been like a father to me. It’s hard to imagine he’s no longer here.”

We have already seen how the family environment created by Coach Smith fostered the kind of reciprocal loyalty Bill Chamberlain

talked about. But what we haven't examined yet is where this whole concept of family originated.

### **Treating Each Other Like Family**

That's important to consider, because this feeling of family extends to everyone who has ever played for Coach Smith. For example, I had a difficult time trying to obtain an interview with James Worthy, a former UNC player under Smith and a very successful NBA player. All my attempts to contact him with regard to this book project had failed.

Finally, I was able to secure an interview with Mitch Kupchack, now the general manager of the Los Angeles Lakers. He personally called Worthy and told him that I was a former UNC player and what I was trying to accomplish with this book. Worthy readily agreed to see me. When we finally did the interview, he apologized for being so difficult to reach. He said, "If I had known you were in the family, I would have agreed to meet with you immediately."

When I interviewed Coach Smith, I probed him regarding his efforts to create this kind of family environment. He admitted he had intended to develop that atmosphere. "It probably goes back to the way I was raised," he told me. "We are all products of our environment in one way or another. I was raised in a relatively strict home. I spent four hours on Sunday in church, even though I often-times didn't want to go. But I learned most all my values from a very loving mother and father. I knew the importance of a supportive, caring, loving family in my own life."

Bill Guthridge, Smith's longtime assistant and eventual successor, agreed with this assessment. When I asked Coach Guthridge about the Carolina family feel and why it existed, he immediately surmised that Coach Smith brought his personal family commitments

into the UNC family philosophy. The closeness of his own family influenced his approach to coaching and his emphasis on treating each other like family.

John Lotz, another of Smith's former assistant coaches who is now deceased, also believed that Coach Smith's understanding of family was the foundation for leadership principles like loyalty and placing others above self. Lotz said, "I have no doubt it came from his own family. His mother and father were really Christians in the true sense of the word. We are talking about a different era—the thirties, when Coach Smith was being raised as a boy. They were strong Baptists and believed absolutely in doing the right thing. His parents were both schoolteachers and undoubtedly hammered these principles into him from an early age. They taught him to do the right thing and then to teach others how to do the right thing."

I believe Coach Smith learned most, if not all, of these principles about the value of family through his own family. These principles gave permanence and power to him, and he passed them on to us. They were delivered to him within the context of a family. He delivered them to us within the same context.

Bill Chamberlain shared another story with me about the family environment Dean Smith created at Carolina. As family members are apt to do, Chamberlain created some real headaches for Coach Smith. One occurred during his sophomore year, when Bill became involved with the Black Student Movement and the cafeteria workers' strike.

"The university had asked them to work thirty-nine-and-one-half hours per week," Chamberlain recalled, "so they wouldn't have to be paid medical benefits. Other white workers weren't treated that way, and I simply thought that was unfair. I threatened not to play, even to transfer, if their needs were not addressed. Coach never tried

to dissuade me from my commitment, even though I know he must have been wondering what to do.

“One day I went by his office unannounced to talk about the strike. He was in a meeting with the chancellor of the university. When his secretary buzzed to tell him I was outside, Coach asked the chancellor to leave so he could talk with me. Interestingly, he totally supported my position. He even ended up signing a petition demanding rights for the cafeteria workers, which they eventually got.

“When I left his office, the chancellor was still sitting outside. Then he went back in Coach Smith’s office to continue their conversation. Can you imagine? A player causing him as many headaches as I did being more important than the chancellor! But we were more important to him than anyone except his own personal family. Yet, come to think of it, we were his family!”

As I listened to this story, a question kept sweeping over me: Would any of my present employees ever say this about me? I thought especially about the younger individuals on my staff, some of whom come from broken homes and dysfunctional families. Do they look to me as a potential father figure? Do I give them reason to do so? What could I do to make our work environment feel more like a family atmosphere and not merely a corporate setting?

Evidently I’m not the only leader who has asked such questions. One man who has tried to create a family environment in a corporate context is Don Carty, the former CEO of AMR Corporation, the parent company of American Airlines. According to Knight Ridder reporter Dan Reed, Carty wanted to change a long history of autocratic management and to make American a company that its people could love because it was a company that cared about and responded to their needs. To that end, he spent much of his first

seven months as CEO preaching to workers and managers alike about the importance of building not only professional skills and competencies, but also the enthusiasm and the love and respect for each other that he believed had been missing within American.

As more and more young people from negative family backgrounds enter the corporate workforce, managers and leaders need to be consciously creating a positive family environment. It's impossible to calculate how much more productivity takes place on a team or in an organization when people feel like they are part of a family, and that they belong to one another.

### **Creating a Sense of Family**

But how do you go about creating a family environment? So far we've covered some of the general principles: being vulnerable, being a surrogate parent, treating those who work with you like family. Let's look now at some of the practical things Coach Smith did to help create and develop this sense of family.

### ***Recruiting in the Family***

Coach Smith recruited players he knew would fit into his understanding of family. When doing his in-home visit with a recruit, he would carefully watch the family dynamics within the recruit's home. Often he would talk more to the parents than he did to the recruit.

Phil Ford, the great All-American point guard from the 1970s, was amazed that Coach Smith talked much more to his parents than to him during his visit. Phil's mom, who was not a huge basketball fan but very concerned about Phil getting a good education, wanted her son to go to a school whose coach cared first about academics. That's what Coach Smith talked to her about. After he left

the house, Phil said, “My mom was very impressed. She even commented how wonderful it was that UNC sent a dean of the academic school for the visit!”

In the later 1970s, there was a standout guard from Florida that most every school wanted. He was an extraordinarily gifted high school player. Most every recruiting guru believed he had an NBA future. Most every Division I program targeted him as a primary recruit.

Rumor was out that he wanted to attend UNC and play for Coach Smith. Coach Smith did the in-home visit. He spoke with all the members of the household. He listened and watched. At the end of the visit he left...and quit recruiting the player. When he was later asked by his assistants why he lost interest in this player, he simply responded, “I didn’t like the way he talked to his mother. He won’t fit our family.” And that was it! The prospective recruit went on to play at another school...and in the NBA.

Coach Smith recruited players who would fit his family. That was important for keeping the family “feel” secure and intact.

### *Developing the Family Feel*

Dave Hanners offered some interesting perspectives on Coach Smith’s family approach to coaching basketball. Not only was Smith like a surrogate father to the players, Hanners suggested, but he also set up, either intentionally or intuitively, a system where other members of the immediate and extended family played roles in the program.

For example, assistant coach Bill Guthridge became the players’ favorite uncle. He was much more relaxed than Coach Smith, with a gentle and engaging sense of humor. One of my favorite stories about Coach Guthridge’s sense of humor involves Michael Jordan.

At the zenith of his extraordinary popularity in the early 1990s, Jordan came to visit the basketball office at UNC. Coach Guthridge ran into him in the hall and wryly said, “Michael, I haven’t seen you in a while. What have you been doing since you left Chapel Hill?” Because of Guthridge’s gregarious, humorous personality, some of the players felt more comfortable going to him with their problems. This may be one reason why the transition was so successful when Coach Smith retired in 1997. The players lost Dad, but their favorite uncle stepped in to replace him.

Then there was Phil Ford, one of Coach Smith’s greatest players and an assistant for many years, another uncle who brought something else to the family. He was a bit younger, therefore he could joke around with the players more easily. Back when Ford was still on the coaching staff, Hanners said this about him: “Phil is great at loosening the players up. He runs out on the court with them at practice, telling them that he is number one. He points to his jersey, retired over one of the baskets, and tells them that when he played they had a play called ‘12 lob.’ They would just throw the ball toward his jersey and he would go up and get it and slam-dunk the ball. The kids get a kick out of that.” Hanners suggested to me that when Coach Smith chose his assistants, he looked for personality traits he didn’t have in order to bring balance to the coaching staff and better meet the needs of the players in his family.

“I think he even chose secretaries with the family idea in mind,” Hanners continued. “To me, they are like four surrogate mothers or aunts. They possess the maternal instinct. When the guys come in the office, they tell the secretaries things they will never share with the coaches, things like problems with their girlfriends. Sometimes they don’t want us to think that they have everyday problems. I believe Coach Smith knew the family needed moms, so he

hired secretaries who were not only wonderful administrative assistants but who could also supply the maternal side of the family environment.”

Hanners had a final insight into how Coach Smith helped develop the family feel. “I even wonder if in the design of the office space in the Smith Center he didn’t think through developing this family thing. The kitchen is in the center, as are the players’ mailboxes. In order to get a drink or get their mail, they have to walk by the secretaries’ desks. There was always intentionality in what Coach Smith did. He thought through practically every detail in every situation. I’ve always wondered if that were intentional, forcing the players to deal with their need to interact with a mother figure. Many of these guys came from fatherless homes and their mom was the strongest person in their lives. Perhaps this design just had the right feel for him in developing this family commitment among us all.”

Are there opportunities for you to apply some of these “family environment” ideas in your sphere of influence? How many leaders would recruit a staff knowing certain people might fulfill different roles in the family? How many would design office space in new buildings in order to maximize a family feel? What revolutionary thoughts!

Long before the Smith Center came into existence, however, Coach Smith was nurturing a family environment. During my interview with him, he gave me another insight into how he tried to create a sense of family. He reminded me how, every Thanksgiving, he would invite players to come over to his house for Thanksgiving dinner if they wanted.

“Oh, yes,” I said. “I did that a couple of times.”

He then told me he personally would have never gone over to

Coach Allen's house for an event like that when he was playing under him at the University of Kansas. "I would have preferred to be with my friends."

"I was just trying to get more playing time!" I replied.

We laughed. He said the Thanksgiving tradition was an attempt to create a family atmosphere among the players, "although I never wanted it to become a buddy-buddy affair. That was the tension for me. I wanted a family atmosphere, but I knew we couldn't be too friendly at this point. That would happen later, after you graduated."

### *Caring for Your Personal Family*

During this conversation about family, something absolutely amazing happened. The phone rang. Coach Smith looked puzzled for a moment. He said, "I don't understand. I gave explicit instructions not to be interrupted." The phone stopped ringing. We continued the conversation. Then it started ringing again. He was not puzzled any longer.

"Excuse me for a moment," he said. "That must be my private line. It's either one of my children or another former player. They're the only ones who have my private number. You're the only ones who can get to me any time you want!"

He picked up the phone and said, "Hello." Then he smiled. "Hi, Kristen." He covered the phone receiver with his hand and said, "It's my daughter. I'll be right back with you." Then he spent the next several minutes counseling his then-teenage daughter about something that was important to her.

I laughed to myself. I had been furiously studying different articles written about Dean Smith trying to find a way of illustrating my conviction that his former players are like family to him. I had looked everywhere but couldn't find one. Then he gave me the

illustration during the interview. Coach Smith said the only people who possessed his private telephone number were his own blood children and players like me!

### A Glimpse into His Life as Dad

The February 12, 2015 funeral of Coach Smith was an event I'll never forget. It was held at Binkley Baptist Church, Coach Smith's church for all his years in Chapel Hill. The sanctuary was packed with family members, a few close friends, and more than one hundred former players and managers. Everyone from Michael Jordan to team managers were present. All were considered to be "family."

What struck me the most during the worship service was the warmth with which Coach Smith's biological children spoke of him. A side of him was shown that his players and the public rarely, if ever, saw.

For example, his daughter Kristen shared about Coach Smith's love of dogs. Who knew about that? Then, laughingly, she shared how, on a birthday, he would ask where the child would want to go to eat. It had to be a special restaurant chosen by the child. He would build up the event with great excitement. Then he'd drive the child to a different restaurant than the one chosen. He would then wait to observe the child's crestfallen face. Finally he would smile and say, "Just kidding!" and then drive to the restaurant originally chosen.

He not only loved to eat crabs but loved to go crabbing with his kids during the annual family vacation at the beach. Who knew?

To awaken them for school, he would break into each kid's bedroom in the morning and start singing, "Oh, what a beautiful morning" from the musical *Oklahoma!* (terribly off key, Kristen added, easily modulating between tenor and bass!). None of his former players ever heard him even try to sing!

His son Scott shared a hilarious story that occurred during the time in the 1970s when Smith was coaching international squads. One event had a party where players from all over the world were gathered, both men and women. Coach Smith turned to his teenage son Scott and suggested he ask Bill Foster's daughter to dance. Foster was then the coach at fierce rival Duke University. Scott hesitated. He didn't want to ask Bill Foster's daughter to dance. Coach Smith said to him, "Go do it. It'll help improve Duke/UNC relations!" Begrudgingly, Scott did so.

While Scott was dancing with Bill Foster's daughter, he looked around and saw his dad dancing with a 6'9" Russian female basketball star! Scott's eyes widened with amazement as he watched his dad bobbing up and down and shuffling his feet with the beat of the band. The palms of his hands were facing the ground, going up and down too, like he was dribbling two basketballs! A smile consumed Coach Smith's face as he looked at his son. He was having a blast on the dance floor!

Scott asked his dad what he was doing. "Well, son, you're improving UNC/Duke relations. I'm improving USA/Soviet relations!"

At the funeral, one thing became exceedingly clear: Coach Smith dearly loved his family. His wife, Linnea, was central to his life. She was his primary caregiver for the final eight years of his life while dementia ate away his mind. She was his best friend for thirty-eight years. His five biological kids were of paramount importance to him.

But I also believe that we lettermen were all in this same general category: We were a part of his extended family. That's the way he looked at all his lettermen. That's why, if we ever needed him, we could simply call. That's why we all loved him so much.

Some are saying today that business is at war with family life. Not so at Half Price Books. At one point, it was the largest used-book

dealer in the United States. What has been the key to its success? Locating its stores in cities where its employees and their family members desire to move.

Leaders who want to be effective at managing the next generation will need to develop a sense of family in the workplace. With so many broken homes littering people's pasts, there will be many who desire to learn how they can best nurture their own families. Also, with more and more women moving into corporate leadership positions, work and family life have become mandated with such features as working at home, flexible hours, and day care at the workplace.

British leadership guru Charles Handy, in his book *The Hungry Spirit—Beyond Capitalism: A Quest for Purpose in the Modern World*, talked about how contemporary organizations can adapt to modern situations. In a chapter titled "The Citizen Company,"<sup>2</sup> he concluded that businesses must operate like communities. He described people who work for these companies as "citizens" in today's workplace. I think he may need to go a step further. We're not only communities with citizens, but families with individual family members—and the workplaces are either functional or dysfunctional!

### **Continuing the Family Relationship**

When he was still UNC's head basketball coach, the wall of the kitchen near Coach Smith's office was covered with photographs of former players, their wives, and their children. A picture of my own three children was there, with Coach Smith holding my youngest, Michael, when he was just a few months old.

One particular photograph is insightful. Michael Jordan's son, Marcus, is portrayed as an infant wearing pajamas. A phrase written

on the pajamas nicely encapsulates the principle covered in this chapter: “All I do is eat, sleep, and root for the Tar Heels.” Marcus, too, is a part of the family!

And the most important aspect of this family relationship is that it continues long beyond a player’s days at Carolina.

One of the most telling of all the stories from former players regarding their feelings about being a part of the UNC family came from Rick Webb, a seldom-used substitute who played for Coach Smith during the late 1960s. Here is the story Webb shared with me.

“On October 5, 1996, I was involved in a life-threatening car accident. I was in intensive care for twenty-three days, undergoing seven difficult operations. Although I truly believe I was saved only by God’s grace, my experiences under Coach Smith’s leadership and being a part of the Carolina basketball family helped me recover.

“Although I played very little, tough practices and arduous conditioning reinforced important life lessons: humility, tolerance, patience, compassion, understanding, consideration, kindness, and most important, love. I also learned the power and peace associated with prayer. Coach Smith was a great believer in prayer before and after games.

“The Carolina basketball family was there to support me throughout my recovery. Coach Smith wrote and checked on me regularly. Other players really cared for me with their prayers and presence in my time of need.”

Everybody reading this book—everybody on the planet, it seems—knows who Michael Jordan is. Few would recognize the name Rick Webb, however. He was never a superstar—just a seldom-used college basketball player who would have been long forgotten in the ordinary scheme of things. But the Carolina basketball family is not ordinary. And many years later, Rick Webb is still

a part of the extended family, still as loved and respected and cared for as Michael Jordan. That's because Coach Smith made us a family.

"Most athletes learn how to endure and play through physical pain and suffering," Webb told me. "But coping with the mental and psychological aspects of debilitating injuries requires you to draw from experiences learned through life's many trials and tribulations. My experiences with Coach Smith, his influence, and the Carolina basketball family helped me gain the strength, determination, and patience necessary for my continuing recovery and changed lifestyle."

Is there a leader in the world who would not love to have that statement made about them by someone who has been under their tutelage? Wouldn't it be thrilling to see how your leadership has positively affected someone during life's trials? This influence evolves most naturally in a family environment of caring for one another. It's an environment that the leader creates.

Every leader who desires to be effective should ask, "Are my people my most important product? Are they like a family to me? Do they care for one another like a healthy family does? Are the people under my leadership learning principles that can be used when tragedy hits? Would they say they feel like their fellow workers share a sense of family?"

Charles Dickens is widely quoted as saying, "No one is useless in the world who lightens the burden of another." I'm convinced that most often takes place within the context of a family commitment. I believe Coach Smith understood this too.

After all, leaders come and go. But families will always be necessary.

Perhaps Phil Ford summed it up best when he said, "I frequently told Coach that he was the only father in the world with three hundred children, with only five of them being his own."

## INSIDE COACH SMITH

### Dean Smith and Dads: Are Good Fathers Back in Style?

Marilynn Chadwick ■ *Charlotte Observer*, February 12, 2015

Sooner or later, it was bound to happen. Good dads are back in style. With legendary Coach Dean Smith's recent passing, many saw what they've actually suspected. Fathers, and father figures, are not just an add-on. Rather, they fulfill some of our deepest longings.

My husband played basketball for Coach Smith. News of the coach's death brought tears. It's been more than forty years since graduation. Yet David says that next to his own father, Smith was the most significant man in his life. He's not alone. Even superstar Michael Jordan called Smith his "second father."

I've listened to countless commentaries by former teammates and members of the Carolina Basketball family around the country as they grieve for their beloved coach. Those who lacked fathers of their own speak of Smith as their "father."

Coach Smith certainly acted like a good dad to his players. He expected excellence both on and off the court. He set the bar incredibly high. But his players knew they were "family." And they responded by achieving more than anyone thought possible. Young athletes gave their all for this man who cared more about his players' success than his own. "Players win the games," he used to tell reporters. "I lose them."

David and I were blessed to have exceptionally good fathers who, like Coach Smith, cared more about their children than they did themselves. But good dads these days are hard to find. Perhaps we've brought it on ourselves. Just watch any television show. Dads are spoofed, maligned, caricatured, and generally disrespected. The

message? It's just not cool to be a dad. If the same treatment were given to moms, you'd spark a revolt.

But that's the nature of dads. The good ones don't whine. They don't show off. They put the needs of their families ahead of their own. And as Coach Smith modeled for us all, good dads embody self-sacrifice.

In short, good dads are that reservoir of safety and unconditional love for which all kids hunger. Quite likely, they're a major factor in determining the outcome of a young person's life. The statistics aren't pretty. Girls and boys without dads are more likely to end up pregnant out of wedlock, in prison, poor, or dead. And bad dads may be worse than no dads, leaving scars inside and outside that can last a lifetime.

But I'm seeing a resurgence of dad-hunger out there. This year's Super Bowl in 2015 cashed in on this trend with their tear-jerking array of commercials aimed at our daddy longings. Turns out good dads are anything but dull. I think people today are literally dying for good dads. Perhaps Coach Smith's legacy will inspire dads to be better. Smith knew it wasn't simply about winning and losing but rather "how you play the game." His life reminds us that good guys are very cool. And just maybe, more guys will want to become good dads. Lord knows we need them.

## LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 3:

# Be a Friend Forever

*“But when you leave, you’re my friend.”*

WHEN I ASKED COACH Smith to describe his leadership style, he never paused. “I was a benevolent dictator. I was the leader. There was no doubt about that. I came up with the practice plans. I controlled everything. But I hope I did it all with some benevolence. I tried to control with compassion.”

I had to smile. He did run everything with an iron grip. There was no dialogue in practice. He did not seek our input regarding issues. It was either his way or the highway! Coach Smith would never hesitate to throw someone out of practice, or make them run extra sprints if he thought their actions were hurting the team.

“I was the quarterback on the football team,” he wryly told me. “I was the point guard on the basketball team. Therefore, I got to call all the plays. And I was the catcher on the baseball team. That meant I got to call the pitches. I guess I did like to be in control!”

No, there was no doubt about it. He was unquestionably in control. Yet he *was* a benevolent dictator. We knew he deeply cared for us, individually and corporately.

Coach Smith reminded me that each year he let us become just a little bit closer to him. “Wasn’t it your senior year, David, that we started letting the seniors make some of the rules and regulations outside of practice?”

I nodded.

“Well, I knew that most freshmen come on campus as high school hotshots, and I had to begin to knock some of that out of you. That’s why on road trips, freshmen had to carry the projector and do other grunt work. That’s why sometimes I would be extremely hard on you as a player. In a real way, I had to tear you down to build you back up. Then, as seniors, you became leaders yourself. You had earned the right to be closer to me.”

What he said rang true with me. That was exactly what happened in my years under his leadership.

“But,” he continued, “after you left, after you graduated, you became my close friends. Everyone talks about my loyalty to my former players. But I don’t treat you any differently than I would a close friend. Since you’re my friend for a lifetime, of course I’m going to be there when you need me. Of course I’m going to care for you. And I hope that you would do the same for me, simply because we’re friends.”

In the previous chapter I shared some examples of how many former players consider Coach Smith a surrogate father. When I asked if he thought of himself in this way, his answer was immediate. “No, I couldn’t replace your parents. They did the job of raising you. You are who you are primarily because of them, not me. I

look at you and all the former players as my friends. I am your ally, your friend.”

Yet I respectfully disagree with what Coach Smith said on this point: To the players, he was like a father who grew to become our close friend.

But perhaps he was stating something that was even more important than the family feel he created among us. Perhaps he was stating that, beyond family, we possessed something that was greater to him: friendship. Above everything else, he wanted us to be his life-long friends.

That is what former Carolina players knew with Coach Smith. He was a father figure who became a close friend.

And the basis of this friendship started with the fact that he accepted us for who we were and respected us as individuals.

### **Accept People for Who They Are**

Coach Smith’s acceptance of and respect for people as individuals was apparent in episodes such as the recruitment of Danny Manning. When Manning was a senior in Greensboro, North Carolina, everyone thought he was a lock to attend North Carolina. However, Larry Brown, then head coach at Kansas University, hired Ed Manning, Danny’s father, as one of his assistants. The younger Manning committed to Kansas soon thereafter and later led the Jayhawks to the national championship.

Many Carolina people questioned Larry Brown about the Danny Manning situation. They thought it cost UNC many victories and possible national championships. It was one of the first things they brought up when referring to Larry Brown. But Coach Smith never mentioned it. Whenever he talked about Larry, it was always with

great respect. Why? Because they were friends, and that's the way friends treat one another.

In 1990, former Charlotte mayor Harvey Gant, an African-American and a Democrat, was running against Jesse Helms in the North Carolina Senate election. Many encouraged Coach Smith to run against Helms. He would not. But he did support Gant. Plus, he asked Michael Jordan to endorse Gant publicly.

Jordan refused. He purportedly said he wouldn't do it because Republicans buy sneakers too. Coach Smith felt no angry feelings or disappointment toward Jordan. He always wanted his players to stand by their beliefs. He respected them for doing so.

### **Friendship with an Opposing Coach**

We also see how important friendship was to Coach Smith in his relationship with John Thompson, his assistant on the 1976 Olympic basketball team and former coach at Georgetown University.

Coach Smith tried to recruit Patrick Ewing, a highly touted high school player who went on to become a Hall of Fame player in the NBA. Ewing almost chose the Tar Heels out of high school. "I was close," Ewing said on the Dan Patrick radio show in 2013. "North Carolina was a very good school. But when I went down there they put me in that Carolina Inn and there was a big Ku Klux Klan rally in North Carolina when I was there. I'm like, 'You know what? I'm not coming down here.'"

Before leaving on that visit, Coach Smith told Patrick Ewing that if he didn't come to UNC, he should attend Georgetown and be coached by John Thompson. Only a good friend would recommend a star player attend a rival school he may later have to play against in a national championship game, which was exactly what happened in 1982!

This kind of friendship was a higher priority for Dean Smith than celebrating victories. When North Carolina beat Georgetown in 1982 for the national championship, most fans missed something that happened on the court as the Tar Heel team erupted in celebration. Coach Smith showed amazing dignity and grace one wouldn't expect in this situation.

As the final horn sounded and victory was secured, Coach Smith had every reason to celebrate wildly along with his players, coaches, and managers. It was a breakthrough game for him. He had been to six previous Final Fours without winning a championship. Frequently, critics criticized him and his system for not being able to win the big game.

But Coach Smith didn't celebrate with those around him. Immediately, he looked for John Thompson, Georgetown's head coach and his close personal friend and assistant on the 1976 Olympic gold medal team. Coach Smith ran to Thompson and hugged him. Reading his lips, you could see him ask, "Are you okay?" His first reaction was empathy for his friend, not joy for the national championship. Only after Thompson acknowledged that he was okay did Smith return to celebrate with his players and assistants.

"Dean Smith's first reaction after winning the game was to come over and console me," Thompson said years later. "I hope I would have been classy enough to have done that, because I probably would have been doing what Jim Valvano did [when NC State won the championship in 1983]. I probably would have been running around yelling and hollering, but his thoughts were to come to his close friend because he knew how I felt." No wonder John Thompson remained a close friend all Coach Smith's life! He became ill the day of Coach Smith's memorial in Chapel Hill. He wasn't able to attend. But he asked his son, John Thompson III,

to attend. He gladly did so and received a standing ovation when introduced.

After Coach Smith's death, Thompson simply said, "I loved him." He wanted to leave it at that. Nothing else really needed to be said.

### **Friendship Equals Acceptance and Forgiveness**

One player who experienced acceptance and forgiveness because of friendship from Coach Smith was Phil Ford, undoubtedly one of Smith's greatest individual and team players. Ford graduated from high school in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, with amazing credentials. His basketball acumen was outstanding. Practically every school in the country tried to recruit him, and many different coaches all promised him a starting position and plenty of playing time. That's quite alluring for any high school star. It's a difficult carrot not to bite when thinking about signing with a school.

Then Coach Smith came to visit him. Ford had always been a North Carolina fan. But he also knew he was a fabulously gifted point guard who could impeccably run Coach Smith's famous Four Corners offense. So he waited for the pointed pitch, specifically how he would almost certainly start and be given tons of playing time in his first season.

To Ford's astonishment, Coach Smith promised nothing. Instead, he told Ford he might have to play on the junior varsity team his first year in order to grow as a player and totally understand the system. The only promise Coach Smith made was that he would be treated fairly.

"That kind of set me back," Ford later recalled. Indeed, he didn't like it one bit. However, slowly but surely, he began to see this honesty as something positive, especially with the help of his mother. She said, "Phil, if he's not out here promising you that you will start,

that means that if you go there and work hard and do the best you can, then he won't be out promising your job to another high school player." Acknowledging his mother's wisdom, Ford said, "I thought about it, and her observation made a lot of sense."

Ford did sign with Coach Smith and North Carolina. His career was spectacular. Not only did he lead Smith's teams to dozens of victories and to ACC championships, but to the final championship game of 1977 as well. He became an all-American and a John Wooden Award winner as a senior. His future sparkled. He was a first-round draft choice in the NBA and was rookie of the year in 1978.

### *Forgive Human Frailties*

The future seemed limitless for Phil Ford, until his third season as a professional. He broke the orbital bone around his left eye, and the injury caused him to have double vision. He could never regain his magic touch that had led to so many basketball successes. Slowly, depression crept over his soul. He turned to alcohol. He consumed more and more. It wasn't long before full-blown alcoholism ensued. His career began to erode. He was being pushed out of the league and onto the streets. It was the darkest stage in Ford's otherwise brilliant life.

It was at this time that Ford discovered Coach Smith was not just a benevolent dictator or his surrogate father, but his friend. When word reached Coach Smith about Ford's dark despair, he immediately picked up the phone and tried to track him down. He wanted to meet immediately and find out what needed to be done for Ford to become well.

Ford described it this way. "Coach Smith saved my life. It was like he was saying to me, 'Hey, I'm here for you. It's going to be me

and you. You and I will solve this problem together.” Hope began to take root in his soul. He saw that life still had purpose and that, with Coach Smith’s help, he could overcome this demon tormenting him.

Coach Smith made phone calls to rehabilitation centers around the country until he found what he thought was the best one. Ford entered the clinic and began the long, difficult road toward recovery. A couple of years after the recovery process began, with his life back on track, Ford became an assistant coach at UNC, where he stayed until Smith’s retirement in October 1997.

Why did Coach Smith go to such great lengths for Phil Ford? Yes, Ford was a former player, a very good one at that. Yes, he was part of the Carolina family. That was important. But I would suggest that the primary reason Coach Smith believed in and helped Ford was that he was his friend. That’s the way friends act. They forgive our human frailties and reach out to help us when we need it.

At Coach Smith’s memorial service in the Smith Center, I sat next to Phil Ford. Before he spoke, he cried. After he spoke, he cried. He deeply loved his close friend and mentor who was now gone.

When James Worthy, North Carolina’s all-American forward in the early 1980s and later an all-pro with the Los Angeles Lakers, talked in 1998 about Coach Smith as his friend, he said, “You notice it right away. There’s nothing you can’t talk to him about. The door to his office is always open. If you needed a day off to study for a final exam, he would give you the day off to study.

“But the friendship really happens after you graduate, when you are living life on your own. You grasp how much he cares after you leave. I am much closer to him right now than I have ever been, and the closeness grows every month. When I was playing, he sent me good luck mailgrams on opening night. He remembers

anniversaries when *we* can't remember them. And it's not public relations. It's sincere. It's Coach Smith. He is our friend and he regularly communicates it."

After James Worthy made headlines with a much-publicized bad decision, another former player expressed his exasperation with Worthy to Coach Smith. Smith quickly defended Worthy, saying that no one could really understand all the pressures and temptations of being an NBA superstar. He, too, lamented Worthy's poor choice, but he was very unwilling to throw stones. Coach Smith encouraged empathy toward Worthy, not judgment. Why? Because Worthy was his friend.

### *Desire the Success of Each Individual*

Another way Dean Smith expressed his friendship was by wanting the best for his players as individuals, desiring their success, no matter what it cost the team. Yes, the team was all-important. But frequently we heard him say, "The individuals on the successful team are the individuals who receive the most attention."

Justin Kurault, a team manager in the late 1980s, shared insights with me about Coach Smith's friendship for his players and managers during his tenure. Ostensibly, Kurault was not essential for the program to remain in the top ten. Yet at the end of his senior year, Coach Smith took aside Pete Chilcutt, Rick Fox, and King Rice, his senior starters, and Kurault, the team manager. He asked the four of them how he could help them fulfill their life desires.

Kurault told Coach Smith he wanted to coach. Coach Smith responded, "Well, if you don't want to make any money, I'll see what I can do for you."

"So I spent the summer working Coach Smith's camp and a couple other camps. Finally, I found out that Coach Smith helped me

get the assistant's job at Davidson. It was hard to believe he would do all that for someone like me—just a manager. But he told me, "You're my friend. That's what friends do for one another."

Richard Vinroot, a letterman in Coach Smith's early years and former mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina, told me this story about how Coach Smith placed his respect for individual players even above victories against Atlantic Coast Conference foes. When King Rice was the starting point guard, he went through a very difficult week. He ended up in a campus altercation that resulted in his arrest and a short stay in jail.

That week, Carolina was playing a very important game in Chapel Hill. It would help decide key seedings for teams in the NCAA tournament. At that time there was no proof that King Rice was culpable, so Coach Smith allowed him to start.

He played terribly. Carolina lost. Tar Heel fans are usually loyal to a fault, but they mercilessly booed King Rice when Coach Smith left him in the game.

Afterward, Vinroot was in Coach Smith's office. He was frustrated with the loss and launched into a diatribe against Rice. Coach Smith's irritation slowly but surely rose. Finally he said, "Richard, you don't know all that King has been through this week. You don't know his frustrations and what is going on in his mind. Yes, I started King tonight and played him practically the entire game. But, frankly, King's self-esteem at this point is far more important to me than whether we win a basketball game."

Isn't that amazing? Coach Smith was more concerned with one player's self-worth than winning a basketball game, albeit a very important one. By the way, King Rice went on to win many games for Coach Smith and Carolina. In fact, at the one-hundredth Celebration of UNC basketball held in 2010, players were chosen to

speak from each decade that Coach Smith coached. Guess who was chosen from the 1980s? King Rice. With tears, he recounted the number of times Coach Smith came to his aid, especially when he made stupid decisions, and helped him become the man he is. Today he's also a successful Division I college basketball coach. Could it be at least partly because of the confidence he gained from Coach Smith? One game was sacrificed to help win many others and to help a kid grow in his life. Isn't that what's most important in life? Isn't that how the game of life should be played?

Justin Kurault added this insight about the King Rice incident. He said that after the campus altercation, King was so embarrassed about it he didn't respond to two different attempts by Coach Smith to reach him. When they finally met together, Coach Smith firmly reminded King that he cared about him as a person first. Smith also told him that he was his friend, and he would stick by him no matter what.

### **Support and Defend Your Friends**

One of my most intriguing interviews in working on this project was with Bob Knight, then the head coach of the Indiana Hoosiers. North Carolina squared off against Indiana in the 1981 national championship game in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Over the years that Knight was a coach, he repeatedly received flak in the press for his antics and treatment of players.

Coach Smith had mentioned to me that he and Bob Knight were friends, so on a lark, I wrote Knight and asked if he would like to comment about Coach Smith's leadership. He responded immediately and said he would like to express his thoughts about Dean Smith.

The interview took place on a snowy day in early March 1998,

in Bloomington, Indiana. It was on a Monday of the first week of the NCAA tournament—not the best time for his total concentration. However, when he finally did sit down with me, Knight could not have been more cordial. He began by trying to teach me about theology and particularly the differences between John Calvin and John Wesley. Fortunately, we quickly moved to the real reason for the interview. (I think I could have beaten him in a theological debate, but I honestly did not want to try!)

When Knight began to talk about Coach Smith, his voice changed, becoming almost reverent. He said, “Over the years our friendship has grown deeper. When somebody asks how I get along with Dean Smith, I tell them we are good friends. And I also tell them that he is one of the few, if not the only, person I know that the more I became acquainted with him, the more I wanted to know him.”

Knight continued by telling me a story he had never told before. “We were eating in Chapel Hill,” he said, “after an NCAA officiating meeting in Greensboro we both had to attend. The restaurant was very crowded and there was a light atmosphere. When the check came, Dean grabbed it. I said, ‘No, I’m taking us to dinner.’ And he said, ‘No, I’m taking us to dinner.’”

Knight swore and said, “Dean, I am going to pay for this.” He put his hand on Smith’s wrist and demanded the check.

“I told Dean I’d seen this kind of stuff from him before and that he could pay tomorrow night. We could argue about it again the next night too, but I was paying for dinner tonight. And I took the check from him.

“He didn’t know that I heard him, but while I was giving the credit card to the waiter, he leaned over to my wife, Karen, and said, ‘You know, he is the only person in the world that I would let do this.’ That’s the way Dean is. He’s unbelievably generous.

“What I was saying by paying for that dinner was that I really appreciated being with him. And by letting me pay, he was saying he really enjoyed being with me too. I thought that was really a nice thing for him to say about our relationship.”

Coaches Smith and Knight had known each other for a long time. They were close friends. At no time was this in greater evidence than the summer of 1998, when *Sports Illustrated* wrote a rather scathing article about Coach Knight’s antics and treatment of players. The next week, in a letter to the editor, Dean Smith wrote,

Coach Knight was and is a brilliant technical coach and teacher of skills. Knight will not cheat in recruiting, although many coaches in the Hall of Fame with him have been on NCAA probation.

Knight demands that his athletes get their degrees.

Every school would like to have a coach who wins games, whose players have been recruited legally and who graduate, and who brings in millions of dollars to support the many men’s and women’s programs that cannot support themselves.

I am not aware of any player who has graduated from Indiana who is not grateful to Coach Knight for his experience with the Indiana basketball program.

When Richard Vinroot criticized Bob Knight over his news-making antics, Coach Smith angrily came to Knight’s defense. He pointed out many of the things Knight had done and continued to do for his players.

For example, after Landon Turner, a star in Indiana’s 1981 national championship season, was crippled in an automobile accident, Knight came up with money needed to help defray his medical expenses. He continued to counsel Turner through a time of

deep, dark depression, when Turner learned he would be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Smith wanted Vinroot to know the kinds of positive things Knight had done that had not received publicity.

Later, Bob Knight publicly defended Dean Smith when he thought he was being wrongly maligned. Knight was doing a color commentary for ESPN on one of their college basketball Game Day programs. It was the game of the week, and Knight joined several other basketball pundits to give his views on this game in particular and the state of college basketball in general.

Someone began a conversation about Michael Jordan's greatness. There was general consensus. Then someone else restated the hackneyed line, "Well, Dean Smith is the only person ever to hold Michael Jordan under twenty points per game" (Jordan averaged nineteen his junior season before turning pro).

When Bob Knight heard this comment, he went off. For the next five minutes he went on a diatribe and stated that Dean Smith had taught Jordan how to play basketball the right way. Smith's teaching Jordan the right way to play was the reason the Chicago Bulls had won six NBA championships. It wasn't until a commercial break that Knight's lecture came to an end.

Knight later said he was just defending his friend against an unmerited comment. It was as simple as that.

Lefty Driesell was one of Coach Smith's fiercest rivals. The tension in their personal relationship was exacerbated when Coach Smith won the recruiting war for Charlie Scott, who chose UNC over Davidson when Driesell was the coach there. It only became worse when Driesell became the head coach at Maryland and they played against one another twice a year.

During a game in my junior year at UNC, a fight broke out between the Maryland and UNC players. Coach Driesell was in

the middle of the fray. At one point, he wouldn't even shake Coach Smith's hand after they had competed against one another.

Yet the years quieted the fires between them. As time passed by, Coach Driesell saw the honest, principled man Coach Smith was. They became friends. During the last years of Coach Smith's dementia, he called Linnea, Coach Smith's wife, on a weekly basis to check on his friend and see how he was doing.

Wouldn't any of us do the same thing for a true friend? Wouldn't we publicly defend a friend if we thought he was wrongly accused? If a close friend has fallen into alcoholism, wouldn't we do anything within our power to help him return to a normal life? Wouldn't we want to help a close friend find a job and fulfill his career ambitions? Wouldn't we regularly check up on a good friend who is ill?

We would do that for our friends, but what about our employees? Why do we not allow them to get close to us?

### **Allow People to Get Close**

Think about what would happen if employers, over the years, allowed employees to become friends?

Certainly there will always be the tension of how to be a boss and a friend at the same time. In any workplace or organization, someone has to be the captain of the ship. But should this prevent a meaningful friendship from taking place, a friendship that could enhance and not hurt the bottom line?

I believe that employers and employees can be friends. It is the friendship that forms the foundation for the best possible working relationship. But for this to happen, you must see people as your highest aim, your most important product.

Jay Bilas, a former Duke basketball player, and a lawyer in Charlotte, is probably best known and respected for his college basketball

commentary on ESPN. He is bright, witty, and insightful. To me, he is one of college basketball's best pundits.

His last personal interaction with Coach Smith occurred at a meeting in Chicago. He was at a basketball summit that Coach Smith was also attending. Bilas was with Coach Smith in the lobby of the hotel where they were staying. They exchanged kind words, and also talked about golf, an interest for both.

After Coach Smith's death, Bilas wrote, "I brought up [to Smith] a funny story that our mutual friend, Bill Raftery, had just told me about something Raftery had done on Smith's annual golf trip. Smith began to laugh at the memory. He laughed so hard that he doubled over a bit. I had seen Smith smile and laugh before, but never anything like that.

"For me, that's the memory I want to keep of Dean Smith: a basketball legend, a true gentleman of principle and character, laughing out loud, thinking fondly of one of his friends."

### **Friendship and the Final Victory**

When win number 879 occurred in Winston-Salem in the NCAA tournament in March 1997, allowing Coach Smith to move ahead of Adolph Rupp as college basketball's all-time most winning coach, every former player who could be there was present. I had already committed to being with my family in the mountains, or I would have been there too. As I watched the game on television and saw the record become his, my eyes became moist. I was profoundly happy for him and excited to know I had been a part of his program. Mostly, however, I was proud that I could call him my friend.

Right before the game ended, the former players who were there slipped out of the stands and lined both sides of the tunnel leading

to the locker room. As Coach Smith left the coliseum, his eyes also became moist as he noticed each former player. He stopped and shook their hands. He knew they had all helped allow this moment to occur. Overcome with emotion, he thanked them for what they had meant to the university and to him. He thanked them for being there and, mostly, for being his friend.

Perhaps Phil Ford best summarized it for all of us who played for Coach Smith when he said, "I had a coach for four years, but I got a friend for life."

## **INSIDE COACH SMITH**

### **Michael Jordan's Kiss**

In Chapel Hill in 2007, ten years after Coach Smith's retirement, UNC was honoring the 1957 and 1982 national championship teams during halftime of a home game. Michael Jordan was on the floor, with many of his teammates, to help honor the team he'd played with and starred on twenty-five years earlier, Coach Smith's first ever NCAA title. But it was also a time to honor the coach of the team, Dean Smith.

Just before Smith was introduced, Michael Jordan put his arm around his coach. He pulled Smith close to him, his 6'6" frame overshadowing Coach Smith's 5'10" body. Then Jordan leaned down and did something that endeared him to everyone present. He kissed Coach Smith on the top of his head. The picture of this touching moment was captured on film. It was also shown in newspapers and online the next day all over the country.

As Jordan kissed him, Smith sheepishly smiled, looking a bit uncomfortable with this public display of affection. Then Woody Durham, then still the voice of the Tar Heels, with microphone

in hand, introduced Coach Smith with the loud yell he deserved: “Dean Smith!”

The fans erupted into uproarious applause. As the seconds went by, the decibel levels increased. This went on and on and on. No one wanted to stop the applause, screams, whistles, and shouts...except Coach Smith!

Coach Smith, as always, was uncomfortable with the attention. He kept beckoning for all to sit down and cease the noisy applause. He pointed to his players, trying to get the crowd to acknowledge the real reason for his success. The crowd and players would have none of it. This was their moment to show approval and thanks. They knew the genius behind UNC’s success. They knew the brains behind the beauty of the program.

If they could have, every fan would have come on the floor and similarly given Coach Smith a kiss on the head. Or at least tried to hug him, or shake his hand, and simply say, “Thank you.”

After learning of Coach Smith’s death, ESPN commentator Bomani Jones wrote, “I think you could make an argument that Dean Smith is the most significant resident of the state of North Carolina in the twentieth century. When you start looking at the advancement socially that he was behind, the significance of him being who he was, taking the stances that he was willing to take and what some of the ultimate effects of those happened to be. With that, I think there’s a legitimate case that there’s been no person more important to the history of the state than he was in the twentieth century.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s why Michael Jordan’s kiss will be forever and indelibly etched on the minds of those who saw it live or in the picture. It was like a child affectionately kissing his wonderful, aging father. It

was like a close friend kissing another close friend, something that is often and indiscriminately done in other cultures around the world.

Most every other letterman, if given the chance, would have done the same thing as Michael did...from one close friend to another.

That's because friends are forever.



**LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 4:****Put the Team Before  
the Individual**

*“The individual must submit his talents  
for the sake of the team.”*

AT THE BEGINNING OF his career, many critics doubted Dean Smith’s coaching ability. His early teams did not succeed. After a particularly painful ACC loss in the early 1960s, some of the student body even hung him in effigy. Not once, but twice! He ostensibly turned the program around from 1967 to 1969 with three straight Final Four appearances. But many felt Smith achieved this not because of his coaching ability, but because he was good at recruiting talent.

Then came the 1971 season—my senior year. The pundits predicted doom and gloom for Carolina basketball. Charlie Scott, our all-American, had graduated following a disappointing 18–9 season. His replacement was an aggressive, fearless point guard named

George Karl (former NBA coach of the Milwaukee Bucks, Denver Nuggets, and presently coach of the Sacramento Kings). On the surface, it seemed like George was a replacement that would make the team worse, not better. We were slotted to finish next to the last, right above Clemson.

Before the season began, Coach Smith preached that teams, not individuals, win games. He constantly exhorted us to play as a team, to believe in his vision of the team. He said that if we did, we would surprise everyone. He was so convinced that no individual was greater than the whole that every player bought the idea. None of the critics imagined we would succeed like we did. Yet we were ranked in the top fifteen teams that season, winning twenty-six games, the Atlantic Coast Conference regular season title, as well as the prestigious NIT championship in New York.

Art Chansky, in his book *The Dean's List*,<sup>1</sup> which chronicles all of Coach Smith's seasons, said the 1971 season did two things for Carolina basketball. First, it showed that the philosophy of team above the individual worked. With no apparent superstar, the team was imminently successful. Second, it convinced every Carolina recruit thereafter that if they played by the Smith philosophy, they would win games. They caught the vision.

Former player Bobby Jones saw what happened with the 1971 team when he was a freshman (freshmen were ineligible to play varsity). He totally grasped team play. He told me, "Coach Smith somehow, someway, made us believe that if we followed his philosophy we would win. By the time I was a senior (in 1975), if he'd told me to go to the corner and stay on my hands and knees until the play was over—if he had said we would win by doing that, I would have done it. We knew putting the team above the individual

worked. We knew that was his vision. And we did whatever he told us because we believed in him.”

In my opinion, this concept of team may be Coach Smith’s greatest gift to basketball, leadership, and society. It doesn’t matter whether you’re coaching a sports team, managing a corporation, being a parent, or leading a Boy Scout troop—creating a cohesive team is critical.

In his book titled *Business as a Calling*, the respected lay theologian Michael Novak quoted David Packard of Hewlett-Packard: “[When a] group of people gets together and exists as an institution that we call a company so that they are able to accomplish something collectively they could not accomplish separately—they make a contribution to society...”<sup>2</sup>

When a leader melds a group of people into a team, and when the leader inspires that team with a vision, then great things begin to happen in an organization. The team will be far more productive working as a unit than as individuals. B.C. Forbes, founder of *Forbes* magazine, once said you spell success T-E-A-M-W-O-R-K.

Critics have tried to demean Coach Smith’s dogged vision of the team as being more important than the individual. A regularly recurring joke has been that Dean Smith is the only person ever to hold Michael Jordan to fewer than twenty points a game.

When I asked Roy Williams about this, he became mad. “The people who make those kind of comments don’t know what they’re talking about. Michael was double-and triple-teamed at every opportunity. Then the shot clock was initiated during his college years. In 1982, when we won the national championship, we averaged scoring in the sixties. Everyone was trying to control tempo by controlling the basketball. Plus, we saw zone after zone, and Michael

had not yet developed his great jump shot. But go ask Michael about his greatness and the foundation he learned under Coach Smith. He is a great player today because he learned to play team basketball at North Carolina.”

When I asked Coach Smith the same question, he became a bit defensive. “David,” he said, “I taught Michael how to play as a team member. I taught him how to play both individual and team defense. He and our team both succeeded here because he understood these concepts. Then he went to the Chicago Bulls and taught Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman, and his other teammates how to play together, especially on the defensive end. He won six NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls because he learned how to play defense and the importance of a team playing selflessly together.”

“No individual person is greater than the team,” he would frequently say to us. “If you want personal recognition, you should play tennis, golf, or run track.” He was totally convinced that the team playing together is the goal of basketball. He even told me, “I wish that some year a coach who had gone twelve and fifteen would be named coach of the year just because he did a wonderful job coaching the team. It’s society that stresses wins and losses. But that’s not what’s most important: It’s the individual submitting himself to the team.”

Once Smith even went so far as to say to me, “I wish sometimes we didn’t even keep score. That way the emphasis would be on team play, learning how to play together, instead of the final score.” That would be novel for our competitive, win-at-all costs sports culture, wouldn’t it? He saw basketball as a means to an end. He saw sports as a way to produce better citizens who would care for society’s needs

along with their own. In short, what was most important was how you played the game.

As Michael Jordan said, after learning of Coach Smith's death, "In teaching me the game of basketball, he taught me about life."

### **The Importance of Vision for a Team**

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once boarded a train in Washington, DC, then realized he had lost his ticket. The conductor recognized him and said, "Don't worry, sir. I'm sure when you find it, you'll send it in."

Justice Holmes replied, "Young man, the question is not 'Where is my ticket?' but rather, 'Where am I supposed to be going?'"

Coach Smith clearly knew where he was going: The team would be more important than the individual. The team would win games. This was his vision, and he stated it almost daily.

Management gurus say that a leader needs to restate the vision every twenty-eight days to keep the team focused on it. I have learned in my own organization that our vision similarly needs to be repeated at least that frequently, or people tend to forget it.

That's what Coach Smith did. I can hardly remember a practice session without the vision of the team above the individual being stated in some way. Often the thought of the day, printed at the top of the daily practice plan, had to do with this vision. The assistant coaches regularly stated it. While studying game film, we would hear the team vision quoted over and over again.

Every year it was this vision that united each new team. This vision was reflected on a sign that hung over the door leading from the locker room to the court in Carmichael Auditorium. It simply read, "United we stand, divided we fall."

I had the privilege of being in Chapel Hill when Vince Carter announced his decision to forego his senior season and turn professional. It was not the best decision for the North Carolina team. However, it was the best decision for Vince Carter, and that was why Coach Smith encouraged him to do it. During the press conference, Vince shared why he was going to the NBA. He went on and on about how it would help him fulfill personal and professional goals.

Finally, Coach Smith interrupted Vince in mid-sentence. “He’ll also help the team,” Smith said. Everyone associated with the Carolina program chuckled. Even during Vince’s momentous occasion, Coach Smith could not resist reminding his superstar that the team was what is most important.

Let’s look now at some of the different ways Coach Smith allowed this team concept to develop. Most, if not all, of these ideas are transferable to different leadership situations.

### *Teach What’s Important in the Vision*

I asked Coach Smith how he initiated this concept of team first into practices so we could best understand it. How did he teach the vision? “You should know that one,” he responded. “It begins on the defensive end. If a team plays good defense, it can always be in a game.”

We spent the first three weeks of preseason practice mostly learning team defense. He taught us “help” defense, or how we all needed to help one another. Then he taught pressure defense.

Coach Smith used an interesting trick to prove the need for pressure defense to initiate the action. He would hold a dollar bill between his thumb and forefinger. He then bet us that we couldn’t catch the bill when he dropped it. Of course, we all tried to do it.

And each time we failed. It was a demonstration of his cardinal basketball theory: “Action beats reaction.”

That’s probably why Coach Smith considered himself primarily a defensive coach, why he advocated strong, man-to-man, pressure defense. He said, “The offense will always have the advantage against a defense that just sits there waiting to be attacked, waiting for somebody to take a shot. So, if you’re on defense, you’ve got to go get the ball. Let’s not take what they are going to give us; let’s take what we want.”

One of Smith’s chief defensive innovations was the run-and-jump defense. It was revolutionary in its day. A defender would suddenly leave his man and run toward the point guard who was dribbling the ball upcourt. It would cause an immediate double team. The unsuspecting guard, suddenly surrounded by two defenders, would often make a careless mistake under pressure. Coach Smith was forcing the action, causing a forced error. Eventually, this strategy became extinct. Quick, adept athletes learned to expect it. The element of surprise was lost. But it worked successfully for many years. It was also the precursor for many of today’s innovative trap defenses.

That’s not to say that offense wasn’t important. He also taught that no matter how good the defense was, the other team would score. But he knew that if we played good defense, we could stay in the game.

Coach Smith’s offensive schemes are as carefully studied and copied as his defense. Let’s face it—he was a brilliant coach, both offensively and defensively. Former Duke player and ESPN commentator Jay Bilas said, “One of his books, *Multiple Offense and Defense*, is still the best book on basketball I have ever read, and it

was the first time I ever heard of ‘points per possession’ long before the current age of analytics.”

However, in teaching the team concept, Coach Smith began with defense because it was the most important part of the vision. He could never know, from night to night, how well or poorly the offense would score. Players who are gifted offensively never know from one game to another if they are going to have the touch or be in the zone. Coach Smith knew, though, that a team could play hard defensively every night. This could be a constant. He therefore developed the team concept first by focusing on defense.

### *As a Leader, Take the Hits*

Another way Coach Smith developed the team concept was his commitment to the principle that *we* won games and *he* lost them.

He never demeaned a player in the press, even if doing so might be justified because of a mistake. He did not want to do anything that might disrupt the team. And if a player made a mistake, Coach would assume that somehow he had not properly communicated to that player what he should have done.

As a result, the players felt protected. It fostered trust among us when we knew that, as our coach, he was willing to take the hits for the team.

In 1971, my senior year, we won the regular season ACC championship. South Carolina was still a part of the conference then and our most bitter rival. We had split two games with them during the regular season. We met in the ACC finals to decide who would represent the ACC in the NCAA tournament. It was a winner-take-all tournament, the pressure of which no contemporary team knows.

With six seconds to go, we were ahead 51–50. Our 6'11" center was jumping against their 6'3" guard. We thought we had the

game won. Coach Smith went over all our assignments in the huddle. Somehow, though, not everyone understood what we were supposed to do. The ball was tipped to the wrong spot. South Carolina scored, and we lost 52–51. We were devastated. For many Tar Heel fans that loss stands out as one of the most disappointing in Carolina history.

I was in the game when the tip went awry. For years, I did not even want to talk about what had happened. It was that painful. Finally, in the 1990s, when I was visiting with Coach Smith, my curiosity overcame me. I asked him about that game and if I had done anything wrong to cause the loss. He went over every detail of the play. He showed me what he had been trying to do. Then he said, “I wanted you to be here. But that wasn’t your fault. That was my fault. No one was really where I wanted them to be. I accept full responsibility for that loss. I didn’t communicate well enough as a coach.”

That was it. He didn’t think the subject needed to be pursued any further. He had lost the game. He took the blame. He took the hit.

I found it fascinating that more than twenty years after that loss, he was still protecting me, his players, and the team. He was still taking full responsibility for the losses. *Players win games. Coaches lose them.* The unity of the team is what is most important!

### *Recognize Potential and Reward Effort*

Another way Coach Smith reinforced the team vision was to recognize potential and reward effort. I believe he was always thinking about next year’s team when examining a player’s potential. He looked for ways to encourage individuals to become better players and contribute to the team.

Pearce Landry tells an interesting story that illustrates this point.

He was a Morehead Scholar, the recipient of a very prestigious scholarship awarded to outstanding high school students who show giftedness in academics, athletics, leadership, and service. During his sophomore year at Carolina, he played solely on the junior varsity team.

In February of that year, Carolina played Notre Dame. Coach Randy Wiel, then the junior varsity coach, came up to Landry before the game and told him that if the game was a blowout, Coach Smith wanted Landry to dress and earn a few minutes playing with the varsity team. He had played in practice against the varsity team, but this opportunity to play with them was beyond his wildest dreams.

Sure enough, in the second half, Carolina blew the game open. Landry was sitting in the stands wearing a suit and tie. With about ten minutes left to play, Coach Wiel turned and told Landry to run to the locker room and change. “I sprinted out of the stands and into the tunnel to the locker room,” he said. “The assistant manager handed me a uniform with number fifteen on the back. I slipped it on and got back on the court with about four minutes to play. Finally, with about fifty-five seconds to go, I entered the game. That was my claim to fame that year.”

“What was Coach Smith trying to accomplish by putting you in for the last minute of the game?” I asked Pearce.

“You know, I think he was trying to say to me that there were good things ahead of me if I kept on working. He was trying to give me a little taste of varsity competition so that in my junior and senior years I might be a good practice player. He was also saying, ‘Thanks for helping the varsity in practice.’ I think he was looking ahead to the next two years.”

During his junior year, Landry remained pretty much a practice player. He got to play in one important game against LSU on

national television. But he kept working and kept getting better. Then during his senior year, Larry Davis transferred, Pat Sullivan blew out his back, and suddenly Landry was the sixth man.

“Then I remembered that game against Notre Dame in my sophomore year,” he said. “That began to boost my confidence. Had Coach been looking to the future, thinking that I might improve enough to help the team? Had he wanted to give my confidence a boost? I think so.”

Napoleon once said it amazed him that men were willing to sacrifice their lives in order to have a few medals pinned onto their chest.

It’s just another way of recognizing potential and rewarding effort.

### *Know Your Team Members*

Another way Coach Smith helped develop the team was by knowing the players and communicating honestly with each member of the team regarding their strengths and weaknesses.

In some ways a coach needs to be a master psychologist. He has to be able to understand each player’s personality, his unique psychological makeup, his limits and abilities. This information is critical to know in order to make the proper decisions for the team.

Regularly, Coach Smith would cry out in practice, “Know your limits.” He would then carefully outline the specific giftedness and limitations of each individual player. Only certain players could shoot three-pointers or handle the ball on the break. If he didn’t think you could do these things, he wouldn’t allow you to try. This honesty, accepted as truth because we all wanted what was best for the team, was extremely important.

For example, there was the time when Coach put 7'2" center

Serge Zwikker into a game. The ball moved from side to side. Zwikker was wide open on the baseline. He took the shot...and missed badly. Immediately, he came out of the game.

“Serge,” Coach Smith said, “that was a bad shot. You know what you’re supposed to do when you go into games: set good screens, rebound, and be an intimidating defensive presence. You’re not supposed to shoot!”

“But I was wide open,” Zwikker objected.

“There’s a reason you were wide open, Serge,” Coach Smith retorted.

Zwikker had stepped outside his role for what was best for the team.

Before and during the season, Coach Smith would specifically share with each player the role he played. He was honest and plain-spoken. At the end of each season, Coach set up a personal appointment with each player. He clearly outlined individual strengths and weaknesses. He forthrightly pointed out where they were with the team and how much playing time they would probably receive the next season unless they improved. Then he challenged them to start building on their strengths and improving their weaknesses. Amazingly, he would be so honest that he would even tell a player if he thought he’d never play. Then, if the player concurred and desired to transfer, Coach Smith would help him find a school where he had the best chance to succeed.

This honesty, I believe, was absolutely crucial to how Coach developed the team. It helped avoid unnecessary rivalries by clearly defining each player’s role. It helped avoid childlike outbursts of “That’s not fair!” Each player knew he was appreciated for his own unique contribution to the team.

Some people believe that only positive encouragement and

comments should be given to members of a team. They suggest that when a boss sees mistakes in judgment and errors, he should only look for something good to say and not discourage a member of the team with criticism.

Coach Smith would not agree! In practices, during games, and at the end of the season, he would be brutally honest with us. If he had to say something to us during a game, he would always kneel in front of us and quietly talk to us one-on-one. He was committed to never embarrassing us in front of a crowd. Coach Smith believed that criticism should be given constructively. Moreover, he would give this criticism without favoritism.

Buzz Peterson remembers when Michael Jordan was receiving all the publicity and glamour. “Coach Smith thought it was going to his head. Therefore, from time to time in practice, he would really get on Michael to keep his head level and the team as most important.”

Dave Hanners remembers one moment when he experienced Coach Smith’s biting tongue. Hanners was a freshman in his very first practice. “It was the first year freshmen were eligible,” Dave said. “He didn’t want us in the practice in the first place. We all came into the circle at the beginning of practice. It was very sunny outside. I’m from Ohio, and I couldn’t believe how bright it was. The light was coming through the windows. I was looking off at the sun, and Coach looked at me. Bang! He got me. He said, ‘Dave, what is the emphasis of the day? You seem to know everything and don’t need to pay attention. If you don’t need to listen, you must already know the emphasis of the day.’”

“That put me at a loss. I stuttered. And guess what? I never again looked at anything but Coach when we came to that circle. And I never forgot the emphasis of the day!”

When criticism is thoughtful and sensitively delivered in a timely manner, it can have a positive purpose. Coach *never* scolded, berated, demeaned, or humiliated us. He did become angry at the wrong behavior, but not at us. I think he knew that approval and disapproval are both realities, and it was his job to give both. The way he communicated always honored his life principle that we, his players, were his most important products.

When I interviewed Bob Knight, I asked if he thought Coach Smith's greatest strength was loyalty. He said no. Knight thought the better word to describe Smith's greatest asset was *honesty*. "Someone can be loyal to bad things," he said, "but honesty cannot. Honesty is the greatest of all the virtues. Our mutual honesty is what has caused the mutual respect we have for one another."

Coach Smith had this same commitment to honesty with potential recruits. For example, most people thought Kenny Anderson, a former NBA player, would come to Carolina when he graduated from high school. Many think the reason he didn't come was because of Coach Smith's honesty. Anderson was asking two questions of all the coaches recruiting him. Phil Ford and Coach Smith met with Anderson to try to answer his questions.

The first one from Anderson was, "Coach, will I start as a freshman?" Phil leaned back in his chair, anxious to hear the answer to that one. Coach Smith responded, "Kenny, if you are as good as people think you are, and if you show the confidence that you have shown at this stage of your career, then the playing time will take care of itself. You don't have to worry about that."

Then came the second question. "Will you let me run the show?" Anderson asked. Ford's back straightened up on that one. He said, "Even I wanted to hear Coach's answer!"

"Kenny," Coach Smith replied, "we have done this for so long

I hope you will trust our judgment on matters. My door is always open for discussion. If you have any questions about anything that we do or don't do on the floor, I hope you'll always come in and talk with me about it."

Kenny Anderson went to Georgia Tech. He said he didn't want to be just another horse in Coach Smith's stable. Coach Smith believed the team was greater than the individual. And this principle would not be abrogated, even for a point guard as gifted as Kenny Anderson. Therefore, Coach Smith had to be honest with him, not making any promises during the recruiting process that he couldn't keep later. His honesty may have cost him a talented recruit, but it was best for the team.

Dr. William Schultz, a psychologist who developed strategies to increase productivity at places like Proctor & Gamble and NASA, once said that the key for success lies in how well people work together. He went on to say that, in his opinion, the key to people working together is mutual trust and honesty. He concluded, "If people in business just told the truth, 80 to 90 percent of their problems would disappear."<sup>3</sup>

### *Create Little Teams on the Big Team*

We were playing Georgia Tech in the old Charlotte Coliseum in 1971. We had the better team and were expected to win easily. However, Georgia Tech came out highly motivated, and with ten minutes left in the first half, we were down by ten.

Dennis Wuycik raised a fist in the air, signaling that he was tired and needed to come out of the game. Coach Smith sent me to the scorer's table. Then Lee Dedmon gave the fist. Craig Corson, the backup center, followed me to the scorer's table. Then George Karl signaled that he was tired. Coach Smith was already greatly

exasperated with the first team's uninspired play, so he muttered under his breath, "Oh, what the heck!" He told the entire second team to go into the game and replace the first team.

We entered the game with fresh legs and great enthusiasm. Within three minutes we had taken the lead from the Yellow Jackets. Coach Smith then put the starters back into the game. They now had fresh legs and were greatly inspired—and a bit embarrassed! They blew the game wide open.

That game started something that lasted for many years. It was called the Blue Team. This was the second unit that, for most teams, just sits on the bench, watches the games, and serves as cannon fodder for the first team. However, from then on, Coach Smith would regularly substitute the Blue Team in mass force for the first team, with startling results! We almost always held the score until the first team re-entered the game, and sometimes we increased the lead.

However, we discovered something much more important than what happened to the score. If you give a player a few minutes of time, even if it's only in the first half when the pressure's not on, he will be ready if you need him in the second half. And even more importantly, he will feel that he is a part of the team. After that Georgia Tech game, a new spirit of unity engulfed our team. I'm thoroughly convinced that one of the primary reasons for that team's extraordinary and unexplainable success was the fact that all of us felt we were a part of the team. We believed Coach Smith's vision for us.

Moreover, the Blue Team had an identity. We even developed our own handshake, one that could be used only by Blue Team members, with our fingers all crunched together as we touched fingertips together. We became highly offended if a player other than a member of the Blue Team used this handshake.

Bill Guthridge, who was then the assistant coach, usually coached the Blue Team when we played against the first team in practice. Therefore, we allowed him to use the handshake. In fact, when I visited Coach Guthridge to interview him for this book, he walked out of his office to greet me and extended to me the Blue Team handshake—twenty-seven years later!

Thinking back, I realized we had created a team within the team. They were separate teams, yet connected by the overall vision of winning together. We discovered that a team could have smaller teams within the larger team, and still accomplish the team vision. I remember how Coach Smith used to break us down into teams of big men and small men to play against each other. Each group developed its own sense of team.

### **The Need to Treat Everyone Equally**

All were equal on Coach Smith's teams. From the superstar to the average player to the manager, everyone was equal in Coach Smith's eyes. The teams responded accordingly.

One of the most amazing scenes in the 1997 season occurred during a home game against Florida State. UNC may well have played its best game of the season. It was a blowout against a very good Florida State team. With about twelve seconds left, Scott Williams, the son of Roy Williams, was playing during what is known as mop-up time.

The game had obviously been won, but the crowd and the entire team were intensely into the game. Why? Because Williams did not get to play very much and had not scored a basket in his varsity career. Finally, he drove to the basket, threw the ball into the air, and whoosh! In it went. The bench erupted. They acted as if he had just hit the game-winning basket in the national championship.

The players, and even the fans, all knew how important every man is to the team.

### *No One Person Is Bigger Than the Program*

Justin Kurault experienced this reality of everyone feeling equal and a part of the team even though he was the team manager. “There is no one person who is bigger than the program,” he said. “Coach put us right there in the locker room with the players. We had a locker just like the players. In fact, ours was a little bigger than those for the players so that we would have room to store some of the stuff we needed to do our job. We received the same warm-ups to travel in. When the team members received pictures at the end of the season, so did we. We were lucky enough to win three ACC tournaments, and the managers received rings just like the players.”

Dave Hart was a manager on the 1981–82 NCAA national championship team. The NCAA would award only twenty-two commemorative watches. “And there were twenty-three of us when you counted everyone,” Hart later said. “I was the youngest manager, so it was natural for me not to get a watch.”

Later, Smith called Hart into his office. They talked about the championship for a few minutes. Then he said, “I appreciate everything you did this season. You were as much a part of this team as anyone, and I want you to have this.”

Coach Smith handed him a box. Inside was Coach Smith’s own personal national championship watch. That’s a side of Coach Smith few ever saw.

Coach Smith struggled with the individual receiving attention in what he believed was the ultimate team sport. Until the NCAA mandated otherwise, Coach Smith made sure the stat sheet listed

players alphabetically, not by their scoring averages. It was all about the team. Everyone was equal.

In their book *The Wisdom of Teams*, Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith wrote:

Teams are not the solution to everyone's current and future organizational needs. They will not solve every problem, enhance every group's results, nor help top management address every performance challenge. Moreover, when misapplied, they can be both wasteful and disruptive. Nonetheless, teams usually do outperform other groups and individuals. They represent one of the best ways to support the broad-based changes necessary for the high-performing organization.<sup>4</sup>

How about your organization? Do people in your workplace have a chance to be involved? Does your lowest-level employee feel like he or she is a part of the team? If not, why not? Ask yourself what you can do to make them feel that they, too, own the vision. When workers feel they have input into key decisions, oversight, and the overall direction, they feel ownership and work harder to make the team's vision a reality.

### *Show Fairness, Not Favoritism*

One more thing you can do to develop a team vision is to treat each team member fairly. This is another leadership lesson I learned from Coach Smith.

According to Coach Guthridge, this might be Dean Smith's greatest genius in creating a sense of team. Everyone knew that he treated his players fairly. So how could anyone argue with him if he

chose to play one person more than someone else? They knew his decisions were not arbitrary in nature.

How did Coach Smith accomplish this? Guthridge said the major way he ensured fairness was through his hierarchical system of moving freshmen to seniors. If you were a senior, you knew you would get every opportunity to play, even if a freshman was playing at the same level.

This conviction was at the heart of the struggles of the 1994 team. Four out of five starters returned from the 1993 championship team. Three heralded freshmen also came on board. The freshmen were enormously talented. In practice they regularly challenged the incumbents. But the majority of playing time went to the seniors. If they were evenly matched, the seniors got the edge.

Eddie Fogler, a former player, assistant coach under Coach Smith, and a head coach at several schools, said this told the incoming players that they had to pay their dues into the system. It said to them, “Coming out of high school, you haven’t put anything into this system.” From day one, people learned that service to the organization had its benefits. And if you paid your dues, you would be rewarded.

Woody Durham, the former Tar Heels’ radio voice, pointed out an example of this respect for seniors that many people would not otherwise notice. Carolina played in the 1977 national championship game against Marquette. Coach Smith was coaching against Al McGuire. They were good friends and had learned basketball from one another. The game was a chess match, with Carolina finally getting the lead in the second half. Then Coach Smith went into the Four Corners at a crucial point in the game.

Mike O’Koren was a fabulous freshman who had scored thirty-four points in the semifinal game against UNLV. He gave the tired

signal and exited right before Carolina gained the lead. Bruce Buckley, now a prominent Charlotte attorney, took his place.

When Carolina regained the lead, Eddie Fogler leaned across Bill Guthridge and said to Coach Smith, “Don’t you think we should take a time-out and get Mike back in the game?”

“Now think about this,” Durham continued. “It’s the national championship game. Coach Smith had been to three Final Fours in the late 1960s. He had taken another team to the Final Four in 1972. Comments were spreading nationally that perhaps Dean Smith was not a great coach because he couldn’t win the supposed big one. Do you know how he responded to Eddie? He said he would never embarrass a senior like Bruce Buckley by taking him out of the game like that.

“Right after that, Bruce had a shot blocked and the momentum of the game changed a bit. That’s not to say Carolina lost the game because of this decision. It is to say that Coach Smith was concerned with how his seniors were cared for, concerned with his loyalty to them, even in a national championship game!”

Freshmen didn’t like this hierarchy, nor did they understand it. But it was birthed in the conviction that this was the fair thing to do. It was best for the team. When you became a junior or senior, you especially appreciated it. And as a result, the team was more unified. This shouted in a subtle but clear manner, “The team is more important than the individual.”

For this book I asked Coach Smith if he had any regrets about how he had taught team basketball. Would he go back and change anything about the way he had coached?

His answer was intriguing. “I don’t think I delegated enough to my assistants. I always valued input from the players, but I probably didn’t seek it enough from the assistants. I love the way Coach

Guthridge is doing it now. They have a three-hour staff meeting every morning to talk everything over. Everybody has ideas. Everybody has input.

“I would put together the practice plan and then spend about an hour talking about practice. I would say, ‘Here is what we are going to do’ instead of saying, ‘What do you think?’ I think I controlled too much. I knew I had a vision of how I thought a team should play and how to bring that about. But if I were coaching today, I’d probably allow more input from the assistants. They have good ideas too.”

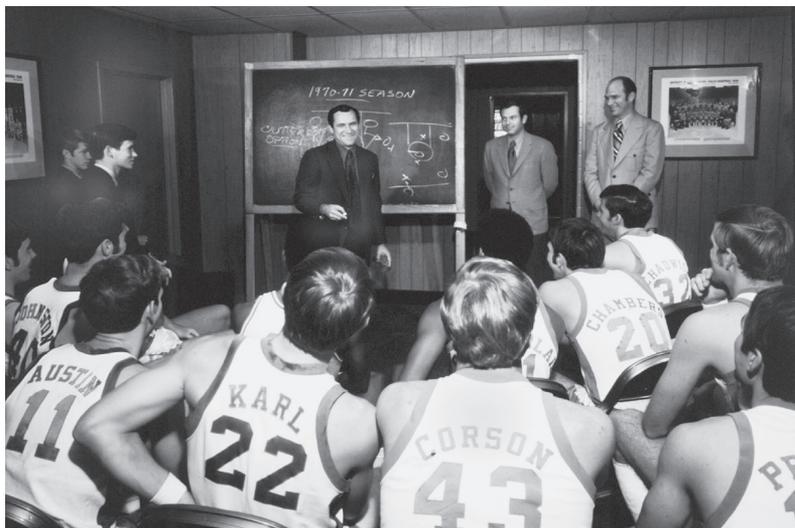
Many leaders today are learning the value of moving from an autocratic style of leadership to a more collaborative one. They are realizing the value of welcoming feedback and insights from others. Frequently, innovative ideas from team members can be helpful and invigorating to the team.

Coach Smith said to me, “Our philosophy, as you know, has been simple: play hard, play smart, and most importantly, play together. And I don’t think any player, five years after he has left this program, has ever regretted coming here.”

When people play for a coach whose vision is the team over the individual, they are learning something much larger and more important than playing basketball. They are learning how to live and play together, how to get along with one another, how to be independent yet interdependent, how to be a team, how to live life as it’s supposed to be lived.

At Carolina, we believed in Dean Smith’s vision that teams, not individuals, win games. He convinced us of this truth. We bought it. We lived it. We became better players, people, and citizens because of it.

And it’s difficult to argue with Coach Smith’s success, both on and off the court.



*A team meeting before the 1971 season. Coaches Smith, Guthridge, and the players. That's me at the far right!*

Used with permission of the *Herald Sun*.

## INSIDE COACH SMITH

### Shaq in a UNC Uniform Under Dean Smith?

Coach Smith died on a Saturday night, February 7, 2015. The next Tuesday evening, former NBA star Shaquille O'Neal stated on television that he came very close to playing for Coach Smith at UNC.

Shaq was a high school superstar from San Antonio, Texas. Evidently he met Smith twice and was very impressed by him.

“For me playing for a small high school, to have the great Dean Smith travel to an Army base and sit with me and my mom and dad and ask me to attend his university... well, that was special.

“The second time I met him was when I went to the University

of North Carolina. Rick Fox was my chaperone. He took me to his house. He showed me all the stuff he did with Kenny [Kenny Smith, former great UNC point guard and also a host on TNT], Michael Jordan, Sam Perkins. And nobody knows this, Kenny, but I almost went to North Carolina.”<sup>5</sup>

When UNC fans read this after Coach Smith’s death, thoughts of what could have been ransacked their minds. “Wow! Shaq at UNC! What could have been!”

Which leads to the obvious question. What changed Shaq’s mind?

“The only reason why I didn’t go is because they signed another seven-footer out of Texas by the name of Matt Wenstrom.”<sup>6</sup>

Matt Wenstrom became a seldom-used reserve at UNC. He never came close to the potential basketball tsunami Shaq would have caused at UNC.

O’Neal eventually signed with LSU. His junior season, he averaged an eye-popping 24.1 points and 14 rebounds per game and was named the national player of the year. He went on to win four NBA titles and is generally considered one of the greatest big men ever to play the game of basketball. His overall strength and power, combined with extraordinary finesse and skill, were a marvel to behold. He was one-of-a-kind.

“He was a wonderful man,” said Shaq. “His record speaks for itself. As I’m listening to all the people talk, they say he was a better person. And I think he will always be remembered for being one of the greatest people in the history of basketball.”<sup>7</sup>

O’Neal is right about that! But his revelation that he almost came to UNC made Tar Heel fans drool over what could have been: even more success for Dean Smith.

That is hard to imagine!

## LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 5:

# Be Flexible with Your Vision

*“We don’t have a system, but a philosophy that is flexible and innovates.”*

IT RANKLED COACH SMITH whenever his vision was called a system. “To me,” he said, “that connotes that we’re rigid, that we don’t change with our personnel, and that’s just not true. Now if you say North Carolina has a philosophy, I love that. We change every year, even though the basic vision remains the same.”

Coach was a stickler for fundamentals, emphasizing them over and over. The approach might change, but the fundamentals stayed the same from year to year.

For example, in 1971, my senior year, Coach Smith knew we were predicted to finish at the bottom of the conference. So on the first day of practice, he called us to the middle of the court. He held a basketball in his hands. He looked at all of us and said, “Gentlemen, this is a basketball.” Then we began drills on dribbling, passing,

rebounding, and shooting. They were drills we had done in junior high school. But Coach Smith knew that for us to be a good team, he had to re-emphasize the fundamentals.

I take every opportunity I can to return to Chapel Hill and reminisce about four of the happiest years in my life. So in 1993, the year Coach Smith won his second NCAA championship, it was a no-brainer when I was invited to speak to a Christian organization on the UNC campus.

I decided to make it an event. I called the basketball office and got permission to observe practice. I then asked my then six-year-old daughter, Bethany, if she would like to accompany me to my old college stomping grounds. She eagerly agreed, especially when she found out it would take her out of school a few hours early.

Speaking to several hundred students at the campus event was exhilarating. Bethany and I walked around the university and had dinner at The Rat, a UNC institution for many years. It brought back special memories that I excitedly shared with her. However, the highlight of the trip was the privilege of viewing practice.

We entered the Smith Center almost in a hushed, reverent awe. I shared with Bethany how this was going to be a new experience for me, too, since I had played in Carmichael Auditorium. This was the first practice I would see in the Smith Center. As we settled in our seats, I looked forward to seeing how practice might be different some twenty years later.

You can therefore imagine my deep introspection as the next two hours unfolded in remarkable similarity to the many practices I had personally experienced years earlier. Practice began with a huddle at center court and a player reciting the thought for the day. Then came the drills to enhance the fundamentals. These were precise and exactly timed. The emphasis was on teamwork and unselfish play. All of it struck a familiar chord.

Coaches Smith and Guthridge constantly adjured the players to listen to what they said and respond immediately and accordingly. More and more I felt a sense of déjà vu, that I was reliving a part of my past... plus learning this very important aspect of leadership that gives a flexible vision.

### Teach the Fundamentals

For the next two hours, I heard Coach Smith say things I had heard more than twenty years earlier, phrases that emphasized the fundamentals of his understanding of how the game should be played. No wonder these things had become the foundation of the concepts I have used in my own leadership.

Let me give you some examples of what I heard during the practice session.

*“Play hard, play smart, and play together.”* This was Coach Smith’s mantra for team play. Every team he ever coached heard it over and over again. In his autobiography, he said this was what he asked from each team.

*“You play like you practice.”* Over and over again I have stated to my staff that the one-time event is fine, but the best results are produced as a result of a day-in and day-out commitment to work over a long period of time. The best work doesn’t flame out after a few years but lasts for a lifetime.

*“Little things win games.”* The big shot may get headlines at the end of the game, but equally important are the little things that set up the victory. When every member of the team, both on the bench and in the game, consistently practices the fundamentals for forty straight minutes, it allows a person to take the big shot and score the win. How often I tell my staff, “The details do matter.” If a company is successful only 98 percent of the time, the profit loss could be in the millions!

*“Keep trying! Good things happen when you play hard.”* Surely this attitude, planted in practice, is the reason for the dozens of miracle comebacks engineered by Coach Smith throughout the years. In the huddle during a close game, he often turned to different players and emphasized this reality. “Just keep at it. Keep playing hard.”

In the Eastern Regional final against Louisville in 1997, the Tar Heels watched a twenty-point lead melt to three with about eight minutes to go. Coach Smith called the team together during a time-out and said, “This has been a great season. We’ve had a great run. Thank you for all your hard work.”

The players were confused. They looked at one another. Was Coach Smith giving up?

Finally, Ademola Okulaja shouted out, “No! It’s not over!”

Coach Smith looked at the rest of the team and asked, “Do you all agree?”

“Yes!”

Then he designed a play to score out of the huddle. They scored. It stopped the Louisville run and the lead was quickly built back to double digits. They coasted to a win and went to the Final Four.

*“Being in shape doesn’t mean you’ll never get tired. It means you’ll recover more quickly.”* In my opinion, this is a great fundamental of life to teach to those who work with us and under us. We all become tired in our work. We then feel guilty for being tired, thinking no one else ever tires. Fatigue is a reality, but we know we’re healthy when we recover from it quickly.

Coach Smith always believed that the sign of being in good shape was not if a player became tired, but how quickly he recovered after becoming tired. If the recovery period wasn’t fast enough, it signaled to him that the player needed more conditioning.

If a person doesn’t recover quickly from a mistake, that’s a sure

signal to us as leaders that he needs more conditioning, more training. Continual mistakes may be the fault of the boss, not the worker!

“Keep working hard! Good things will eventually happen.” Coach Smith believed that hard work would eventually pay off. It may take some time, but it will happen.

I wonder how intentional leaders are today about teaching their employees the value of servanthood and waiting for rewards. I’ve learned through the years that the best staff members are those who have first learned their own unimportance and are willing to give themselves to others for the sake of the vision and the team. The top staff people also have not fallen prey to the desire for instant gratification. They are willing to work hard, persevere, and wait for the rewards.

A tug on my sleeve interrupted my musings during the basketball practice. Bethany had been watching Coach Smith run practice for quite some time. “Daddy,” she said, “I like him. He’s like my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Davis. Kind, but firm.” I laughed inwardly. A child has the ability to see the truth very clearly and easily. She was exactly on target.

Coach Smith was firm on his commitment to the fundamentals that have guided his teams. These fundamentals were immutable. After 879 wins and all his other accolades, it’s easy to see how important the annual teaching of these fundamentals had become.

Why is teaching the fundamentals so important to success? Here’s an illustration from 1970.

Charlie Scott, UNC’s all-American guard, could do things with a basketball that would amaze people even today. He was a superb athlete with unbelievable ball-handling skills. One day in practice, he came downcourt and completed an amazing behind-the-back, no-look pass that led to a basket. All the players paused and applauded the pass.

What was Coach Smith's response? He said, "Charles, the great player is the one who makes the hard play look easy, not the easy play look hard."

Coach Smith was simply restating his conviction that fundamentals, properly performed within the team, win games—not spectacular, individual plays.

### **Innovate as Necessary**

But the fundamentals are also the foundation for innovation. And, in fact, unless these fundamentals have regular, even annual innovations, they will not work.

The fundamentals of dribbling, passing, shooting, defense, and rebounding represented Coach Smith's philosophy. But it was a flexible philosophy, and his innovations kept each team fresh and effective each individual season. A part of Coach Smith's genius was that he permitted innovation and change when necessary to accommodate his personnel.

Coach Smith's innovations are legendary. Many are still being used today. Here are a few of them (others will be looked at in greater depth later in the chapter):

1. He was the first coach to place one of his players at the top of the key during a free throw in hopes that a teammate could tap the ball back to him for another possession. He knew that getting as many possessions as possible was important for victory to occur.
2. He saved his timeouts until the end of the game so he could manage the clock rightly during the last few minutes. He would use the timeouts after a made basket, only then to instruct his team on what to do next, whom to foul, how to keep chipping away at the lead. Bobby Jones once said Smith was like a prophet in the huddle,

often saying exactly what was about to happen during the next play. Then he would ready the team for its response.

3. A manager would chart the layups that were missed during pregame warm-ups. The next day, the team would have to run a sprint for each missed layup. Coach Smith believed that you play as you practice. Your made layups forced you to concentrate on game preparation. Your missed layups showed you weren't concentrating. You weren't ready to play. He made sure players knew he was watching warm-ups through the eyes of the manager!

4. A thought for the day was listed at the top of each practice plan. It could be anything from a famous quote from a person to a verse from the Bible. At the beginning of practice, after Coach blew his whistle and the players sprinted to center court, he'd randomly ask a player the thought for the day. If he didn't give it rightly, the entire team had to run. He wanted to instill eternal truths outside of basketball into his players, truths that would influence for a lifetime.

5. He was the first coach I know of to do a senior day, honoring them by allowing them to start the final home game. They'd hear their name in the starting lineup. They'd play for several minutes. They'd then leave to the uproarious applause of the fans. They had their moment in the sun. Seniors ruled. They made the rules. They chose the restaurants in which to eat when they were on the road. They also had the best seats on the airplane.

6. Every possible game situation was planned for in practices. Over and over again, the team would rehearse what might happen in any and every game situation. When they did occur in games, Coach Smith's teams were ready. No wonder they won so many closely contested games! No wonder they pulled out so many victories in the final minutes!

7. He was the first coach to want college basketball uniforms to

be fashionable. He introduced the V-neck on uniforms. In the early 1970s, UNC teams wore white shoes with the blue road uniforms and blue shoes with the white home uniforms—a fashion statement no one else did at the time. In the 1980s, Coach Smith himself called Alexander Julian, a well-known Chapel Hill men’s clothier, to ask for help in redesigning the team’s uniform. “To have Dean Smith call you on the phone and ask you personally to design new uniforms for my beloved Tar Heels was akin to having God call and ask for new halos for archangels,” said Alexander Julian, the owner of the clothing store.

And the list could go on and on. Fundamentals guided the system. But it was a flexible system that innovated constantly, according to the needs of the season.

Pearce Landry told me the following story about Coach Smith’s willingness to be innovative in the middle of a season. In 1995, Carolina was the number one team in the nation. They had only one loss on their record. “We were about halfway through the ACC season and we came off just a horrible performance against Notre Dame. I can’t remember the team. We ended up winning, but it was a team we should have beaten by twenty.

“We showed up at practice the next day and found out Coach had suddenly changed our whole defensive scheme. He told us we weren’t going to run what we had been running to that point. He said we simply didn’t have the personnel to do what we were doing. He knew that if we were going to be successful in the NCAA tournament, we didn’t have the horses to play that kind of defense. So he switched to a more passive defense that put pressure on the three-point shooter. We ended up going to the Final Four.”

How important is it in business for a leader to have foundations that remain flexible enough for innovation? Peter Drucker once

predicted failure within four years for any leading corporation that loses its innovative proactivity.

Over and over again, in the history of corporate management, his thesis has proven to be correct. Fully half of the Fortune 500 companies between 1975 and 1980 no longer exist. Drucker later updated his prediction. He said it would take only eighteen months to go from leader to loser. Even failure runs the risk of downsizing today!

Nicholas Imparato and Oren Harari give a startling insight into this leadership secret in their classic book *Jumping the Curve*.<sup>1</sup> After interviewing CEOs of various companies that averaged fifteen times better growth than the Dow over the past twenty years, they concluded that the biggest threat to a company's survival is complacency. The refusal to be innovative is a terminal disease for corporate America.

Peter Drucker pointed out how Japanese and Korean businesses are committed to ensuring ongoing innovation. "They've set up small groups of their brightest people to systematically apply the discipline of innovation to identify and develop new business. Innovation requires us to systemically identify changes...to abandon rather than defend yesterday—something most difficult for existing companies to do."<sup>2</sup>

IBM once dominated the computer market but became complacent. Microsoft, Apple, and other companies read the future more accurately. Their innovations made it possible for them to pass up IBM, which then had to reorganize completely to try to catch up. If innovation does not happen regularly, the game will pass you by.

Innovation is necessary for churches too. Some years ago I initiated a new vision for the church at which I lead. Previously, our vision had been one of basically taking care of our own. That is

certainly necessary; but unless the church is also reaching outward to others, it will die. We therefore transitioned ourselves to become a more current, progressive church. We started making use of contemporary music, video testimonies, and other methodologies to reach people who were bored with church or thought it to be irrelevant.

This change in vision was one of the most difficult times in my ministry. During this period I received more criticism than ever before. My wife, Marilyn, encouraged me by remarking that whenever anything new is born, it must go through a time of transition. She reminded me that in childbirth the most painful stage of labor is the final one, called transition, which occurs just before delivery. This is the time when the wife may say to her husband, “You’re the reason this happened to me. I hate you!” She doesn’t really mean it, but the pain during this transition time can be unbearable.

For the people in our church, this transition period was painful. Did the pain eventually stop? Yes, it did. Are we in a much better position now? Indeed we are.

The new vision is working. The innovation was necessary. We’re now a church that has more than quadrupled in growth since this innovation! And we’re still trying to find new and better ways to do ministry.

### **Recognize that Change Is Constant**

It’s easy to keep on doing something that is successful and remain unwilling to change. But courageous leaders are unwilling to say, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” They know they constantly need to break something in order to make it better, in order to reach even higher objectives.

The world around us is constantly changing. The attitudes of Generation X and the following generation, the Millennials, are

different from those of the Boomers. Leaders must be willing to understand and adapt to new generations of people, or leaders and organizations will be left behind.

The contemporary marketplace leaves leaders no choice except to embrace innovation and change. In our day of rapid developments, change will arrive quickly like a tsunami and threaten to eradicate organizations overnight. Therefore, if leaders want to survive, they need to encourage their people, their most important asset, to act immediately on their knowledge and beliefs.

Wayne Gretzky, perhaps the world's best hockey player, said it this way: "You miss one hundred percent of the shots you never take."

Stephen Covey, in his book *Principle-Centered Leadership*, says,

A strategic leader can provide direction and vision, motivate through love, and build a complementary team based on mutual respect if he is more... concerned with direction and results than with methods, systems, and procedures. While all of the producers are hacking their way through the jungle and their managers are sharpening their machetes for them and setting up machete-wielding working schedules and putting on training programs for machete wielders, an enlightened and courageous leader must sometimes cry out, "Wrong jungle!" even though he can expect to receive the answer, "Be quiet! We're making progress."<sup>3</sup>

Coach Smith was ever willing to wail, "Wrong jungle!" He was always ready to innovate, to make his vision stronger with new concepts and ideas that would foster team play. Let me give you some examples in addition to those I mentioned earlier.

## Thank Those Who Assist

This innovation is probably the one from Coach Smith that most coaches, at every level, still use today. The player who scores the point must point to the player who gave him the pass. Everyone recognizes the scorer; Coach Smith wanted to make sure all the spectators knew who gave the pass, because scoring two points was impossible without the pass. If someone failed to point, and Coach Smith noticed it while reviewing game films, that person and the entire team would have to run extra sprints the next day in practice. After all, when one fails the entire team is hurt, not just the individual.

Bobby Jones, the all-American forward in the 1970s, once missed a layup in a game. He still pointed to the person who gave him the pass. Coach Smith liked that. The next day it was instituted in practice. Now hundreds of teams, from youth leagues to the professional teams, do the same—whether the basket is scored or not.

Coach Smith was trying to teach us about life by learning to point to the person who gave us the pass, the person who made it possible to score. No great leader has ever reached any position of significant success without saying thanks to those who have helped him achieve it. As someone once said, we all stand on the shoulders of someone who helped us succeed.

After win number 878, Dean Smith did not take time to bask in the glory of tying Coach Rupp's record; he was too busy thanking his former players. A national television audience watched him traverse the tunnel to the locker room, stopping every few feet to shake hands and greet the scores of players who had come from all over just to be there for the momentous occasion. By his actions, Coach Smith was saying that we players were the ones who had enabled him to achieve this success.

Was he sincere? I am absolutely convinced of it. Long before win number 879 ever came, Coach annually wrote all his former players and their families at Christmas, often thanking us for our friendship and what we have meant to him through the years. He would ask us to say hello to our wives, kids, and parents. This letter would accompany the latest UNC basketball media guide. I've received one every year since graduation in 1971. I had been in Ostend, Belgium, less than a month, beginning my first year with the European professional leagues, when I received a letter from Coach Smith thanking me for the four years I played for him.

I still have his last handwritten Christmas note to me, dated 1-24-06. He wrote, "Dave, I started these notes with the younger guys and am finally getting around to your group. The Christmas season must be difficult for you, but you do help many people! I assume Bethany enjoys her college experience and does well with her studies. Bring me up to date on David's AAU summer experience. He must be a college player, but at what level? And how is Michael? Hope you and Marilyn can relax some and even take a vacation! Best wishes in the New Year and always."

Hearing the simple words *thank you* or receiving a handwritten note can have a powerful effect on employees as well as basketball players. Max Depree, in his wonderful little book *Leadership Is an Art*, wrote,

What is it most of us really want from work? We would like to find the most effective, most productive, most rewarding way of working together... We would like a work process and relationships that meet our personal needs for belonging, for contributing, for meaningful work, for the opportunity to make a commitment, for

the opportunity to grow and be at least reasonably in control of our own destinies. Finally, we'd like someone to say, "Thank you."<sup>4</sup>

Depree contends that effective leadership today cannot be leadership by control, but leadership by persuasion. One of the ways, he says, that people feel they are participating in the process is when the leader simply says, "Thanks."

A raise isn't always the best way for a boss to say, "Well done." Most often, workers want a simple thank you personally stated or on paper. Bob Nelson, who wrote *1001 Ways to Energize Employees*,<sup>5</sup> challenges employers by saying there are many different ways to validate employees. It doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive. A voice mail, email, or a verbal affirmation in a staff meeting can suffice. In an interview, Nelson went on to add that if an employer is too busy to do these kinds of things, he's too busy!

Sometimes I ask our church staff for key volunteers' names so I can write them a thank-you note. The recipient of one of those cards sticks in my mind. Grace, a seventy-something-year-old grandmother who tirelessly works in our kitchen, came up to me during a church meal. She had ketchup stains all over her apron. Her shoulders were a bit hunched over. She was obviously tired from her duty of serving food and clearing the tables. Yet as she approached me, she had a gleam in her eye. For the next few moments she effusively thanked me for sending her a thank-you note. She was overwhelmed that I would take time from my busy schedule to write her. And I'll never forget the last thing she said to me. "You know, David, I'm going to work even harder now."

Everyone likes for someone to say, "Thank you for the pass."

## Help Those Who Sacrifice

Here's another one of Coach Smith's innovations that other coaches have adopted. When a player dived on the floor for a loose ball, the player closest to him had to run and help him up. One had sacrificed for the team. Therefore, another team member ought to come to his aid. If someone failed to do this, the entire team would have to run the next day in practice.

A great question for leaders to ask: Who on my team is sacrificing so we can succeed? Who is helping them? Who is supporting them? How are they being thanked for their extra effort?

## Stand Up and Cheer

When a player came out of the game, those on the bench had to stand up and cheer for him. Yes, sometimes this action felt coerced and contrived (take it from someone who had to do it practically his entire sophomore year!); but Coach Smith believed good little habits develop into good big habits. He also wanted us to be in the game just in case he called on us to play. So we did what he told us to do. Plus, it didn't hurt to know that as he watched game films he would always notice if someone didn't stand up. And if we didn't stand up, the entire team would run the next day. We could never object. He would always say, while watching the film, "The eye in the sky doesn't lie!"

But I think he was trying to accomplish something greater. I believe he was creating synergy, the power of encouragement, within a team.

I do something similar occasionally with my staff. I'll gather all of us together and then put a chair in the middle of the room. Each person on staff must sit in the chair for two minutes. They cannot

say a thing. Then everyone else fills in the blank about the person sitting in the middle of the room. “I like you because...”

Yes, the person in the chair can be a bit embarrassed by this. But in the end, they feel really good about themselves! This helps everyone develop an attitude of encouragement. It’s like applauding when someone comes off the court. It creates team spirit, and staff members love it.

### **Give the Tired a Chance to Rest**

If someone became tired during a game, he was to raise his fist in the air and ask to come out. If a player took himself out of a game, he could then put himself back in when he was rested. Coach Smith adamantly believed that a rested reserve would perform better than a tired superstar. The team must be considered first!

Coach Smith began this practice in his first season. However, he forgot the idea in his first game. When Larry Brown (who would later become one of Coach Smith’s assistants) raised his fist to signal his fatigue, Coach Smith kept giving the fist sign back to Larry, as if to tell him, “You’re doing great! Way to go!”

On another occasion, a reporter asked why Coach Smith never used 6’11” Jeff Crompton to jump center at the beginning of a game. Coach Smith smiled and replied, “Because we’re afraid Jeff will give us the tired signal when he comes back down.”

Many Carolina fans gasped during the 1993 NCAA championship game against Michigan when Coach Smith inserted seldom-used point guard Scott Cherry into a closely contested game after the starting point guard, Derrick Phelps, had given the tired signal with a little over six minutes left. Cherry played only a minute, but he played admirably without making a mistake. Phelps got his rest, re-entered the game for the stretch, and finished brilliantly.

Yes, Carolina won the game. Coach Smith knew that fatigue can make cowards of us all. He would not let fatigue be a factor in whether a game was won or lost. He let us make the decision to come out of the game when we were tired. The only reason he would ever take us out of a game was for lack of effort, not fatigue.

I don't hesitate to tell workers who seem tired to leave and go get some rest or do something fun. The job still gets done, most often better than if I had forced the person to work continuously while struggling with fatigue. That's why I regularly ask my staff to take their weekly day off. It's partly to help them build their own families on a firm foundation. And it's a lot cheaper than paying a huge family counseling bill! But it's also the realization that rested reserves play better than tired superstars. Proper rest determines job performance.

### **Let Innovation Flow from the Vision**

When I asked Coach Smith if he had carefully planned out all these innovations, he laughed. "Not a one." He noticed my surprise and said, "David, I really didn't plan these things. They all just kind of happened. I was simply living by my conviction of the team being above the individual player. Then as I lived by this principle, these innovations simply occurred."

Isn't his answer interesting? He did not spend hours trying to think up the innovations for which he is famous. He was simply living by his life principles—in this case, the principle that the team is what's most important. And the innovations simply fell into place.

Too often, I think, leaders do just the opposite. We spend countless hours trying to be creative. Yet with Coach Smith, the creativity flowed spontaneously out of a commitment to live by certain principles and core values.

As corporate structures and cultures have been downsized and workforces slashed, as lackluster performance in revenue growth occurs, some leaders have built a culture of cynicism and despair. As a result, they have lost their most important resource: human capital.

Perhaps the answer is not pushing our people to work harder and be more productive and creative, but to ask the questions, “Is the team our highest priority? Does this guide everything we do? Do we play hard? Play smart? Play together?”

If we emphasized this, perhaps the creativity and innovation that are necessary for any organization to succeed would flow more easily from our work associates. They would occur naturally as a result of keeping the team first.

## INSIDE COACH SMITH

“Now he’s a champion!”

Webb Simpson is an outstanding professional golfer. He won the 2012 US Open, one of the big four in the grand slam of golf. He now lives in Charlotte, and has become a friend. He recently told me a fascinating story about Coach Smith and their mutual love for the game of golf.

Webb was a golf prodigy. In his very young years, anyone who understood the game could see that he was special. He began playing early and succeeding often.

At that point in his life, he lived in Raleigh, North Carolina. His parents also owned a residence in Wilmington, North Carolina, right on the Landfall golf course. This allowed Webb the chance to play from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm—which he often did!

One day in the late 1990s, when Webb was eleven years old, he was working on his chips and putts. His dad came over to him and said, “Webb, I heard that Coach Smith is going to tee off today at one this afternoon on the first tee. I know how much you admire him. You ought to go over there and meet him.”

“He was like a god to me at that time,” Webb told me. “I was in awe of him. The chance to meet him personally was a dream come true.”

So Webb started hanging around the first tee as one o’clock approached. Sure enough, Coach Smith arrived, promptly, as usual. Sheepishly, Webb approached Coach Smith and introduced himself. He told him his uncle was Rick Webb, one of Smith’s former players, for whom he’d been named.

“He was gracious and kind,” Webb said.

Then came the chance of a lifetime for Webb. Evidently one of Coach Smith’s foursome didn’t show up. Smith wanted to begin playing. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Webb taking some practice swings.

“Hey, Webb,” he asked. “What’s your handicap?”

“I’m a scratch golfer,” Webb responded.

“Seriously?” Coach Smith asked. “How old are you?”

“Eleven, sir,” Webb said.

Coach Smith paused a moment, processing the fact that an eleven-year-old could be a scratch golfer. Finally, he asked, “Well, would you like to join our group and play with us?”

Webb didn’t hesitate. “Sure, I’d love to!”

So eleven-year-old Webb Simpson played an eighteen-hole round of golf with one of his heroes, Coach Dean Smith. His mom and dad met the group on one of the holes and gave the foursome

lemonade. Webb told me it is one of the most special memories in his life. Plus, Webb said, he shot a great round of golf. That made the occasion even more special.

But that's not the end of the story. One of the people in the foursome was Coach Smith's son, Scott. In 2012, Smith's memory was slowly fading. He was watching the US Open on television with Scott. He wasn't saying much, as is often the case with those who have dementia. But he was watching the match. It was tense and close until the last foursome played the eighteenth hole.

When it was obvious Webb had secured the US Open championship, Scott said, "Hey Dad, that's the eleven-year-old kid who played eighteen holes with us at Landfall years ago. Remember?"

Coach Smith's eyes widened. A connection was made in his memory banks. "Oh yes, I remember," he said. "He was really good, especially at eleven years of age. Now he's a champion!"

Coach Smith loved to play golf. He played as often as he could. Somehow, that memory, like his love of church hymns and the UNC fight song, could never be completely robbed from his mind.

## LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 6:

# Get Better, and the Team Gets Better

*“If you want to make the team better, become a better individual player.”*

BETWEEN MY SOPHOMORE AND junior years at UNC, I wanted to know if I could play in the ACC and particularly at North Carolina. But another factor was that my personal aspirations had melted away; I primarily wanted to help the team be the best it could be. So I called Coach Smith and told him I was committed to staying at North Carolina.

“How can I best help the team?” I asked him.

“If you want to help the team,” he said, “become a better individual player.” He then re-emphasized my weaknesses and strengths. He told me to work on both. Become a better player, and the team would be better.

At first glance, it might seem Coach Smith's statement contradicted his vision of the team being above the individual. On the contrary, it only enhanced it. A team is made up of individual parts. It is the leader's job to take the unique giftedness of different individuals and mold them together as a team with a common vision and goal. The stronger those individual parts are, the stronger the team's potential.

I worked hard that summer to become a better player. Frequently as I ran sprints and lifted weights in the hot sunshine of Orlando, Florida, I would ask myself, *Why am I doing this?* I would always be panting as the answer came to my mind: *Because this is making the team better.*

Dave Hanners posed an interesting question when I interviewed him for this book. "Can you name one North Carolina player who didn't get better between his freshman and senior seasons?" He couldn't think of one, and neither could I. Coach Smith had to deal with all our egos, trying not to bruise them, yet getting the best out of us for the sake of the team. "Most coaches can't do that," Hanners said. "They usually fail somewhere."

Coach Smith also mused with me over how much better some players became during their careers, even to his amazement. "Darrell Elston came here because John Lotz knew his high school coach," he told me. "Elston had a basketball scholarship from Ball State and a football scholarship from Purdue. He was the fourteenth man on the squad in 1972. In the Final Four, he couldn't even dress for the game because the rules stated that only twelve players could dress. I told Elston that perhaps he should go someplace else where he could play. But he worked hard over the years and became an all-ACC performer. He worked very hard, and the team became better."

A great leader can motivate others toward self-discipline and

personal responsibility. No matter how gifted the player may be, or how much playing time he may receive, Coach Smith believed that the individual—whether the manager, a bench player, a regular, or a superstar—can have tremendous impact on the team when he personally improves.

### **Teach Personal Responsibility and Self-Discipline**

A jar rests on the corner of Coach Guthridge's desk. It's an "excuse" jar. When you come in to see him, the first thing you're expected to do is file your excuses in the jar. He simply won't listen to them. Every player on the team is constantly challenged to assume personal responsibility for becoming a better player. He knows it will make the team better. I'm certain that he learned this from Coach Smith.

I was one of the three chaplains to the NBA Hornets in the late 1990s. Before the games I led a fifteen-minute chapel service to remind the six or so players who attended about the true source of all their gifts. It was a time of reflection, a time to remember what's really important and who is really in control of all things.

The first time I led the service, I wanted to capture the players' attention. So I opened with a question. "Who is the toughest player you've ever tried to guard?"

George Zidek immediately said, "Hakeem Olajuwon."

Dell Curry didn't hesitate. "Number 23." (In case you're not a college or NBA basketball enthusiast, that was Michael Jordan's number.)

Anthony Mason, who sadly just passed away at the young age of forty-eight, just smiled. He wouldn't give an answer. I kept pressing him to give me a name. Finally, he said, "David, there's no one I can't stop!" Everyone laughed, for that's what Mason really believed!

I then told them about trying to guard Julius Erving in the NIT finals my senior year, and how he was unquestionably the most difficult opponent I had ever faced.

“But you know who is the toughest opponent you’ll ever have to overcome in your life?” I then asked. “Yourself.”

If we want to be successful, the first victory we have to win is over ourselves. If we could kick the backside of the person who is most responsible for our problems, we would not be able to sit down for a week.

Winston Churchill once said, “The price of greatness is responsibility.”

William Faulkner said, “Don’t bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.”

Coach Smith taught this principle of personal responsibility in several ways. How? First, he demanded self-discipline. He truly believed that the self-disciplined person is a free person. Only the self-disciplined person can say no to whatever may prevent his dreams from coming true.

At every opportunity, he emphasized personal responsibility and self-discipline. I vividly remember a practice on Thanksgiving Day my sophomore year. We were a very good team, ranked number two in the country during the preseason. Our best player was a gifted junior named Charlie Scott. He could outrun, outjump, and outplay anyone else on the team. His athleticism was wondrous.

However, in practice that particular day, Scott was not working very hard. Coach Smith stopped practice. As was his custom, he put us all on the end line and used one of his famous quips on us: “When one of you doesn’t hustle, the whole team suffers. We’re going to run for Scott’s laziness.”

So we ran. Scott, however, refused to run very hard. Everyone

knew that in a pure sprint, Scott would beat the rest of us by a good ten feet. But he simply coasted in the middle of the pack.

“We’re going to keep running,” Coach Smith said, “until Scott runs one sprint as fast as he can.”

He blew the whistle and we started to run again...and again...and again. Scott refused to run one hard sprint, and Coach Smith refused to budge from his command. The immovable object had met the irresistible force! So we kept on running.

We must have run for an hour or more, over and over and over again. Finally, Rusty Clark, our 250-pound center, walked over to Scott and said, “If you don’t run one sprint real hard, we’re all going to kill you.”

That seemed to be sufficient motivation, and Scott finally ran one sprint as fast as he could. Coach Smith blew his whistle and sent us to the showers with a final instruction, “Be back at three this afternoon so we can cover what we missed this morning.”

Another way Coach Smith taught self-discipline was by insisting on punctuality. He knew that simple things like punctuality can turn out to be extremely important. So we had an ironclad rule: If you’re one minute late for the bus, it leaves without you. It didn’t matter if you were a sub or superstar, the bus would leave. If you were late for a pregame meal, you wouldn’t start.

To this day, Bill Chamberlain worries that he may have lost the 1972 National Championship for UNC. He was scheduled to be a starter, but was late for the pre-game meal before the Florida State game in the national semifinals. Florida State jumped off to a huge lead and UNC never recovered. We lost by four. Chamberlain wonders if his lack of punctuality disrupted team unity and caused a very important loss.

At Coach Smith’s funeral, most of us arrived a good hour before

the funeral started. Yes, it was mostly because all of us wanted to visit with one another. We don't have many opportunities in our busy schedules to do that. Yes, we also wanted to get the best seats possible. But I also wondered if there wasn't something innate within us whispering, "You'd better not be late. There's Eastern Standard Time. And there's Dean Smith Time. His is the only one that matters." His watch was always set fifteen minutes before the actual time. He practiced punctuality too!

We all were in our seats well before the service began. I laughed within when the first chime promptly sounded to start the worship service: at 11:00:00. Coach Smith's service began right on time. He had planned the service. I bet he had made sure it would start exactly on time.

He often said, "Gentlemen, when you are late, you are stealing another person's time!" Even at his funeral he made sure we were prompt.

### **Use an Inside-Out Approach**

The individual is key for achieving the best results with a team. Coach Smith saw this truth and practiced an inside-out approach to management, which is different from the way many leaders operate. They think that external changes—such as a new system or organization—is the answer to better productivity.

Management guru Stephen Covey, in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*,<sup>1</sup> explained that organizational change and growth starts with the individual. Most executives, he said, try to impose change using an outside-in approach—that is, they use external factors to influence the people under them to change. But the kind of change that is most productive is inside-out—that is, it

starts from within the person. So as the individual improves, the team improves as well.

Coach Smith used this inside-out approach to teach personal responsibility and self-discipline, and he did it with a bare minimum of rules and regulations. That may seem strange. Too many of us tend to think that the more rules and regulations, the more disciplined someone will be. Coach Smith did not adopt this perspective.

Earlier, I noted how each year, the seniors made the rules for the following season. This action not only allowed for tremendous buy-in by the players, but it also allowed those who most closely know the individual personality of the team to make the rules.

When I visited with Coach Smith, he reminded me that essentially he had only one rule: Don't ever embarrass me, yourself, or the team. Of course, he was the one who judged if that rule were ever broken. But, evidently, it was the one major rule he always had.

I vividly remember when I ran up against the "never embarrass me or the team" rule. It was during my sophomore year, when I didn't get to play much. You can therefore imagine my surprise and excitement when Coach Smith touched me on the shoulder in the middle of a significant game and told me to enter. I tore off my sweats and ran to the scorer's bench. Play stopped and I entered the game. Here was my chance to make a positive impression. Here was my long-awaited opportunity to prove I could play at this level.

The ball came to me at the top of the key. No one guarded me. I glanced at the basket and let the ball fly. *Clank!* It bounced off the rim.

Before I could process what had happened, the horn sounded and someone else entered the game for me. I went to the bench, furious with myself. I had taken a poor shot. I had blown it! Coach Smith was not concerned with someone who could score points.

I knew that. Everyone at this level could score. He wanted to see me do the little things: defense, box out, and rebound. I was so mad with myself that I took the towel the manager handed me and swung it to the ground in disgust—in the presence of 10,000 onlookers in Carmichael Auditorium.

Coach Smith had witnessed this little fiasco. He waited until the game action went to the other end of the court so the crowd's attention would not be on the bench. Then, very quickly and quietly, he walked down the bench and knelt in front of me. He asked me, "David, did you throw that towel in frustration because you took a very bad shot or because I took you out of the game?" I humbly and quietly responded, "Because I took a terrible shot." He nodded to me. Then he patted my knee and said, "David, don't ever embarrass me, and I won't embarrass you." Then he walked back to his seat on the bench without saying another word.

I knew the one rule, and I had clearly broken it.

But I never did that again. From that moment on, I disciplined myself to control my responses and never embarrass him or the team again. I knew I had to be governed from the inside out.

### **Develop Trust**

Teaching personal responsibility and self-discipline through this inside-out approach requires the kind of meaningful and respectful relationship between leader and followers that will develop trust. We all respected Coach Smith. We truly did not want to embarrass him. The crucial dimension in all communication is the relationship. When the relationship is right, we can almost communicate without words. Coach Smith could give us a look in practice that sometimes communicated more than words.

And the key to all relationships is time. Someone once said that the way kids spell love is T-I-M-E.

Employees need time too. A leader should examine whether he is spending quality and quantity time with work associates in order to develop trust.

Are you as a leader available to those who work with you? Ged Doughton, a former player in the 1970s and now a successful Charlotte businessman, remembers being in Coach Smith's office one time when the intercom buzzed. The secretary announced, "Senator So-and-So is on the phone for you." Coach Smith said, "Tell him I'm with a player and I'll call him back." Ged felt as important as the president of the United States, and Coach Smith's action fostered a deep sense of trust and loyalty.

How can you gain the trust of those who work for you? It is best accomplished with a private visit in your office or the work associate's office, a relaxed lunch, a private chat over coffee—in other words, a time when you are focused solely and specifically on that person and his or her fears, concerns, needs, hopes, and interests.

Do you as a leader spend time like this with your employees? Do they think you genuinely care about their lives? Do your employees feel they can come to you and share their concerns, or do they see you locked in your corner office with the view, unreachable and unapproachable?

The second way Coach Smith helped develop relational trust was by refusing to let us compare ourselves with one another. He knew the danger of what someone called "the snare to compare." He constantly urged us to know our limitations as well as our strengths. He felt each individual was an important cog in the entire machinery. If he sensed any envy among us, he would immediately confront

us and remind us of the uniqueness of our own personal giftedness. Over and over again he would say, “Improve your strengths and weaknesses, and the team will become better.”

At the beginning of every season, Coach Smith developed team goals. At the end of the season, he would meet with every player about personal goals for becoming better. He was always brutally honest during this interview. If he did not think you would play, even with hard work, he would tell you. If he thought transferring was your best option in order to play, he would help you find the right school. But your name would still be on his letterman’s list. He would always consider you a part of the Carolina family.

In this way, Coach Smith taught us that as the individual improves, it allows the whole team to improve. And when the individual unleashes the unique potential he has, the team becomes better. He was also confronting the damage that occurs when a person starts comparing himself with someone else. It can only be destructive.

Coach Smith was brilliant when he refused to let us compare ourselves with one another. He knew this kind of comparison was deadly to a team. It destroyed the uniqueness of the individual and could abort the need for claiming personal responsibility. The snare of comparison keeps our inexhaustible godly qualities locked inside us.

### **Work Hard in the Off-Season**

Coach Smith also taught us to work hard during the off-season so that we could become the best individual players possible. In fact, he would often say, “Great players are made in the off-season.” He placed that kind of motivation within us. We took responsibility for our lives. And we were willing to pay to price in self-discipline to make the team better.

Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, in their book *Built to Last*, state that the extraordinary success of visionary companies is not so much because of superior intellect or supposed success secrets, but most often because the workers demand so much of themselves. “Becoming and remaining a visionary company requires oodles of plain old-fashioned discipline, hard work and a visceral revulsion to any tendency toward smug self-satisfaction.”<sup>2</sup>

Coach Smith’s teams became better and better largely because individual players took personal responsibility and became better players.

As the individual improves, so does the team.

It’s a simple secret to success for all corporations and teams.

## INSIDE COACH SMITH

### Reaching Back with Love

I was in Iowa City, Iowa with my wife Marilynn and my son Michael for the 2015 NCAA swim championships. We were having a fun time as a family. My wife and I had just experienced an eventful and successful morning with his swims. He had done well. As parents, we were exceedingly happy for him.

Then, out of nowhere, a text arrived from my friend Charles Chandler in Charlotte, North Carolina, who writes for *Decision Magazine*. He congratulated me on the check Coach Smith had sent to me and all his former lettermen. “Huh?” I asked myself. “What in the world is he talking about?” I dismissed it. It was probably no big deal. I’d explore what it meant later on.

Then my cell phone rang. It was another friend, Scott Fowler, who is a sportswriter for the *Charlotte Observer*. He asked me about the check from Coach Smith. “Scott, what are you talking about?”

I queried. I told him about the text I'd just received from Charles Chandler. He went on to tell me about a \$200 check that Coach Smith was sending to all his lettermen from his estate. He simply wanted all of us to go out to dinner on him.

After Scott finished, my only response was, "Wow! That's amazing. That's so...totally Coach Smith!" It was a perfect Coach Smith moment, one that people who knew him would completely understand.

When I arrived home from Iowa, I looked for the envelope and there it was! I opened the letter and read its contents:

Dear David,

As you are aware, Coach Smith passed away on February 7, 2015. As Trustee of the Dean E. Smith Revocable Trust, I am responsible for carrying out the direction of Coach Smith with respect to a small bequest to each varsity basketball letterman he coached.

Each player was important and special to Coach Smith and when he prepared his estate plan, Coach wanted to reach out to each of his lettermen. Accordingly, Coach directed that following his passing each letterman be sent a two hundred dollar (\$200.00) check with the message "enjoy a dinner out with compliments of Coach Dean Smith." Enclosed is a check in the amount of two hundred dollars (\$200.00) with the notation "Dinner out."

Please enjoy your dinner out.

Sincerely,

Tim Breedlove

Several thoughts raced through my mind as I read this letter.

First, it was obvious Coach Smith had planned this gift—years before dementia had robbed him of his memory. At some point, while he was still cognizant, he carefully planned for each letterman to have a gift from his estate. And he especially wanted it to be a meal he paid for. Moreover, a \$200 meal out—that’s a nice meal out at any restaurant! While he still had his memory, he remembered his lettermen in his will and wanted to give us a blessing.

Second, I found myself inwardly struggling and asking, “I wonder if I should frame the check or cash it?” What a memory it could be if framed! But I know Coach Smith would have insisted that I take Marilyn out to dinner. During every second of the meal, I can only imagine him serving us and saying, “I hope you’re having a great time on me!”

Third, I couldn’t help but wonder if maybe Coach Smith saw this as a way of saying players should receive some kind of compensation for the billions that college basketball makes off them. It wouldn’t surprise me if he had determined, in advance, to make a statement from eternity to those in charge of the game he loved so much. He was that wily.

Finally, I continue to be overwhelmed by this man. Even from the grave he was reaching back to his players with love. Even from the grave he wanted his lettermen to know how special every single one was to him. Even from the grave he wanted us to remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Even from the grave he wanted us to know that life is much more about giving than getting.

I’m privileged to have known him. I’m a better man for it.

Thanks, Coach, for the gift. Thanks for reaching back and loving me from eternity.

There will never be another one like you.



## LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 7:

# Speak Positive Words

*“By how many points do you think we’ll win?”*

SOME YEARS AGO, CAROLINA was playing Duke in Durham, which had always been a very difficult place to play because of the incredibly vocal fans. I played in Cameron Indoor Stadium years ago, and we thought the fans were crazy then too.

Before this particular game, the Tar Heels were huddled in the locker room. The “Cameron Crazies” were yelling, jumping, and screaming. The band was blaring the Duke fight song. Even in the locker room, the noise was almost deafening.

As the time came to run onto the floor, everyone knew they would be resoundingly booed. The Carolina players mentally readied themselves for every possible indignity.

Coach Smith calmly walked into the huddle and looked his players in the eyes. He said two things: First, “Isn’t it amazing that at this

moment, there are a billion people in China who don't care one bit who wins this game?" He paused, then continued, "Isn't it going to be fun to shut them up?"

Carolina won the game.

In explaining how Coach Smith motivated his teams, I would be remiss if I did not talk about his extraordinary ability to be a positive encourager in tough game situations. Carolina comebacks and victories under Coach Smith are now legendary. However, few people know what really went on in the huddles when strategic decisions were made that led to those victories. Often it was Coach Smith's ability to encourage through positive words that inspired incredible performances.

In one particular game, Carolina was down by several points with a little over a minute to go. During a time-out everyone came to the bench with concerned looks on their faces. Coach Smith just smiled.

He turned to Ademola Okulaja and asked, "By how many points do you think we'll win?" Okulaja responded, "I think we'll win by five."

Then Coach Smith asked the same question of Antawn Jamison, who answered, "I think we'll win by three."

They won by five.

No one completely understands the power of encouraging words on another person. We know discouraging words spread negativism and a defeatist attitude among sports teams, families, and companies like a spark to wood after a sixty-day drought.

One of my favorite illustrations is about a man who wanted revenge against someone who had severely hurt him, so he went to the devil to buy an instrument of pain he could use against his enemy. He looked at one weapon and asked what it was.

The devil said, “That’s slander, and it’s very effective. It’s worth a million dollars.”

The man then pointed to another instrument and asked what it was.

“That is a furious temper,” the devil said. “I use it often to break apart relationships and hurt people. It is also worth a million dollars.”

The man finally pointed to one instrument on the far end of the table. “What is that and how much will it cost?”

“Oh, no,” replied the devil. “That’s not for sale. It’s called discouragement, and it is my most valuable weapon.”

Discouragement is a powerful negative force. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Ever heard that one? It’s a lie. Words do hurt. They divide and discourage us as nothing else. The writer of the book of Proverbs in the Bible was absolutely correct when he wrote, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21). Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” The Bible is clear: Use your words to give life, edify, and encourage!

How powerful positive words can be! They can inspire like nothing else.

This principle even works in the animal kingdom. Geese, for example, can fly 72 percent farther in formation than alone. Do you know why they honk as they fly? Because the goose at the point of the V cannot turn his neck to see if the other geese are still following him. The force of the headwind blowing against him is so furious that if he were to look back, his neck would instantly snap in two. So the other geese honk to tell the leader not to quit, to let him

know they are still in formation behind him, still supporting him. They honk their encouragement.

### **Become an Encourager**

You cannot give out encouraging words, however, if positive thoughts don't fill your heart. It is my belief that Coach Smith thought positively; therefore, it was easy for him to be an encourager.

In 1968, George Karl was a very highly recruited point guard from Penn Hills, Pennsylvania. He had narrowed his choices to Duke or Maryland. Coach Smith entered the recruiting scene late with Karl, but decided he really wanted him.

Karl was not very encouraging when Coach Smith visited.

"What are our chances?" Coach asked Karl.

"About one in ten," he answered.

"I like those odds," Smith said. He convinced Karl to visit Carolina. Karl loved the campus, the program, the players, and especially Coach Smith. He signed up as a scholarship player with UNC soon after his visit. He went on to become an all-ACC point guard, played in the NBA, and is one of the NBA's best coaches ever.

A leader can't give positive, encouraging words if he's not a positive, encouraging person himself. That's where it all starts!

How important are positive words? They can mean the difference between quitting and staying in the game long enough to win.

In his early years in baseball, Jackie Robinson, the first black player in the major leagues, was ready to quit. He could not stomach the racist slurs continually thrown at him. One day, when he was feeling especially ready to give it all up, he brazenly decided to steal home in an important game. He ran frantically from third and ended up sliding under the catcher's tag, scoring a run. As he ran to

the dugout, a little boy right behind the dugout kept yelling at him, “Way to go, Jackie! Way to go! Keep it up!”

The boy’s words kept ringing in his ears. “Keep it up!” And at that moment, Jackie Robinson decided not to quit.

Amazing, isn’t it? A few words from an unknown little boy helped baseball and the entire sports world to keep one of its greatest players and contributed to breaking down racial barriers for all African-American athletes. A few positive words of encouragement outweighed all the discouraging words of the critics.

One time during my ministry I wanted to give up too. Life’s pressures had become too great for me to bear, and I wanted to quit. I remember one night when my wife, Marilynn, and I were on vacation. I was sitting on the edge of the bed at two in the morning, staring out the window at the water.

Marilynn awakened and noted my odd behavior. “What’s wrong?” she asked.

“I want to quit,” I said. “Ministry is too difficult.”

She leaned over to me, took my hand, and quietly said, “I believe in you, David.”

That’s all I needed to hear. I persevered.

The tough time did pass. Ministry became meaningful to me again. The church started to surge forward. How glad I am now that I didn’t quit. How glad I am that someone spoke encouraging words to me.

Coach Smith placed such an emphasis on positive words that he never allowed one player to criticize another player. In fact, he even became angry with me once for criticizing a *football* player.

During my freshman year, Carolina had just lost a tough football game. The team had two talented quarterbacks. One was a gifted

option quarterback and fine runner. The other was a fine passer who later played in the NFL. For this game, the coach had decided to play the option quarterback, relegating the passer to the bench.

It just so happened that the passing quarterback was a high school friend of my older brother, Howard. In the locker room after a practice that followed the football game, I mentioned to a teammate that I questioned the football coach's wisdom in not playing the passer, proudly pointing out that he was my brother's friend.

Coach Smith overheard my comments. He approached me with fire flashing from his eyes. He told me in no uncertain terms that I had no right to question the football coach's judgment, reminding me that we were not only a basketball family, but also a university family. "Don't ever do that again publicly," he told me as he walked away.

I was embarrassed, but I knew Coach Smith was right. To this day I watch my words when I say something publicly about another person. I understand that my silence carefully guards a reputation. It also helps guarantee unity.

There's an old maxim that says, "If you can't say something good, don't say anything at all."

That's dead wrong. Say something good! Say a lot of good and encouraging words to people. Doing that will make a tremendous difference in their lives. Positive words can bring about change and spark people toward victory.

### **See Victory in Your Mind**

One of Carolina's most famous comeback victories occurred against Duke in 1973. The team came from eight down with seventeen seconds to go to tie the game at the buzzer, go into overtime, and eventually win. A key player in this victory was Bobby Jones.

He told me that when Coach Smith called time-out with seventeen seconds on the clock, the team came to the bench fairly dejected.

With a calm voice and a wry smile, Coach said, “Let’s have some fun here. We have them exactly where we want them. Think about this: There are thousands upon thousands of high school athletes who would love to be where you are right now. Let’s decide we’re going to win this game.”

“Then he turned to me,” Jones remembered, “and said, ‘Bobby, you’re going to make these two free throws. Then we’re going to put on the trap and we’re going to steal the ball. And if we don’t get the steal, we’ll foul them immediately. Then we’ll talk some more at the next time out.’”

“So I made the free throws and we put the trap on. Someone deflected the ball and we got possession. We scored a layup and immediately fouled again. We called time-out and went to the huddle. The crowd was tense and loud. Coach just sat down, all calm and relaxed, even smiling. ‘Okay, here’s what we need to do,’ he said. ‘They’ll miss the free throws and we’ll go down and score. Then call time-out again.’”

That’s exactly what happened. “We’re now down by two with a few seconds left,” Jones continued. “In the huddle, he told us to throw a half-court pass to Walter Davis, for Davis to take no more than two dribbles, shoot the ball, score—and we would win in overtime.

“It was amazing. It all happened exactly as he said. And when we went into overtime, no one was really celebrating. We just knew that if we did what he said, we’d win. It was as if he had scripted it. But what was so amazing was how calm and positive he was in the huddle. And because he was so positive and encouraging, so were we!”

Coach Smith could see the victory in his mind, and that’s what

he transmitted to the players. Over and over he stimulated them to win by planting in their minds an image of how a big win could be achieved. Then he reinforced that image with positive words. As Jones said, it was almost as if he scripted the victory. It was that clear to him.

On the first day of practice one year, after the 1993 championship season, Coach Smith had each player climb a ladder and cut down a part of a basketball net. This team was not predicted to do very well, so he wanted to plant in their minds from day one what it would feel like to cut down a net after winning a championship.

After that first practice, the team went into the locker room and had a huge celebration. They pretended to drape the newly cut nets over the 1993 championship trophy and took a team picture around it. Later, each player was given a copy of that photo to place in their lockers to help them visualize what it would be like to win a championship.

### **Believe in Others**

Roy Williams shared of a similar incident from the national championship game against Georgetown in 1982.

“David,” he told me, “it was the greatest single experience I’ve ever had in my life about how encouragement can change people’s attitudes in a tense situation. We were down by one and when the guys came to the time-out with about forty seconds to play, I really thought we might lose the game. I had believed we were the best team and were destined to win. But at that moment, I began to doubt.”

Williams carefully studied the looks on the players’ faces, and he believed they also thought they were going to lose the game.

“We coaches were kneeling down in front of the players,”

Williams continued, “and we knew the coaches were going to determine the outcome of this game. Coach Smith then proceeded to tell the players what we were going to do. He said to penetrate and look for the best shot possible. But what was probably going to happen, he said, would be a penetration that would allow us to kick it to the backside. We’d then get a shot and knock it in. He said not to worry if we missed the shot, because we would have the other side covered with rebounding. And if we missed and they got the rebound, not to worry because we would foul them and they would miss the free throw under that kind of pressure.

“I can’t explain it. Suddenly the players’ spirits lifted. I checked the scoreboard again to see if somehow we’d gotten ahead in the game. And then, as the players left the huddle, Coach patted Michael Jordan on the back and said, ‘Knock it in, Michael.’ He knew the shot was going to come to him.

“Needless to say, the rest is history,” Williams concluded. “It happened exactly as he designed it.”

Many fans have heard this story. However, what they might not know is what Coach Smith said to Matt Doherty in that same huddle. Doherty added the following account.

“Right before that time-out, I had missed a crucial shot, one that could have put us up by three with 1:19 to go. Instead, they went down and Sleepy Floyd scored to put Georgetown up by one. That’s when we called time-out. When I went to that huddle, I felt awful. I had let all my teammates and coaches down. Coach Smith outlined the next play, like everyone has heard.

“As we broke from the huddle,” Doherty continued, “he told Michael to knock it down. But what people don’t know is that as I left the huddle, he said the same thing to me. Can you imagine? He was anticipating that I was feeling down from missing the previous

shot. He wanted me to be confident in case I was forced to take the final shot. His constant encouragement gave all of us confidence.”

One of the best insights into those final seconds of the 1982 national championship game is seen in the famous picture of Michael Jordan’s shot with seventeen seconds to win the game. The ball was ready to leave his fingertips. The Georgetown player was lunging toward Jordan, desperately trying to interfere with the shot attempt. The crowd was on its feet. Excitement loomed everywhere.

But here’s what’s most interesting in the picture: The UNC coaches were all sitting calmly in their seats. Their elbows were resting on their thighs. Their hands were folded. There was little detectable emotion on their faces or body language.

When Mike O’Koren saw the picture, he said to then-assistant Roy Williams, “What’s going on? You guys look like you are sitting there watching a casual pick-up game between shirts and skins.”

Conversely, when you look at Georgetown’s bench, you see just the opposite scenario. The coaches were all standing. They were animated, feeling the extreme tension of the moment.

The extraordinary pressure was on UNC and Coach Smith. The moniker “You can’t win the big one” had been hung around his neck. This was the big one. This was the big shot! Yet none of the coaches—including Smith—were standing, twisting, turning, yelling, or screaming as the ball left Michael Jordan’s hand. There seemed to be absolutely no concern in Coach Smith’s mind about how that shot or game would judge his future legacy.

And of course Jordan made the shot. The rest is history. Coach Smith won his first national championship.

Purportedly, after the game, a reporter asked Coach Smith if he thought the win now validated his career. Smith scoffed at the

question. He thought it nonsensical. He said he was no better a coach after the game than he was before the game. His team just happened to win the game.

Sometimes obvious calmness in a high-pressure situation is the loudest word of encouragement others can hear from a leader.

Coach Smith believed in his players, and he encouraged them to believe in themselves, even when the odds were against them.

### **Affirm What People Do Well**

Matt Doherty shared about an interesting way Coach Smith developed confidence through encouragement in practice. “He knew I was a smart player who competed, and I could pass the ball and do little things like that,” Doherty said. “And I knew that if I did the little things I would play.

“So I began to work harder on my screens. I wanted to be the best screener on the team. I remember him pulling me aside one day and saying I was the best screener in the country. It made me feel so good, I started working even harder on my screens. At clinics during the summer I told the kids that Coach Smith said I was the best screener in the country. I’d go downtown and meet a pretty girl, and I’d tell her that Coach Smith said I was the best screener in the country. It filled my black book with phone numbers! Anyway, his encouragement motivated me to do the little things better than ever.”

### **Show Disapproval in a Positive Way**

Sometimes, of course, it is necessary to show disapproval. But Coach Smith always managed to do it in a positive way.

Lee Dedmon, a 1967–71 letterman and co-most valuable player of the 1971 ACC tournament, said, “Oh, he could get angry. But he got

angry at the action, not the person. He often expressed his anger to groups, not individuals. He wouldn't hesitate to bounce some chalk off your head if you were falling asleep while watching game film."

Mitch Kupchack said, "He could throw chairs with his eyes. I always felt that when he simply said, 'Change jerseys' and moved someone in practice from the first to the second team. You knew his disapproval. But it was always done in such a way that you never felt belittled. In fact, you always felt it was best for the team—and somehow for you too!"

Coach Smith's final season in 1996–1997 had a dubious beginning. The Tar Heels began ACC play 0-3. It was a talented but young team, featuring sophomores Antawan Jamison and Vince Carter. It appeared the team was going to suffer its fourth consecutive loss to rival NC State. UNC was down by nine points with 2:24 to go in the game.

Coach Smith called a time-out and began to work magic with his words—words that not only won the game but saved the season. He called the team together, noticed their negative body language, and suggested they were ready for defeat.

Makhtar Ndiaye remembers what Coach Smith said: "‘It seems like I want this more than you guys want it.’ We all looked at his face and saw how determined he was. We all realized we had to do something, right then and there."

UNC scored the remaining twelve points of the game, even though the team had scored only two field goals during the first eighteen minutes of the second half. Coach Smith's words and look of determination was a springboard to the rally that gave the victory. The team went on to have an extremely successful season.

Antwan Jamison said, "The attention that he has and the way he looks into your eyes you have no choice but to believe."

I've always believed that Coach Smith's words and looks of disapproval were always directed at the behavior, not the person. He always encouraged who a person was and disapproved of what a person did. There's a huge difference between the two. Coach Smith understood how important this difference is.

### **Find the Best in Every Situation**

Ronald Reagan received his highest approval ratings ever right after he was shot in 1981. One year later, he received his lowest approval ratings ever, a mere 32 percent. His underlings were terribly discouraged. Sensing this, he gathered them all together and said, "Don't worry. Everything will be fine. I'll just go out and get shot again!" His ability to put a humorous slant on a discouraging situation helped his staff get through a difficult time.

A great leader has the ability to impart to his followers a positive attitude that makes them believe they can overcome any obstacle. No leader should ever underestimate the power of positive words. When you're managing by walking around, a hand on the shoulder and a statement like "I really appreciate how much you mean to this corporation" can go a long way. Everyone likes to be praised. Look in the eyes of your children when you offer praise. Remember, adults are often just grown-up children. They need encouragement just as much as children do.

A good question for all leaders to ask themselves is this: Do the people who work with and for me feel encouragement coming from me, no matter what the odds? People feel cheated if all they ever receive from a leader is information. It's true that all workers in every organization need information, but more importantly, they need generous doses of inspiration and congratulation. They need encouragement.

Walter Bennis, in a speech delivered on C-SPAN titled “Managing People Is Like Herding Cats,” said, “All leaders expect positive outcomes. The glass is not half-empty or half-full, but always full.” That expresses the necessity of a positive outlook.

### **Foster a Positive Outlook Through Preparation**

A key part of Coach Smith’s ability to be positive—to believe even when things seemed impossible—was his absolutely thorough preparation.

Every day, Coach Smith would post a thought for the day on the practice schedule. Each player had to read it and be ready to recite it if called upon during the practice. If he couldn’t do it, the individual or the team would have to run.

One of Coach Smith’s favorite thoughts for the day was this: “Luck is when preparation meets opportunity.” John Lotz once told me that in the many years he had known Coach Smith, he had never heard him say, “Good luck.” Not once. “He simply doesn’t believe in luck,” John said. “You win by being prepared, not by being lucky.”

It’s fascinating to study how Coach Smith prepared for an opponent in light of his commitment to the team above the individual. First, he insisted that his teams be the best-conditioned in America. He vowed that we would never lose because our opposition was in better shape than we were.

Moreover, we prepared for every situation. In our two-hour practices, each one timed to the minute, we spent time going over every possible game scenario. What would we do if there was a minute left and we were down by two? Ahead by two? What if there were ten seconds left, we were down by one, and we had the ball? We were prepared for those situations before the game ever started.

“During the 1983 season,” Buzz Peterson told me, “we were

playing Tulane. We were in triple overtime. Down by three. Coach Smith drew up a play on his clipboard. He said, ‘Buzz, you’re here. Matt, you’re here. Michael, you’re here.’ I remember thinking there were a lot of lines going all over the place, but I remembered where I was supposed to go. Something in practice reminded me.

“I came out of the huddle and looked at Matt and asked, ‘Do you know what you’re supposed to do?’ He said, ‘Yeah.’ Then he asked me, ‘Do you know what you’re supposed to do?’ And I said, ‘Yeah.’ Then he said, ‘Well, let’s do what we’re supposed to do!’

“The only thing I remembered was to go to a certain area. I saw the ball go over my head, then Michael had it in his hands and was shooting a three. We went into another overtime and won the game. We were a better team, but we didn’t play that well. But we won, I think, because we were really prepared and in better shape!”

Coach Smith was so thorough in his simulation of game situations that he once had the team practice the same drill for almost four straight months. Every day in practice he set up the same situation: Pearce Landry guarded Jerry Stackhouse with ten seconds left on the clock, down by one, and the opposing team had possession of the ball. Landry’s assignment: prevent Stackhouse from catching the ball for five seconds, and force a violation and a turnover.

Understandably, Landry wearied of repeating this simulation, often wondering why he had to do this hackneyed drill over and over again.

Then Carolina played Wake Forest in Winston-Salem. For most of the game UNC was down by fifteen points—which is where they were at the twelve-minute time-out in the second half. Smith called the team over and said, “At the eight-minute time-out, we’ll be down by ten. Then at four minutes, we’ll be down by five. Then it’s anyone’s game.”

That was exactly what happened. UNC kept whittling the lead down until, with ten seconds left, UNC was down by one and Wake Forest had the ball. Coach Smith called a time-out and summoned Pearce Landry to enter the game. “Pearce, it’s your job to keep Randolph Childress [Wake’s superstar guard] from catching the ball.”

The ball was handed to the Wake player inbounding the pass. Carolina applied pressure. Wake tried to get the ball to Childress, their best free-throw shooter. But after guarding Stackhouse in exactly the same situation every day for four months, guarding Childress was a piece of cake for Landry. Childress never touched the ball.

The five-second call came and the ball was awarded to Carolina. Donald Williams got the ball, drove the right side of the lane, and hit a running one-hander as the clock expired. UNC won the game.

When your preparation is that precise, you can see the victory in your mind and you can achieve it on the court. Preparation exacerbates the power of positive words in pressure situations.

Woody Durham, the Tar Heels’ radio announcer, shared another story regarding Coach Smith’s legendary preparation. “I have always believed that his preparation was the key to his success. I will never forget 1990. Carolina was not considered to be one of the stronger teams going into the NCAA tournament. It may have been the lowest seed Carolina had ever had. They were the eighth seed and got shipped out to the Midwest regional in Austin, Texas. We won the first-round game and then had to be matched up against the number one team in the nation in Oklahoma.

“At that time we were doing Coach Smith’s pregame interview during the pregame meal. While the team and the assistant coaches were down in the dining room, I would go to his hotel suite to do the pregame interview. I remember knocking on the door of his room. He let me in. He was still watching some Oklahoma tape. It

was Oklahoma versus Kansas. He knew Kansas did a lot of things like us, and he was looking for any advantage. I watched him run the tapes back and forth, over and over again. He studied them intently. Finally, he sat back in the chair and said, ‘I think I know them pretty well. Now if I can just translate it to the players.’

“About six hours later, Rick Fox made a layup at the last second. Carolina upset the number one team in the country and moved ahead in the tournament. I’m convinced he knew Oklahoma’s tendency to overplay on defense and he was prepared to run that play, in that situation, if necessary, before the game ever began.”

Durham told another story that illustrated the same principle. “It was North Carolina versus Virginia in the late 1980s. Virginia had the ball with a few seconds left. If they made the shot, they would win. During the time-out huddle, Coach Smith reached for the clipboard to diagram something. He drew the play Virginia was going to run. He turned to Scott Williams and told him they were going to inbound the ball to Richard Morgan. Morgan would then come left of the foul circle and take the jump shot from that point. He told Williams to release from his man when Morgan moved left from the jump circle. ‘When you release,’ he said, ‘I want you to leap in the air, and I believe you can get a hand on his shot.’ Then he smiled and said, ‘And after you block the shot, just run into the locker room to the cheers of our fans.’

“So Virginia threw the ball to Richard Morgan. He dribbled to the left of the circle and went up in the air; Scott Williams ran toward him, tipped the ball with two fingers, and then ran into the dressing room. Carolina won the game. It happened just as Coach Smith diagrammed it. You should have seen Scott Williams’s face as he described this to me. He wondered if Coach Smith was some kind of soothsayer or psychic!

“But he was simply very well prepared. Coach had looked at so many tapes of Virginia that he had spotted a pattern for a last-second play. He had seen them run this same play in two games, so he believed they would do it again. There was no luck involved. He was simply prepared.”

### **Live Out Your Vision Through Practice**

I believe Coach Smith’s best preparation, however, did not consist of simulating game situations or studying the opposition but rather, in tenaciously believing in his philosophy. Yes, he was ready for Virginia’s final play. But the defensive commitment to have his big men expose themselves on a pick was what allowed Scott Williams to switch and block the shot.

Day in and day out we spent more time in practice going over Coach Smith’s offensive and defensive schemes than we did memorizing the plays of our opponents. We did become familiar with them. However, we spent most of our practice time going over our philosophy. We repeatedly ran through our preparation until we were ready to play. Coach Smith concentrated on teamwork rather than on the opposition. He felt that this would win games—and 80 percent of the time he was right.

What a leadership insight! Too many leaders spend most of their time studying their opposition instead of perfecting their own teams. That’s not to say we should never study others. We can sometimes glean important insights from analyzing our competitors. However, our greatest productivity comes in performing our own vision well. If that vision does not consistently win, perhaps that vision is inadequate. A good vision motivating a high-performing team that places the team above the individual should win in spite of what the opposition is doing.

Practice prepared our team to face the opposition. Coach Smith stayed centered on what was most important for us to perform.

Ultimately, Coach Smith concentrated on his vision and specifically how he thought a team should play together. He spent hours each day carefully teaching this vision. We were aware of the other team and what they did. But what drove us was our philosophy. We performed this vision at peak performance. And we won 80 percent of our games!

Positive words plus positive envisioning plus a positive vision equals success—to the tune of 879 wins for Coach Smith!

### **INSIDE COACH SMITH**

**“If you’re a friend to one of my players,  
you’re a friend of mine.”**

One of my dear friends is Ron Smith. I was able to help him with his sense of call to seminary and ministry in the early 1980s. We’ve remained good friends for these past thirty-plus years. If there’s a more avid UNC basketball and Coach Smith fan than Ron Smith, I’ve never met him. Not only did Ron graduate from UNC, but he bleeds North Carolina blue.

Recently, Ron shared with me a story about an encounter he had with Coach Smith. He’d never shared this before.

In the later 1980s, Ron was working on a basketball project. He was trying to get the support of George Shinn, then the owner of the Charlotte Hornets. He tried and tried and tried to get in touch with Shinn, but to no avail.

Ron wondered if he could solicit the help of Coach Smith in getting in touch with Shinn. But he had never met Coach Smith. Nevertheless, he bravely took a chance at attempting to connect with him.

Ron called the basketball office. He told the assistant who he was, that Coach Smith and he had never met, but asked if he could drop by and see Coach Smith. He carefully explained the project. He told her he was a good friend of mine. Ever gracious, the assistant told Ron that Coach Smith was very busy. She asked for his phone number and said that, if possible, Coach Smith would try to call him back.

Later that afternoon, Ron's phone rang. It was Coach Smith. He said the time that Ron wanted to drop by wouldn't work because he was overseeing his basketball camps. But then he said that if Ron were to drop by after the camps had finished, he would be in his office and they could visit for a few minutes.

Ron made sure he was in the basketball office at just the time Coach Smith said he'd be there. All the assistants were gone. The offices were empty. But, sure enough, Coach Smith was there to greet him.

They went into his office and sat down. Ron then told Coach Smith about his project. Coach Smith asked Ron how he could help him. Ron asked if he would be willing to write a note to George Shinn endorsing his project.

Coach Smith fudged. He told Ron he normally didn't do that kind of thing. Then, out of the blue, he asked, "You're a friend of David Chadwick's?" Ron nodded.

"Well," Coach Smith continued, "if you're a friend of one of my players, you're a friend of mine. Let me think about what I can do to help you."

They both arose and Coach Smith took Ron to the office door and said good-bye. As Ron left, Coach Smith reiterated how he'd try to help him.

Several weeks later, Ron was at an event that George Shinn was

attending. Summoning up his courage, Ron approached Shinn and introduced himself. Shinn noted that he had received all of Ron's attempts to meet with him. Then Shinn said something amazing.

"You must be very special. I just received a page-long letter from Dean Smith telling me about your project and how good it's going to be. Then he told me, if possible, I should get involved in it." Then he told Ron to set up an appointment and he'd consider supporting the project.

Ron's project was extremely creative. But it probably wouldn't have gone anywhere without Coach Smith's help. Plus, he had gotten not just a brief note of support, but a page-long letter! And Coach Smith wouldn't have given Ron any help if he wasn't a friend of one of his players.

And my life would have been much less meaningful if I hadn't had the privilege of playing for Coach Smith.

And being his friend.



## LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 8:

# Pass On What You Know

*“If they learned anything from me, I’m grateful.”*

ON APRIL 16, 1994, Coach Smith received the Apple Award for Distinguished Achievement from the University of Kansas. In presenting the award, given annually to a School of Education alumnus, Chancellor Gene A. Budig said, “Dean Smith is a world-class teacher. His players always reflect the skills and values he acquired as a student athlete at the University of Kansas.”

Every great leader is also a teacher and mentor. His concern is not simply for himself, but to teach what he has learned to those who share his passion. Coach Smith’s basketball family tree has produced many coaches who have taken his vision of team before the individual to every level imaginable—from junior high leagues to the professional ranks.

I believe his passion in life was to teach young people how to play basketball and that he would have been content coaching at a small

Division III school. If he had had no media attention, no ability for television cameras to reach him in a high school gym, he would have easily adjusted. I think he would have liked to announce that basketball tryouts will be on such and such a day, have kids come out who really loved the game and simply wanted to play it for no other reason, and then start teaching. The only trouble is, he would have been such a successful coach that within a year the press would have been swarming all over him.

Coach Smith's passion for teaching started out as a passion for learning. "Whenever you talk about Dean Smith being a teacher of the game of basketball," Bob Knight said, "you must first acknowledge that he was a student of the game of basketball. He spent countless hours talking the game of basketball with experts from his earliest years. And, in being a very good student, he put himself in a very good position to be an excellent teacher. He taught basketball the way it was meant to be played. He got the kids to work together unselfishly and to play in such a way that they receive recognition through team accomplishments. That was his underlying philosophy."

Michael Quigley, former dean of the graduate school at St. Rivier College in Nashua, New Hampshire, wrote an article titled "The Leader as Learner."<sup>1</sup> In it he suggested that leaders must constantly be developing personal intellectual habits as well as the ability to analyze and interpret information for the purpose of strategic decision making. In other words, the leader who is a teacher or mentor must also be a student. That's why Bob Knight suggested that being a great student of basketball was Coach Smith's greatest asset as a teacher.

Coach Smith's learning and teaching genes run deep in his family. With both parents being schoolteachers, it was natural for him

to become a teacher. Alfred Smith, his father, coached the Emporia High School Spartans to a state basketball championship in 1934. He taught a dogged commitment to team play.

“I practically grew up in a gym,” Coach Smith told me, “and I went to a couple of basketball clinics with my dad. When I was in college, though, Dr. Phog Allen wanted me to go into medicine. I guess I enrolled in one premed course, but my real interest was always in coaching.”

Think about this fact for a moment: Ultimately, Coach Smith learned basketball from its founder, James Naismith. James Naismith coached Phog Allen, Coach Smith’s college coach at the University of Kansas. Phog Allen taught Coach Smith how basketball should be played. There is a direct teaching lineage from James Naismith to Coach Smith!

Smith’s mother also made an impact upon him as an educator. In 1988, he gave \$50,000 to the University of Kansas to establish the Vesta Marie Edwards Smith Scholarship in Education. It’s named in honor of Smith’s mother and is given to students in the elementary education program. The scholarship is awarded on the basis of monetary need and academic promise to kids from Allen, Lyon, and Shaver counties in Kansas—places where Coach Smith’s mother taught for forty years.

Coach Smith was on the 1952 national championship team at the University of Kansas. After this successful season, Phog Allen wrote all the members of the team:

It’s been great fun. But twenty-five to thirty years from now you boys will radiate and multiply your recollections of your struggles and successes and your defeats. All these will be rolled into a fine philosophy of life, which will give you durable satisfactions down through

the years. It has been wonderful for me to be so closely associated with such a fine group of outstanding Kansas men as you.

So, Coach Smith was a student of the game from his father and mother and Phog Allen and even James Naismith. In a way, they all mentored him. From them he learned the vision of the team before the individual. And for him, basketball was a vehicle through which he could teach young men a philosophy of life. Now coaches who formerly played under him and shared coaching responsibilities with him are doing the same.

### **Approaches to Mentoring**

How did Coach Smith not only teach his players, but particularly his players and assistants who have now become coaches? How intentional was he? Was there a program or philosophy that guided him as a teacher and mentor?

#### *Intentional Mentoring*

I interviewed a number of men who coached with Dean Smith about how he mentored them. Was there a program he set up to teach them? Did he intentionally mentor them as future coaches? From the different answers I received, I discovered two different approaches to mentoring, both of which Coach Smith modeled.

The first is intentional mentoring. Many of those who were at the time in the basketball coaching profession or now retired—Larry Brown, Phil Ford, George Karl, John Kuester, Eddie Fogler, Buzz Peterson, King Rice for example—were all point guards for Coach Smith's teams. During the preseason and the regular season, these basketball "quarterbacks" regularly met with Coach Smith about

his overall basketball philosophy and his game-by-game personal strategy. These sessions were intentional mentoring classes that laid the foundation for the next generation of coaches. Even after they became head coaches, these men would meet with Coach Smith for several days each summer, a kind of continuing education program.

While these were intentional sessions on the principles of coaching, most of Coach Smith's mentoring flowed out of his peripatetic teaching style. The word *peripatetic* means to walk constantly around and refers to the kind of teaching that takes place while moving or traveling from one location to another.

This is the style Jesus used in teaching his disciples how to do ministry after his departure from them. He first built a close, meaningful relationship with them. They spent three years with him, observing what he did and how he did it. As he went about doing his ministry, he simply told his disciples to pay attention, to ask questions if they didn't understand, and then he told them to go and do likewise.

Evangelist Billy Graham was once asked if he'd do anything differently as he looked back over his life and ministry. He said that he'd take a few men, walk with them over a period of time, and teach them all he knew. Then he'd set them free to do the same thing with others.

Similarly, Coach Smith had students who loved basketball work with him. He found teachable moments during the everyday routine of practice and training. He permitted interaction. He allowed questions and asked for input. As the students drew closer and closer to him, they never stopped observing and asking questions. Later, they adapted what they had learned to their own head coaching experiences.

For example, Eddie Fogler told me that Coach Smith never

actually taught him to coach. “I simply had the experience and the exposure of working with him,” he said. “I was in all those meetings and closed practices. I saw how he handled the players’ meetings. I saw how he organized the travel plans. I saw firsthand the ups and downs. There was no formula he took us through. Now I draw from those experiences and try to apply them as best as I can.”

One time Coach Fogler was on the bench next to Coach Smith in a tight game. Coach Smith turned to him and asked what he thought they should do in this situation. “I thought for a few moments, then gave him my opinion,” Fogler recalled. “He didn’t do what I suggested, but he did turn to me and say, ‘I just wanted to see if you were paying attention.’”

George Karl told me that it was a privilege to be with Coach Smith every summer for four or five days. “We talked a lot about basketball and a lot about life,” Karl said. “He never tried to impose his system on me. He simply made himself available, and I did a lot of observing and asking questions. I guess that’s how he mentored me as a coach.”

The on-the-job training Phil Ford received from Coach Smith is what sticks in his mind. “I learned how to do things mostly by observing his philosophy. The hardest thing was to get that philosophy out of his head and into my heart, and that’s the objective of coaching. But I learned how to do that by observing him and asking questions.”

Coach Smith’s intentional mentoring did not extend solely to his key players. For example, Roy Williams never played on the varsity team at Carolina. “I had to start working for a living in college. So I worked in the intramural office and refereed basketball games, umpired softball games, or whatever needed to be done. I usually started at four in the afternoon, and I would go by and watch a

little bit of basketball practice beforehand. Practices were closed, but Coach Smith would let me stay. He sensed I really wanted to coach. I still have those notes from the freshman and varsity practices I observed.

“When I was in graduate school, they asked me to work the summer camp because I was a good official. I refereed the scrimmages at night. After college I got a high school job and stayed there five years. But I continued to work the summer camps, and eventually Coach Smith asked me to be an assistant. But, you know, he never had a set agenda for mentoring me. I simply observed, asked a lot of questions, saw how he did it, then adapted his style into my own. I think that every day I was with him he was preparing me to have my own program.”

Bill Guthridge, Coach Smith’s successor at Carolina, said he thought that Coach Smith “wanted all of us to become head coaches, or at least to have the opportunity. He encouraged us, both on and off the court, always to think like we were head coaches. He would constantly ask us, ‘What would you do here if you were the head coach? Give me some suggestions.’ Then he would digest our input. Sometimes he would use what we’d suggest, sometimes not. But we felt included. And I think this helped prepare us for that day when we would be head coaches ourselves. Of course, it’s always easier to give suggestions than to live with decisions, but I think I was as prepared as I could have been to follow him.”

In talking with many of those who have become coaches after sitting under Coach Smith’s tutelage, it is obvious that he had no formula for mentoring them. The similar thread woven through all their testimonies is the “teaching on the go” experience that he offered those who wanted to learn.

The most significant learning occurs within the context of a

relationship. Coach Smith gathered gifted people around him and built friendships with them. He allowed them to observe his genius, often asking for their input. He gave them every opportunity to learn from him as he performed his daily coaching responsibilities. They could ask any questions they wanted. Any question was a good question, he told them, if they didn't know the answer. Then, when the time came for them to become head coaches, they went and adapted his style to their own unique personality and setting. Their resulting success speaks for itself.

Yahoo sportswriter Pat Forde said it well:

The sprawling Smith coaching tree is filled with smart men who carried on his punctilious system—the same offensive and defensive schemes, yes, but also copying the smallest details. How to set a screen. How to signal the bench that you need a breather. The next time you see Roy Williams spring a sideline trap coming out of a timeout, smile and know that's a Dean hand-me-down. Same thing when you see Williams with a pocket full of timeouts late in the game—rarely wasted in the early going.<sup>2</sup>

### *Imitational Mentoring*

To a larger group—all of his players, not just those who wanted to become coaches—Coach Smith engaged in what I call imitational mentoring. This is what some people would simply say is being an exemplar, or role model. For his other lettermen, and for many associates, his involvement with us as a friend was a model for how life should be lived and how leaders should lead. Many people joke with me and say I lead the church like Coach Smith did the

Carolina basketball program. I didn't spend much time with him personally after I graduated. However, I did constantly observe his leadership. I learned by observing, then imitating. For many of us, Coach Smith wasn't intentionally mentoring to train us as coaches or leaders. But through imitational mentoring, he taught us how to live and to lead others.

This imitational mentoring was so effective that no one will ever know just how many people Coach Smith has affected. He was admired by many and copied by multitudes because of who he was. Indeed, because of his imitational mentoring in my own life, I have written this book, which hopefully will extend the influence of Coach Smith to even more people in years to come.

### **Mentoring Future Generations**

Bobby Jones was the head basketball coach of Charlotte Christian High School for many years. One of his former players was Luke Boythe, who played for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Here is how Boythe described what Jones has meant to him as a person first, and then as a player: "Coach Jones was genuinely concerned for us as individuals more than as athletes," he said. Boythe recalled Jones developing the team as young men, not just basketball players, and that he led by example.

It's no coincidence that the way Luke Boythe describes Bobby Jones is exactly the way former players talk about Coach Smith. That's what true mentoring is: Taking your life and pouring it into another person, who then takes the same principles and pours them into another person, who then... You get the picture.

In fact, you almost get the picture that Luke Boythe is who he is because Coach Smith's dad and Phog Allen and James Naismith were who they were in Coach Smith's life. Coach Smith passed that

truth on to Jones, who gave it to Boythe, who, hopefully, in one way or another, will pass it on to the next generation.

All effective leaders should lead with an eye to future generations. Max Depree, in his very popular book *Leadership Is an Art*, said, “Leaders are also responsible for future leadership. They need to identify, develop, and nurture future leaders.”<sup>3</sup> No one can lead exactly like you, but there are basic principles that are applicable for all generations. How I apply them for my generation may be different for those mentoring under me, but the principles themselves remain constant.

An outstanding example of how Coach Smith’s mentoring has affected following generations of players and coaches can be found in the Chicago Bulls’ six world championships. Now, I know Coach Smith never coached for Chicago. So let me explain what I mean.

A key reason the Bulls won six world championships in the 1990s is because of defense. That was their imprimatur. “You don’t know how lucky you are,” Don Nelson, former NBA coach, once told former Bulls coach Phil Jackson, “when your two best offensive players are your two best defensive players.” He was referring, of course, to Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen. When Dennis Rodman, another great defensive player who loved to rebound, was added to the equation, the team was solidified.

Michael Jordan willed himself to become a great defensive player. But he also had a wonderful teacher and mentor, Coach Dean Smith, who sensed Jordan’s amazing athletic ability and saw his enormous potential. Smith therefore pushed him early on to become a great defensive player. He constantly told Michael Jordan what he had told us: “Anyone can score on this level. Few really want to be great defensive players. But if you want to be a great player at the next level, you will have to play defense.”

Jordan listened to his mentor. He became a great offensive and defensive player in college. This was most unusual for a young player. Most simply want to score and have little to do with the grinding, exhausting, in-the-trenches work of defense. But Jordan had learned from Coach Smith that defense wins games, and winning was his highest priority. He ultimately hungered for championships, not MVP trophies. In fact, early in his career he mentioned to reporters how he yearned one day to be named the NBA's defensive player of the year as well as the league MVP.

Most people snickered that it couldn't be done. NBA pundits thought that it would require too much energy on both ends of the court for a player to accomplish such a feat. In fact, Jan Hubbard, then with the *Dallas Morning News*, said as much in one of his articles. Evidently Jordan read it, for when he did win both awards in the 1987–88 season, he reminded Hubbard of his mistaken assumption. That's how intensely competitive Michael Jordan was.

Then Scottie Pippen joined the NBA and the Chicago Bulls with tremendous raw skills and natural talent. He possessed quickness, jumping ability, and extraordinarily long arms—with a span even broader than Jordan's. It became evident early on that Pippen would offer the unique ability to guard everyone on the floor, from a point guard to the center. He could cause major disruptions to another team if his defensive skills could be honed.

Enter Michael Jordan. Nothing in those early years helped Pippen more than playing against Michael Jordan every day in practice. Jordan made a commitment to teach Pippen how to play defense. He killed him every day in practice. Jordan had a reputation for making or breaking his teammates, and Pippen offered a special project with potentially exceptional rewards. In essence, Jordan became Pippen's mentor.

Pippen responded in kind. Where other players might have been driven from the league because of Jordan's relentless pressure in practice, the young, gifted, voracious Pippen fought him at every corner. Michael Jordan knew this simple reality: If Pippen could guard Jordan every day in practice, he could guard anyone in the league. And he did. What's more, the Jordan-Pippen combination on the court became Chicago's lethal weapon. So powerful did the two become together that Jordan once said it was like having his twin on the court with him.

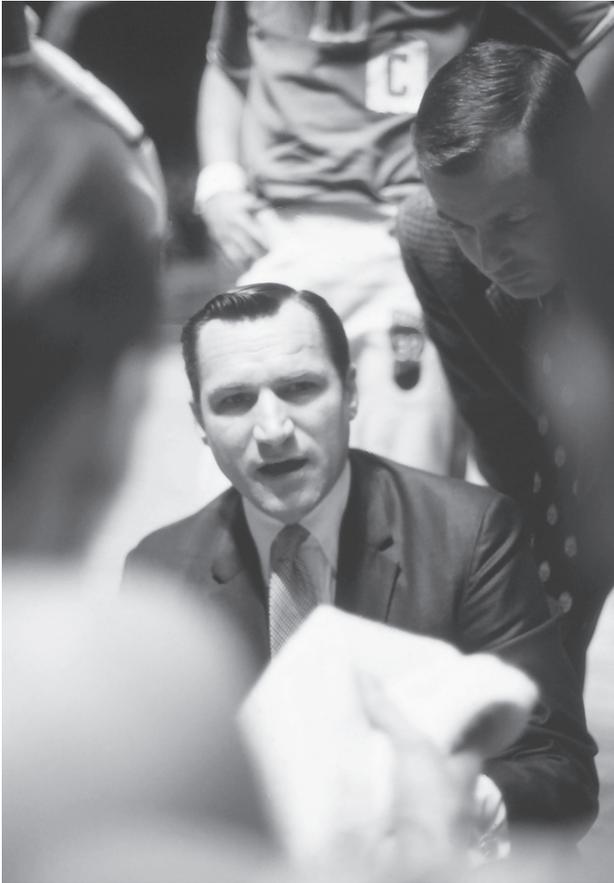
So why did the Chicago Bulls win six NBA championships? It was at least partly attributable to Coach Smith. When he taught Michael Jordan to play defense, he was teaching Scottie Pippen and all the other Bulls on those championship teams how to play defense. The results rest in the annals of NBA folklore and history.

### **The Impact of Mentoring**

Coach Smith believed the team to be more important than the individual. He doggedly taught that defense wins games. He believed he was preparing people for life, not just to be better basketball players. Those who played for him or coached with him observed him and learned these principles. They are now practicing the same things. And those working under Coach Smith's former assistants will one day pass these same truths on to the teams they coach.

No one will ever be able to guess the numbers of people worldwide who, over the upcoming decades, will be positively affected by those whom Coach Smith mentored. That, in essence, is what teaching and mentoring is all about—shaping the next generation. An effective leader understands this truth and passes it on to those who work with him, those who will be leading long after he retires.

No one can predict the impact that mentoring even just one gifted person can have on the future. The leader who influences others to lead others is a leader without limitation. The more people you develop, the longer your legacy.



*A young Dean Smith in the late 1960s. I'm an interested onlooker, standing behind Coach in my "Tar Heel."*

Used with permission of Ron Smith.

## INSIDE COACH SMITH

### Rah, rah, Carolina, 'lina!

The final years of Coach Smith's life saw his mind slowly but surely lose its amazing mental capacities. At home, his wife and he would go for walks. Family and friends would drop by, visit, and talk. But the last couple of years were especially dreadful. He simply wasn't able to respond to much of anything. Words were seldom spoken.

Two specific things were done to help him during the shadowy sunset of his memory.

First, a skilled harpist was brought in to play old hymns of the faith. In fact, she was the same one who played the prelude for his private funeral. For a couple of hours, she would play the songs that had touched his soul from childhood to this moment. He would smile, as one hymn after another, was played in his presence.

Second, a close friend of Coach Smith's, Billy Barnes, would come by and play the guitar in his presence. He played songs that he knew Coach Smith loved and enjoyed, as well as hymns. This too apparently brought deep satisfaction to Coach Smith. As when the harpist played the great hymns of the faith, he would smile and nod.

But he would seldom say anything, if ever.

That's when Billy came up with an ingenious idea. One day, as he concluded his playing time, he suddenly erupted into the North Carolina alma mater and fight song, which was played after every basketball game. Fans in the stands would interlock their arms and sway back and forth as they sang this beloved tune. At Coach Smith's funeral, the more than ten thousand people in the stands, plus the former players and chancellor on the platform, all did the same. Coach Smith had heard it hundreds of times during his almost four

decades of coaching at UNC. Most of the time, he heard it after a grand victory. It always ended:

I'm a Tar Heel born, I'm a Tar Heel bred  
And when I die, I'll be Tar Heel dead.  
So it's rah, rah, Carolina, 'lina  
Rah, rah, Carolina, 'lina  
Rah, rah, Carolina  
Rah, rah, rah!

(Or most often fans would send Duke to a negative, eternal dwelling place with the last line.)

As Billy played the Carolina alma mater and fight song this time, something amazingly timeless transpired. Coach Smith not only smiled, but his mouth opened to a wide grin! He stood up and told his wife, Linnea, to stand up with him! Then, word for word, he began to sing the alma mater and fight song. And, no, I don't know what ending he placed on the song. But I do know I never heard him curse, so you can imagine what I'm convinced he sang.

When one of my friends told me this story, two thoughts entered my mind. First, I remembered my own mom's dementia. Like Coach Smith, during her last couple of years on this earth, she too lapsed into memory oblivion. She too hardly ever said a word, That is, until we started singing the old hymns of the faith. Deeply imbedded within her were these words, easily recalled, when we began to sing them. She would mouth the words to the hymns with us as we sang them.

Second, I thought how interesting it was that it was the UNC alma mater and fight song that finally stirred his soul, touched his heart, brought a smile to his lips and words from his mouth. Most assuredly, that's because of the deep affection he had for the

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He had to stand and sing when the song was played. He was true to his school. He deeply loved UNC.

He had given his life and soul to UNC and the players who played for him.

Dean Smith wasn't Tar Heel born. He was born in Kansas. But he was Tar Heel bred. And now he's Tar Heel dead. But what a legacy he has left for so many.

Rah, rah, Carolina, 'lina!

**LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 9:****Be a Person of Good Character**

*“Your reputation is what other people think of you.  
Character is what you think of yourself.”*

JIM SMITHWICK, NOW A physician, played for Coach Smith from 1962 to 1966. He was a member of the team that experienced perhaps the most traumatic, potentially debilitating moment in Coach Smith’s career.

Carolina had just lost a heartbreaker to Wake Forest. The trip back to Chapel Hill was somewhat somber, and even depressing. When the team bus pulled up to the gym, an eerie sight greeted the players: a dummy of Coach Smith swinging from a tree. Some angry students had hung him in effigy.

The team sat in stunned silence. Everyone waited for Coach Smith’s response. Smithwick, who was a sophomore on that team, gave this account: “He looked at the dummy, then turned to us. He was not angry. He just said, ‘Your reputation is who other people

think of you. Character is what you think of yourself.” Then Coach got off the bus and left.

“Billy Cunningham ran off the bus and angrily tore down the dummy. But I’ll never forget Coach Smith’s words as long as I live. I’ve tried to follow this principle all my life and even pass it on to my children.”

Coach Smith understood something about character: It’s who you are when no one else is looking. It’s being the same person publicly and privately. It’s your words matching your deeds. It’s your inside matching your outside. Therefore, character is not determined by what others think of you, but by what you think of yourself.

Jay Bilas said, “In a game full of characters, Dean Smith was a man of great character.”

I personally believe Coach Smith was a person of outstanding character. This quality is fundamental for a great leader. That’s not to say he was perfect—he had his shortcomings. For example, he was famous for having a lead foot while driving. One time, after a game, he was driving home to Chapel Hill. A state trooper stopped him for speeding. Before the trooper asked for Smith’s license and registration, he said, “Tough loss tonight, Coach.” He recognized the car. He’d stopped him before!

Smith was also a chain smoker until the early 1980s, when a doctor told him he had to quit for his health’s sake. He finally did—cold turkey! He told me he always struggled with kids perhaps seeing or knowing he was addicted to nicotine.

I’m certain there were things in his life that, if he could have done them over again, he would have done them differently. Yet even with his shortcomings, he was still a man of tremendous integrity, principle, and character.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery once said, “It is only with the heart one sees rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.”

Coach Smith’s “invisible” principles were what helped bring him visible success. He understood that there are no shortcuts to character, and he believed that if he were to lose his character, he would lose his credibility. We players instinctively followed him because we knew his words matched his life. We knew he was a person of high moral character. We sensed his humility, his compassion, and his care for us.

### **Essential Character Qualities of a Good Leader**

What were the character traits that guided Coach Smith through the years? Let’s look at some of them.

#### *Stay Humble*

When I asked Dean Smith what 879 wins represented to him, he quietly responded, “That I’m old.” We both laughed.

Immediately after Smith broke Coach Rupp’s record, he was interviewed on national television. He began by praising all the lettermen who had ever played for him. He wanted to shine the spotlight on them, not himself.

John Lotz, who is now deceased, said that if you were to go visit Coach Smith’s home, you would not see any basketball memorabilia. That’s rather unusual for a successful leader in any field. “Oh, he is very aware of what he has accomplished and who he is,” John said. “Yet he is also aware of all the people who were necessary for him to achieve all this. Therefore, personal exaltation seems inappropriate to him.”

In 1998, ESPN wanted to bestow upon Coach Smith the Arthur Ashe Award for Courage because of the many things he had done

to promote racial equality in Chapel Hill and around the country. Smith did not want the award. He truly did not think he deserved it. Ashe's wife had to call him and ask him to receive the award on behalf of her husband and others who appreciated everything Coach Smith had done. He finally relented.

When Coach received the *Sports Illustrated* Sportsman of the Year Award in 1997, he demonstrated his customary humility. He named others he thought to be more deserving. Then, surprisingly, upon receiving the reward, he referred to Roland Thornqvist, a player on UNC's tennis team who did something amazing when he was about to win a very important match. Coach Smith said, "The referee made a bad call and gave him a point to win the nationals. He had it won, but he said, 'My shot was out.' He wouldn't accept it. He went on to win, but those kinds of guys are Sportsmen of the Year."

After his retirement, Coach Smith was dining at a Chapel Hill restaurant. The waitress serving him knew who he was. She was careful to give him the best service possible. She was nervous as she took his order, brought his food, and cleaned up afterward.

After the meal, she finally got up enough courage to ask him for his autograph. Graciously, he asked her for her name. Then he signed the slip of paper she had given to him. Surprisingly, he then took a napkin and gave it to her. "Would you give me your autograph?" he asked. "What you do is every bit as important as what I do," he said.

She didn't know what to do. Awkwardly, she signed her name and gave it to Coach Smith. "Thanks," he said, as he slipped her autograph into his inside coat pocket.

Dean Smith's humility illustrates a point Stephen Covey made: "One of the characteristics of authentic leaders," he said, "is their humility, evident in their ability to take off their glasses and examine

the lens objectively, analyzing how well their values, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors align with ‘true north’ principles” (a term Covey uses to describe unchangeable principles that should shape every leader’s life).<sup>4</sup>

Jim Collins, in his classic work *Good to Great*,<sup>5</sup> said that in his research the one characteristic of every leader that took his company from good to great was humility.

When Coach Smith announced his retirement, many of his former players gathered to show their support for him. The championship trophies were all lined up behind him. Everything around him should have reminded him of his extraordinary success. Yet how did he respond? He shrugged his shoulders at his success and then gently chided the many reporters who were on hand and all those who were watching by television. He scolded them about the obsession so many people have with sports and winning. Just as he had done all through his career, he pointed out that there were billions of people all over the world who didn’t care one bit about who would win the next game. He said that if a Nobel prize-winning professor had just retired from UNC, hardly anyone would have noticed. It would not have begun to approach the fanfare of his retirement.

Then he started to thank all the people with whom he had been associated through the years, especially his former players, for his success. Upon mentioning the former players, he began to cry.

Indira Gandhi summed up this perspective well. “My grandfather once told me,” she said, “that there are two kinds of people: Those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group; there was much less competition.”

I believe Coach Smith was in the first group. Most effective leaders are.

When I asked him about the \$34 million price tag on the new

facility, later to be named for him, a sheepish look crossed his face. He quickly responded, “I didn’t like it one bit. I didn’t want it and objected to it in every way. Frankly, it embarrasses me.”

John Kilgo, editor of the UNC sports newspaper *Carolina Blue*, shared with me how he witnessed the struggle Coach Smith felt internally during fund-raising for the construction of the Smith Center. “He went with Skipper Bowles, a well-known UNC alumnus, when they were asking people for money. The plan was to double-team potential donors. Skipper knew how to raise money. Dean was the name.

“They went into the office of this multimillionaire and started talking about the new building. The guy turned to Coach Smith and said, ‘Well, Coach, how much money do you need from me?’ Coach Smith became very uncomfortable. He wondered if the man thought he was giving the money to him personally, or giving just because he was asking.

“Coach Smith asked tentatively, ‘Would \$10,000 be okay? If you could give that, well, that would be sensational.’

“Skipper excused himself and took Smith into the hall. ‘Next time,’ he said, ‘do everything you just did, but when the guy asks how much he can give, you be quiet and give it back to me. I’ll take over.’

“So they went back into the office and Skipper asked the multimillionaire to please ask the question again about how much money he should give. The guy did, and Skipper then asked for \$1.5 million. The guy gave \$1 million, but Coach Smith still felt like \$10,000 would have been more than enough. At that point, I think Skipper committed to leaving Coach Smith at home when asking others for contributions toward the construction of the Smith Center. It simply made him too uncomfortable to ask for it.”

Receiving Coach Dean Smith's permission to have his name placed on the building was an equally daunting task. Several influential people kept pressing him for approval. He steadfastly refused. Finally, someone was smart enough to get some of the former players to approach him. They knew that only members of "the family" could ever convince him to change his mind. So several players went to him and asked him to accept this acknowledgment on behalf of every player who had ever played for him. That was the trump card. He finally agreed for our sake, not his.

### *Work Hard*

Will Rogers once said, "Even if you're on the right track, you'll soon get run over if you just sit there."

A key reason for Coach Smith's success is that he simply outworked and outthustled his opponents. Yes, he was a great teacher and coach. Yes, he recruited well and had superb talent. Yes, he could motivate. But he also worked very hard.

For example, right after winning the national championship in 1993, he was in Rasheed Wallace's home the next day, enthusiastically—and successfully—recruiting him to play at North Carolina. Coach Smith was able to function on a few hours' sleep per night. He spent countless hours watching game films. He never lost a recruit because someone else worked harder. He modeled a strong work ethic.

And he never lost a game because he was outworked.

### *Care About Your Personal Appearance and Conduct*

Coach Smith insisted we dress well, especially on the road. In my days at UNC, it was in uniform, with a Carolina blue blazer and similar pants. He thought our outward appearance was extremely

important, that it communicated something about what we thought of ourselves.

Woody Durham, the veteran voice of the Tar Heels, once did a television interview with Bob McAdoo, former UNC all-American in the early 1970s, outside of Carmichael Auditorium. “He had on one of those knit berets that was the rage,” Woody said. “Coach Smith was pulling out of Carmichael to go someplace. He suddenly stopped, interrupted the interview, and whispered something into McAdoo’s ear. I quickly figured out what he said to McAdoo: Take off the beret for the interview. McAdoo immediately obeyed.”

When I interviewed Matt Doherty, he did not know I was going to do an ancillary video piece as well. When he saw the camera as we started the interview, the first thing he did was apologize to Coach Smith for not wearing a tie and not using a good razor to get a close shave. Coach Smith’s message that personal appearance says something important for us publicly was a message that Doherty clearly understood!

### *Watch Your Words*

In addition to teaching us to present a good image by dressing appropriately, Coach Smith told us that our words reflected our character. He had a very strict rule about not cursing. I played under Coach Smith for four years. In all that time, I cannot remember one time I ever heard profanity from him.

Michael Jordan said, “No cursing. Yeah, I still remember that. You got to run the steps if you cursed. I had to run the steps a couple of times.”

Phil Ford told me, “I never heard him curse at me, but sometimes I wish he had!” I knew what he meant. Sometimes his glare of disapproval was worse than a tongue-lashing.

During a game at Carmichael Auditorium, the UNC crowd started chanting a profanity about an opposing team. Coach Smith calmly took the microphone and chided the fans. “We don’t do that here,” he said. The crowd stopped its chants.

When I interviewed Bob Knight, he jokingly said to me, “Dean was the master of the Four-Corners offense. I was the master of the four-letter word.” Personally, I’m glad I played for Coach Smith.

I believe he did not curse nor allow us to curse for two reasons. First, it was because he wanted the best for us and himself. Dean Smith was an extremely bright man. He was an educator. He valued education. When he entered the University of Kansas, he scored in the ninety-seventh percentile in math. In fact, Coach Guthridge said this may need to be the first thing people address when looking at Coach Smith’s life. He was extremely intelligent, perhaps bordering on brilliant. Therefore, to him, cursing represented an inadequate vocabulary. I believe he strove to be the best he could be in everything he tackled, including his speech.

Second, I believe he wanted a similar excellence of speech from us. While I was in his office, he expressed disappointment in a former player’s recent book, which contained some profanity. He was pleased with the book, but disdained the language. Cursing represented a poverty of vocabulary, and he wanted the best for himself and his players.

### *Practice Honesty*

Another character trait that caused Coach Smith to stand out from the crowd was his absolute refusal to cheat. His unfailing honesty and integrity truly set him apart.

Andrew Carnegie once said, “As I grow older, I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do.”

When I was a senior in high school, Coach Smith came down to Orlando, Florida, to recruit me. We went to eat at a well-known establishment at the Orlando International Airport; it happened to be owned and operated by one of my father's close friends.

When we finished our meal, Coach Smith asked for the check. My dad's friend came to the table and said dinner was on the house. Coach Smith objected. Dad's friend insisted. Coach Smith objected even more vociferously. The resistance continued.

Finally, Coach Smith said that for him not to pay could break NCAA rules, and he could not permit for that to happen. My dad's friend finally yielded. This incident is just one example of how Coach Smith was able to run the UNC basketball program for thirty-six years and not once have the smell of scandal taint his program. Honesty was an absolutely essential life principle for him.

Coach Guthridge shared with me another illustration that demonstrates how Smith felt about integrity. If he discovered that he was playing golf with someone who cheated—moved his ball unfairly in the rough, inched the ball a bit closer on the green—he would simply walk off the golf course and never play with that person again. He demanded honesty from himself and those around him. He was not a cheater, and he refused to play with one.

Eddie Fogler said, "Even though he had intense rivalries, I don't think any opposing coach would ever believe that Coach Smith would violate an NCAA rule. He was that well thought of among his peers. They knew his honesty. That was the way he had always been.

"One thing that especially bothered him was the suggestion that he didn't have to recruit players, that he could simply select the ones he wanted. He often interpreted that to mean that if his teams weren't good, or if he didn't coach at a great school, that perhaps

he would cheat. Well, Coach Smith could have been at the worst school at the bottom of the best conference, but there was no way he would ever have violated NCAA rules. If he had faced losing his job because of his refusal to cheat, then he would lose his job.”

I’m convinced that Coach Smith would have been appalled at the present academic scandal in UNC athletics. He simply wouldn’t cheat to make players eligible. It was against his nature.

Most likely you have heard the saying that honesty is the best policy. Coach Smith believed and practiced this maxim at all times.

### *Honor Authority*

Coach Smith understood what it meant to be under authority as a necessity for having authority. As athletic director, John Swofford was Coach Smith’s boss. I asked him if Coach Smith ever caused him problems. He quickly retorted, “Absolutely not!”

“He respected my position,” he continued. “Very successful coaches can make athletic directors’ lives miserable, wielding such power and influence over alumni and others that they end up causing constant chaos. This was never the case with Coach Smith. He respected proper lines of authority.

“Whenever we disagreed, or he disagreed with the chancellor, it was always behind closed doors. We did have our disagreements, although not many of consequence. There were times when I had to make decisions with which he didn’t agree. How did he handle it? He was always respectful. Sometimes he would be forceful in his opinions, as I would hope he would be. However, when he left my office, he would either actively support the decision publicly or never state his opposition to it. He would never give negative publicity or the indication there was disunity. He understood what it meant to submit to authority.”

Perhaps Coach Smith learned this principle from being an assistant under Bob Spear at the Air Force Academy and Frank McGuire at North Carolina. For example, no one can remember Coach Smith ever asserting himself against McGuire; he was completely loyal to him. In fact, during the 1960s and early 1970s, when McGuire's South Carolina teams were North Carolina's fiercest rivals, Coach Smith would always ask North Carolina fans to heartily and respectfully welcome McGuire back to Chapel Hill.

Or perhaps Smith took a page from the way things are done at Nordstrom's. There, every new worker starts at the bottom. If you're not willing to do whatever it takes to make a customer happy at the lowest level, from delivering a suit to a hotel room and to getting on your knees to fit a shoe, you'll never be a leader in the organization.

However he learned it, Dean Smith understood that the best leader is the one who has learned to be under authority.

### *Treat Everyone Equally*

John Lotz observed that a deep belief in equality motivated practically everything Coach Smith did, whether it was religious, political, or athletic. For example, the reason he treated the twelfth man on the team the same as the superstar was his belief that all people are created equal in God's sight.

Coach Smith was a champion for the cause of racial equality. Bill Chamberlain, one of the first African-American players recruited at Carolina, told me that there were times when he would become angry with racial inequality in America and write to Coach Smith just to get his frustrations off his chest. Every time he wrote, Coach Smith set up an appointment to meet with him, and then listened with sensitivity and encouraged Chamberlain to try to look at the situation from another perspective, or empathized with his anguish.

Coach Smith didn't like the fact that his high school basketball team was not integrated. He had seen his dad integrate his team years earlier. Coach Smith didn't think it was right. He protested to his high school coach. An African-American soon joined the team.

Coach Smith came to Chapel Hill with a commitment to try to integrate the town and the UNC team. In 1959, as an assistant coach, Coach Smith and his pastor invited an African-American seminary student to join them for a meal in a whites-only restaurant. It was the first step toward bringing about true integration in Chapel Hill. When asked about it, Coach Smith simply said, "It was the right thing to do."

Coach Smith recruited Charlie Scott, the first Carolina black athlete, in 1966. A year later, he followed up by recruiting his second black player, Bill Chamberlain. Not everyone agreed with what Coach Smith was doing. After a tough loss at South Carolina, a fan yelled racial slurs at Charlie Scott as we ran off the court. We players had to hold Coach Smith back, for he wanted to run into the stands and defend his prized player.

It was Coach Smith who asked John Thompson, a dear friend with a darker skin hue, to be his assistant coach for the gold-medal-winning USA Olympic team in 1976.

And it was Coach Smith who continually asked if the SAT was racially biased.

### *Show Compassion to All*

In the late 1980s, Dean Smith spoke at a banquet I helped organize to raise money for an inner-city scholarship program. He didn't like speaking at fund-raisers, but was willing to do this. Was it because I was a former player and asked him to help out? Perhaps, yet there were other times when he turned me down. I think he did it for one reason: It was a ministry to the poor.

Few will ever know Coach Smith's deep convictions about helping the poorest of the poor. Heaven only knows how much time and money he gave to people and causes around the world related to clothing and feeding the hungry and homeless. James Worthy said, "I remember receiving a unique Christmas present from him once. He sponsored a child in another country in my name. That really touched me."

### *Don't Love Money*

Coach Smith was embarrassed by how much money he made—\$162,750 in salary in 1997 before his retirement. When North Carolina signed a \$4.7 million, four-year deal with Nike in 1993, Coach Smith made sure it covered twenty-four of the school's teams, though the athletic director said "this easily could have been a contract just for Coach Smith."

He received \$500,000 from Nike as an up-front gift. Did he take it all and vault himself into the upper echelon of coaches' compensation? No—he gave away half of his annual \$300,000 Nike salary, distributing it among his assistants and office staff. He also earmarked \$45,000 of his annual salary for a special fund to be used by players who had yet to finish their degrees. He was even concerned for the 3 percent of his players who hadn't graduated!

When John Kilgo hosted the *Dean Smith Show* on television, many businesses would approach him to ask him to convince Coach Smith to endorse their products. They would say, "He doesn't have to make a statement. We just want his picture alongside our product, and we will pay him a huge amount of money." Kilgo took these different offers to Coach Smith. Repeatedly he turned them down.

"But every other coach is doing it!" Kilgo said.

Coach Smith replied, "The professors on this campus would

not be comfortable with the school's basketball coach making that much money doing something like that. I consider myself a teacher, and it wouldn't be fair to receive that kind of money. It would send the wrong message."

Terry Truax was a graduate assistant in the UNC program in 1971. He later was an assistant with John Lotz at the University of Florida, and subsequently became head coach at Towson State University, guiding their basketball team to the NCAA tournament on a couple of occasions.

Ultimately, Truax was let go from Towson. Between jobs, money was tight. One day, completely unannounced, he received a check in the mail for \$5,000. It was from Coach Smith. A note was attached to the check saying that Smith had been unable to pay Truax much back in 1971. Now that he had some means, Coach Smith wanted to give the money to Truax in repayment for all his hard work at UNC years earlier.

### *Support the Larger Good*

Coach Smith strongly encouraged the NCAA to explore the integrity of having beer companies fund college-level games and tournaments. With teenage alcoholism rampant and drunk drivers killing people in large numbers, he thought it was bad optics for college athletics to be associated with alcohol-industry sponsors.

His wife Linnea, a psychiatrist, asked Carolina preseason all-Americans to refuse to be a part of *Playboy's* preseason picture of its all-American team. Coach Smith agreed. He thought the magazine degraded and objectified women, and this was one way he could protest.

That said, I should point out that Coach Smith would be the last person to try to impose his beliefs on another person. We would

have conversations about issues on which we would respectfully disagree with one another. However, I think he would challenge us all to see ourselves as a part of a larger community, and to look at ways we can be a part of the larger good, individually and corporately.

But he was committed to doing what was right.

### *Keep Priorities in Perspective*

One of Coach Smith's firm convictions was that freshmen athletes should be barred from varsity sports so they could concentrate first on their academics. He believed athletes go to college to be students.

Smith opposed the rule change in 1972 that allowed freshmen to play varsity sports. When this change occurred, the competition for high school athletes intensified. As a result, recruiters begin their work earlier than ever, looking for prospects even at the junior high level. It was recently reported that superstar LeBron James's ten-year-old son has been offered scholarships by schools! Knowing this, I'm certain Coach Smith would shake his head in disbelief.

Coach Smith also believed this change communicated to athletes the lie that college is a training ground for professional sports. Yet fewer than 1 percent of high school players get college scholarships, and fewer than one in a thousand go on to become professionals.

Coach Smith made the audacious proposal to permit freshmen to receive scholarships even if they sat out the first year of play altogether, allowing them to adjust to campus life and the rigors of academia. Then he proposed that these freshmen continue to receive full scholarship aid as they advanced toward their degree.

Naturally, the dissenters said that the cost of doing this would be too great. Yet Coach Smith thought this argument to be spurious

when you think about the billions being generated by college athletics programs nationwide.

Coach Smith furiously argued that part of the money made by these universities could be used to support freshmen athletes adjusting to academia. As he put it, “We would be saying, ‘You’re here as a student first. Once you’ve shown us your ability as a student, we’d be happy to have you as an athlete too.’” What’s so interesting is that of all the college basketball teams, UNC would have benefited the least from freshmen ineligibility because the school was always getting commitments from skilled high school players who would help the program immediately. So to ask for freshmen ineligibility would actually have hurt UNC more than most programs. But that wasn’t the point. Coach Smith had strong convictions about the matter, and they took precedence over convenience.

Academics were more important than athletics.

### *Recruit People of Character*

“We always looked at a young man’s character,” he told me. “Indeed, if I had to do it over again, I think that would be an even bigger factor. I would not be so much concerned with his beliefs, but I would watch closely for his willingness to work hard, his tenacity to stay with a difficult situation.

“I probably would be willing to recruit more people like Hubert Davis, now an assistant with Roy Williams. I told his dad he could maybe play for George Washington. Then he came here and was a first-round draft pick in the NBA. Sometimes we saw a player’s court demeanor and walked away from him. There were probably some others in whom I saw potential problems but took them anyway because of their ability. Life is too short. I would probably make

character an even higher priority in recruiting if I was still doing it today.”

How did Coach Smith discover whether a player had character? James Worthy revealed one of his secrets. “I was a blue chipper,” Worthy said. “A lot of colleges wanted me. When Coach Smith came to visit me, I was wondering about playing time, if I was going to be a star, and if I’d get a pair of sneakers. The only thing he said to me was that I’d have to go to class unless I had a written permission slip from my parents. I also had to go to church each Sunday. ‘That is what we do at Carolina,’ he said.

“Later I realized he was recruiting character. He was looking for good players and good people. He knew these kinds of kids best played his philosophy.”

Coach Smith also spent a lot of time with a player’s high school coaches. He valued their input on character. During games he would carefully watch how a recruit played—was he selfish or unselfish?—and how he spoke to officials, coaches, and teammates.

Perhaps the best example I could give of Coach Smith’s ability to recruit character would be Bill Guthridge, his longtime assistant and eventual successor. Coach Smith gave the same detailed attention to recruiting assistants as he did players, and when he recruited Coach Guthridge, he made an outstanding choice.

*The Charlotte Observer* did a feature article on Coach Guthridge right after North Carolina won the ACC tournament in March 1998. The article described Guthridge’s narrow escape from polio at age eleven. Medical tests showed he had the virus, but he recovered quickly. One of his neighbors, a boy who lived four houses down, was not so fortunate:

One morning when he was twelve, Bob Brandenburg didn't feel much like playing. The next morning he couldn't get out of bed. It could be devastatingly fast, polio.

By the time school started in the fall, Brandenburg was in a wheelchair. The junior high was about one hundred yards away, up a slight incline. That first morning, as he looked out the window at the kids moving past, Brandenburg saw someone waiting in the driveway. Guthridge had come to push him to school. "I'd had polio a year earlier, so I could empathize," Guthridge says. "I think anybody would have been happy to help."

"Guthridge was such a loyal person," Brandenburg says. "He pushed me to school the next six years."

Leonard Bernstein, the famous orchestral conductor, was once asked what he thought was the most difficult instrument to play in the orchestra. Without blinking an eye he responded, "Second fiddle." Coach Guthridge loyally played second fiddle to Coach Smith for more than thirty years. But he had demonstrated his loyalty much earlier by pushing a friend's wheelchair for six years.

Coach Smith's motivation for recruiting people of good character was the fact he was so committed to good character himself. The two are inseparable.

### **Character Is What Makes a Person Great**

There is an anonymous quote that says, "Athletics makes men strong. Study makes men wise. Character makes men great." Coach Smith could have said it. It should be said about Coach Smith.

## INSIDE COACH SMITH

### Value Each Human Being

In 1977, the Final Four was held in Atlanta. It was Easter weekend. The fervor surrounding basketball and religion festively intersected in Atlanta for several days.

Charles Pierce, a writer for Grantland, upon learning of Coach Smith's death, wrote a moving obituary that gave insights into Coach Smith's life that I'd never known.

Pierce and his family went to worship at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, the new one that was built across the street from the large sanctuary where Martin Luther King senior and junior once preached. Pierce described how "we walked across the street into the sanctuary. It was cool and dark. Very few people were there."<sup>1</sup>

When people enter, old recordings of sermons from Kings senior and junior can be heard playing. Pierce noted a lone figure in the back of the sanctuary. He was seated in a pew, in a posture of prayer "his elbows on his knees and his hands folded. His eyes were closed."<sup>2</sup> It was Coach Smith. He listened intently to the recordings, imbibing every word.

The day before the 1977 national championship game, Coach Smith was in church, praying and contemplating racial equality.

Coach Smith believed all people are created equal in the sight of God. "My father said, 'Value each human being.' Racial justice wasn't preached around the house, but there was a fundamental understanding that you treated each person with dignity," he said.

Upon learning of Coach Smith's death, Coach Mike Krzyzewski of Duke University said that many people admired Coach Smith's strong stands for racial equality and suggested they too would do

the same thing. “But no one else did it then. Dean was the one who did it.”

Coach Smith is rightly buried at the Old Chapel Hill cemetery on campus. This cemetery is on the National Register of Historic Places. The earliest gravestone there is of a former student from 1798. The burial ground is now reserved for UNC dignitaries. But it’s also the final resting place of former slaves.

It’s the right place for Coach Smith to be buried, for it represents all people—famous and not, black and white.

In my opinion, he would be pleased to be buried there. In fact, I bet if he could have orchestrated the details, he would have chosen to be buried next to one of the former slaves.



**LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 10:****Make Failure Your Friend**

*“Look at your mistake, learn from it, and move on.”*

THE 1994 TEAM WAS supposed to be one of Carolina’s best ever. Four starters returned from the 1993 national championship team, and three gifted freshmen—Jeff McInnis, Jerry Stackhouse, and Rasheed Wallace—joined the team. But the players never jelled as a team. They lost in the second round of the NCAA tournament to an undersized and undermanned Boston College team.

In preparation for the next year, Coach Smith sent his players a copy of the cover of *Sports Illustrated* after the Boston College upset. The cover stated, “A Talented Team Falls Flat.” In the accompanying article, the writer said, “Smith, whose greatness is undeniable, may have done the worst coaching job of his career with the most talent he has had.”

Coach Smith was unafraid for the team to read this criticism.

He asked them to read the article. Indeed, he wanted them to see this failure. He then challenged this team to be better and vowed he would be a better coach. The team was very successful that season.

I had originally decided not to write this chapter as a part of this book. Yet the more I thought about all Coach Smith had taught me about life and leadership, it became increasingly apparent that I would be remiss if I failed to include it.

In fact, after I had almost completed the manuscript, I went to Chapel Hill to update Coach on the project. During our meeting, I mentioned that I wanted to write about making failure your friend but wasn't sure I should include it. His response was immediate: "Please do it. That's a very important principle for me."

As we visited, Coach Smith recalled a particular day in practice when Matt Wenstrom did something wrong. Wenstrom started to pout.

Coach Smith went over to him and asked, "How do you handle mistakes in life?"

Wenstrom quickly recited the thought for the day from the practice plan. "When faced with failure, admit it, quit it, and forget it!"

Coach said to all the players, "If you can learn any one thing in life, learn that! Learn from your mistakes and move on." It was one of his favorite quotes. It appeared regularly in the "Thought of the Day" section on the practice sheet before each game. When we failed, he wanted us to own up to the mistake (admit it), learn from it and not do it again (quit it), and not think about it again (forget it). He didn't want us driving our life's car constantly looking in the rearview mirror. He knew that would only cause more accidents!

This last point has always helped me. Tom Brady, the great New England Patriots quarterback, said that successful NFL quarterbacks

must be great amnesiacs. They must learn from their mistakes and then quickly forget them. That is true for all leaders.

Someone once said, “You don’t drown by falling in the water. You drown by staying there!” Someone else said, “You are a failure only if you don’t get up and try again.” I remember Coach Smith saying, “Just because you’ve failed doesn’t mean you’re a failure.” He steadfastly refused to allow failure to define himself or his teams.

Coach Smith’s career was marked by many failures. But he was always trying to learn from them. He steadfastly refused to stay in the water and drown. Instead, he learned how to become a fantastic swimmer.

A question often posed at leadership and management training seminars is “Are leaders born or made?” The answer is both.

Leaders must be born with an innate intelligence and giftedness to lead. Coach Bill Guthridge ventured his opinion on why Coach Smith was so successful. “What few people ever talk about is the fact that Coach Smith was an extremely intelligent person. He attended the University of Kansas on an academic scholarship. So when you factor together his intelligence with hard work and preparation, and then learning from different failures in life, well, that equals a very successful coach and leader.”

So, leaders need both an innate intelligence, and as Coach Guthridge said, they must also learn from life’s failures. Leaders are born...and made!

R.L. Johnson Jr., former CEO of Johnson & Johnson, profoundly stated, “Failure is our most important product.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, its baby talc came out when Fred Kilmer, its director of research, responded to a physician’s critical letter complaining about patient skin irritation from Johnson & Johnson’s medical plasters. Kilmer sent the talc to soothe people’s skin, and success was birthed!

Dean Smith learned many leadership skills in the fires of life's failures. We too often forget those early years, when he didn't win, when the critics said he would never be successful at college basketball's highest level.

We forget that students in Chapel Hill hung him in effigy in the early 1960s not once, but twice! We forget that alumni wanted him dismissed. We forget that newspaper writers regularly questioned his decisions.

We forget that after UNC lost to Marquette in the championship game, sportswriters and other critics across the nation eviscerated Coach Smith's system, the Four Corners, and his game decisions. Many thought even then he wasn't a good coach.

We forget that for two decades critics said he couldn't win the big one, the national championship. When he finally did win it in 1982, they said, amazingly, that he probably couldn't do it again.

We forget that in the 1990s, before his second national championship in 1993, critics said the game had passed Dean Smith by and suggested he retire, allowing UNC to get a younger coach who could relate better to contemporary college players.

We forget that one rival ACC coach named his dog Dean because, the man said, "He cries and whines so much!"

Former Duke coach Bill Foster would sarcastically ask officials if Dean Smith invented the game of basketball because Foster thought all the borderline calls in games were made in Smith's favor.

We forget in those early years how Coach K thought officials called games differently when Coach Smith was on one side of the court and other ACC coaches were coaching against him. He sarcastically called Coach Smith "Saint Dean," insinuating that he got special treatment from the referees. Ironically, that's what many non-Duke fans complain about with Coach K today!

We should remember all these things because these failures and criticisms forged Coach Smith's character, strengthened his resolve, and forced him to grow as a leader. I think he knew that the fear of failure is the greatest enemy of success. Therefore, he learned to embrace failure. He made failure his friend.

Management consultant and bestselling author Tom Peters urges us to celebrate our failures, learn from them, and build on them. For him, failures are an essential part of progress. He said, "The essence of innovation is the pursuit of failure... to be able to make mistakes and not get shot."<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, Peters quoted Soichiro Honda, the founder of Honda Motor Company, who said, "Many people dream of success. To me, success can only be achieved through repeated failure and introspection. In fact, success represents the 1 percent of your work which results only from 99 percent that is called failure."<sup>3</sup>

Or, as that inimitable philosopher, Dolly Parton, once said, "The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain."

### **Failure Does Not Have to Be a Foe**

When we look at Coach Smith and all of his successes, we tend to forget the losses. It's the same way with leaders in all walks of life.

The average American millionaire, for example, has been bankrupt 3.75 times. Henry Ford went broke on five different occasions before he finally succeeded.

Albert Einstein did not speak one word until he was four years old. He couldn't read until he was seven. One teacher described him as "mentally slow, unsociable, and adrift forever in his foolish dreams." Another called him "uneducable." The Zurich Polytechnic School refused him admittance.

The father of the famous sculptor Rodin once said to him, "I

have an idiot for a son.” His teachers described him as the worst pupil in the school. He failed three different times to gain entrance into France’s most prestigious school of art.

Some of the world’s most famous products were the results of mistakes: cheese, aspirin, paper towels, and penicillin, just to mention a few.

The man who dreamed up the photocopier thought he had discovered something wonderful to aid industry. He shopped his invention to IBM, Kodak, and RCA. They all scoffed at the idea and rejected it. Ready to give in to failure, he finally took the idea to Xerox. The rest is history. I can tell you that everyone on my office team appreciates the fact that he made failure his friend and didn’t give up!

Failure can be a leader’s most formidable foe, but it doesn’t have to be.

DeWitt and Lila Wallace had done a bit of everything from farming to DeWitt fighting and being wounded in World War I. He became a copywriter, but was fired. They finally came up with the idea of condensing a lot of reading material into one magazine. They took the idea to several New York publishers. It was rejected by everyone.

So, in 1921, they borrowed money and started the magazine in a small room beneath a speakeasy in Greenwich Village. More than three-quarters of a century later, *Reader’s Digest* sells almost 28 million copies per month. For those of us with limited time, we’re glad that the Wallaces made failure their friend.

Walt Disney was abruptly dismissed by a newspaper editor for whom he worked. What was the reason for the dismissal? The editor said Disney lacked new, creative ideas. Go figure! Disney also

struggled with unpaid bills and went bankrupt before he finally came up with the new, creative idea of Disneyland.

In fact, few know that Disney had an animation business in Kansas City, Missouri, that went under. That's what caused his move to California. So in 1923, at the ripe age of twenty-two, he moved in with his Uncle Robert in Hollywood. Rent was five dollars for room and board. However, soon Disney ran out of money. His uncle's patience waned and he was ready to send Disney to the streets. At last, a vaudeville-house operator finally agreed to sponsor a cartoon series.

Disney then constructed a simple wooden box in his uncle's garage. The cartoons were quite simple, just stick figures with jokes printed in comic-strip balloons. Yet that was the start of Walt Disney's cartoon genius, now reaping profits annually into the multiple billions.

Boeing went through difficult struggles in the 1930s, 1940s, and again in the 1970s after it had to lay off 60,000 employees. Hewlett Packard had severe cutbacks in 1945. In 1990, its stock dropped below book value. Ford suffered one of America's largest annual losses in the early 1980s (\$3.3 billion in three years) before it began emphasizing a new core value of people first. IBM nearly went bankrupt in 1914 and 1921, and experienced difficulties again in the 1990s. Many great people and companies suffer failure; they just know how to make it a friend.

Madeleine L'Engle wrote a children's book titled *A Wrinkle in Time*. My own children have read it over and over again. It's one of their favorites. But the book was rejected by more than fifty publishers before finally going to print.

Vince Lombardi once had an "expert" say this about him: "He

possesses minimal football knowledge. He also lacks motivation.” This expert predicted failure for Lombardi as a football coach.

Winston Churchill failed the sixth grade. He twice failed to achieve an elected office during the early 1920s and had little political influence all through the 1930s. But he learned from his failures and kept developing his talents. In 1940, he became prime minister of England at the age of sixty-two. Today he is acclaimed as a great leader and hero of World War II. The free world is certainly glad he made failure his friend.

A young man named Rocko wanted to become a big league baseball player more than anything else in the world. For years he tried to develop his skills. Finally he took a long train ride to Fayetteville, North Carolina, for a tryout with a major league team. He hit one double, but other than that, his performance was uneventful.

On the long train ride home he felt great disappointment and was ready to give up. He asked a friend riding the train with him about boxing; Rocko thought he could be successful in this sport. His friend, Ray Gormley, said Rocko had no future in boxing and discouraged him from trying.

Yet he did give boxing a try, and he became a world champion. Millions of fans knew him as Rocky Marciano.

### **The Greatest American Failure**

“There lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen...and now he belongs to the ages.”

Which great world leader did this statement address? Alexander the Great? Winston Churchill? Julius Caesar? George Patton? John F. Kennedy? No, none of these answers is correct.

Perhaps some background information would help.

When he was seven years old, his family was evicted from their

home because of a legal technicality. As a result, he was forced to go to work to help support them.

At age nine, while groping to find his identity as a child and suffering from extreme shyness, his mother died.

At twenty-two he lost his job as a store clerk. He was therefore unable to secure the education necessary to fulfill his desire to attend law school.

At twenty-three he became a partner in a small business enterprise but ended up owing a lot of money when his partner died and left him with huge debts to repay.

At twenty-eight he asked a young lady whom he had been dating for four years to marry him. She declined. This was the second romantic disappointment for the man. An earlier youthful relationship had tragically ended when his love died.

At thirty-seven, after three unsuccessful attempts, he was elected to Congress. Two years later he tried for reelection, but was defeated. It was during this time he had what contemporary psychologists call a nervous breakdown.

At forty-one, during the time when his marriage was aching, his four-year-old son died.

At forty-two, he applied to be a land officer. He was rejected.

At forty-five, he ran for the Senate and lost.

At forty-seven he was defeated for nomination as the vice president of the United States.

At forty-nine, he ran for the Senate again...and was defeated again.

During these long years of disappointment, critics circulated false rumors about him. Consequently, he suffered from long, deep periods of depression.

Yet at fifty-one, he was elected president of the United

States—only to have his second term in office cut short by an assassin’s bullet.

While he was dying, one of his chief antagonists, Edwin Stanton, spoke the statement previously quoted: “There lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen...and now he belongs to the ages.”

Abraham Lincoln, one of America’s most inspirational and gifted leaders, could in many ways be considered the greatest American failure. Yet he knew the truth that pain can lead us to possibilities and suffering can lead to success. He too allowed failure to be his friend, and America is a better nation because of it.

Every outstanding leader knows this truth: We learn much more from our failures than our successes. It is in the pain of failure that we gain new insights about our weaknesses and how to succeed. Adversity becomes life’s university.

### **Learning from Mistakes**

In my own most difficult leadership crisis, Coach Smith’s words about failure proved invaluable for me. Let me give you some background. I had been the leader of Forest Hill Church for more than eighteen years. During this time, we had experienced unprecedented growth. It had been a wonderful experience.

In the early 1990s, after turning down an opportunity to lead a different congregation, I felt the time was right to move the church in another direction. We had grown significantly up to this point, but most of the growth had come from people who were dissatisfied with other churches. Simply receiving another organization’s dissatisfied customers did not necessarily connote health. I felt that for the church to be truly outreach oriented, it needed to make more

of an effort to reach the unchurched. Besides, the disgruntled people who came to our church often brought their own baggage and hurts from their previous churches. Eventually, they became angry with us too.

With this in mind, I wrote a seventy-page position paper that I felt would direct us into the twenty-first century. Forty of this church's significant leaders gathered together for a weekend and I enthusiastically cast the new vision. There was some discussion. However, in my zeal, I committed a huge leadership mistake. Beginning the second day, I said something like, "Well, I believe so much in this new vision that if you don't want to do it, I may have to go somewhere else."

I'm sure, in retrospect, that's not what I intended to say. Moreover, I'm certain I was undergoing some "aging and staging" in my life. I was in my early forties and was subconsciously applying leadership pressure to myself and the other leaders so the new vision could happen as quickly as possible.

However, I failed to realize that the leadership of the church felt bullied. They sincerely respected me, but they still felt bullied. They didn't tell me what they were feeling, however. Maybe they didn't want to hurt my feelings. Maybe they didn't know how to tell me. At the end of the weekend, they gave unanimous support for the new vision, though I didn't recognize their unanswered concerns.

As I aggressively moved ahead, casting the vision at every opportunity, more and more people felt alienated and hurt. It took months before I finally realized it. The people in the church simply were not moving in step with me.

During the next several months, several staff members left. One became pregnant. Another felt called to return to seminary for more

graduate work. I had to let another go. Another suffered a massive heart attack and died. Suddenly I had four staff positions open. I also had a new vision to which to recruit new staff. And that's exactly what I did.

We recruited all over the country and tried to find the best people possible. Over the course of the next year, all four staff positions were filled with gifted, aggressive, and excited people. With them, I moved ahead with great vigor.

However, I again failed to notice what was happening with my core leadership. They weren't on board. Maybe my head was in the sand. Maybe I wasn't listening. Maybe they didn't have the courage to state their mind. Or perhaps it was a mixture of all of the above. But a slow, rising tension began to engulf the church. Other members of the church were even accusing the leadership of not having the courage to confront me. No one trusted anyone else. Everything was grinding to a halt. My leadership was in trouble.

To be candid, I wanted to quit. Everything was failing. I was frustrated and tired. I didn't want to continue the fight. Yet amidst this struggle, I remembered the very important leadership secret Coach Smith taught me years earlier: Make failure your friend. Look at your mistake, learn from it, and move on.

So when I finally realized the problem, I knew I had two options. I could continue to steamroll ahead and let the chips fall where they might. Or I could stop, stand in front of the people, apologize for my mistakes, and seek their input.

I chose the latter. I recommitted myself to leadership. I then devised a plan to find unity, a vision both staff and leadership could buy and support. I met with each lay leader for at least an hour, often more. I asked for their opinions about what had happened.

I quizzed them regarding how I had failed. I listened intently. I took copious notes. I told each person that anything about me or the staff was fair game. I really wanted to know what they were thinking.

Then over the next several months, we brought together both the lay leaders and paid leadership. With the help of a church member skilled in conflict management, we got people talking with one another. When they did, we were surprised to find that most of the problems had been blown way out of proportion. The mistrust that had formed between us began to dissolve.

After several months of healthy dialogue, I then recommitted myself to the others as a servant leader. I told them I wanted a common vision, one on which we all could mutually agree and enthusiastically support. I told them that if they wanted to tear the previous vision to shreds and start all over again, I would be willing to do that. Amazingly, they all looked at me and said, “You’re the leader; lead us!” So we went over the vision again, took out some areas of weakness, and added other items that made it stronger. We ended with a stronger vision statement that could now be taken to the congregation with total unity.

Was it hard? Absolutely! Who enjoys eating crow? But I did regain their trust. When I retreated, consensus started building. Soon the church moved ahead with enthusiasm. Amazing growth began to occur, largely comprised of people who had never gone to church.

That all happened two decades ago. Today, the church is extremely healthy. Why? Because we learned that failure should not be feared. When properly approached, it can be one of life’s best teaching tools.

## Where There's a Way, There's a Will

Jim Valvano, the late coach of North Carolina State University, loved to tell this story about Coach Smith and the 1982 Championship game against Georgetown. During the time-out with thirty-plus seconds to go and UNC down by one point, Valvano was having fun with the Carolina fans surrounding him. He offered all of them different offensive strategies to score the winning basket and then stop Georgetown on its ensuing possession. One particular fan kept responding to each of Valvano's strategies, "Dean will find a way."

As most know, Michael Jordan scored the go-ahead basket with sixteen seconds left on the clock. Georgetown then came down the court and Freddie Brown accidentally threw the ball to UNC's James Worthy—and Carolina won the game.

Valvano stared incredulously at Brown's errant pass. Then the UNC fan tugged on his sleeve as the buzzer sounded to signal Carolina's victory and said, "See, I told you Dean would find a way!"

One of the ways Coach Smith always found a way was through the avenue of failure. It didn't scare him. It didn't intimidate him. It didn't cause him to worry. Indeed, he embraced it and learned whatever he needed to know. He let failure make him better at what he did.

Failure also made his players better—even Michael Jordan. Jordan once said, "I missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot, and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I've succeeded."

Jordan, like Coach Smith, had found a way to make failure his friend. It's one of Coach Smith's secrets to success, and he wanted me to make sure I told you.

## INSIDE COACH SMITH

### Gracious Even in Defeat

Coach Smith's best team ever may have been the one he had in 1984. It featured five first-round NBA draft picks: Michael Jordan, Sam Perkins, Brad Daugherty, Kenny Smith, and Joe Wolf. Most college basketball pundits picked them to win it all.

Then came the Indiana game. Indiana started guards Steve Alford and Marty Simmons, both freshmen. German Uwe Blab roamed the center. Mike Giomi and Dan Dakich were the forwards. Dakich controlled Jordan. Indiana won a 72–68 shocker.

When Coach Smith addressed the team after the painful loss, he purportedly had a tear in his eye. He told the team that he never wanted to compare teams. In his eyes, each time was unique within itself. But he told this team that it could well have been his best team ever. Then he left the locker room.

After Coach Smith left, Indiana sportswriter Andy Graham went into the UNC locker room to talk with the players. Both Jordan and Perkins gave plaudits to Indiana. He received some great quotes from terribly disappointed players.

As he emerged from the interviews, he noticed Coach Smith with his back against the wall. He was discombobulated and disappointed, probably still trying to grasp the reason for the loss. Graham approached Coach Smith to let him know how classy his players had been during the interviews and how tough he knew the loss was upon them and him.

Coach Smith smiled and responded, "Thank you. I am proud of them. And you should be proud of those boys from Bloomington today, too."<sup>4</sup> The conversation continued for another fifteen to twenty minutes.

Then Graham experienced the uniqueness of Coach Smith. He listened intently to every word Graham spoke. It was an eye-to-eye conversation. He seemed genuinely interested in the sportswriter. They talked about family and politics. Graham wrote, “It was astonishing. He treated me as an equal, even though I most certainly wasn’t and never shall be. I was a human being—that was enough.”<sup>5</sup>

If Coach Smith had been able to read Graham’s last quote, he would have most certainly disagreed. Graham was his equal simply because he was a human being. Coach Smith never considered himself great. He simply saw himself as a college basketball coach who loved to teach kids how to play a wonderful game.

But, even in defeat, he practiced graciousness. Even in failure, he was kind.

That’s what made him special to those who knew him. It was not all the wins and successes. It was how he played the game of life.

He was gracious even in failure. And that’s yet another reason he was successful.

Andy Graham discovered this truth after one of Coach Smith’s most painful losses in thirty-six years of coaching.

**LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 11:****Know Who Really Is in Control**

*“There have been many times in life  
when I’ve had to give up.”*

I USED TO HAVE a favorite illustration about Winston Churchill, the esteemed prime minister of Great Britain. His skillful leadership kept England steady during the incessant battering of German air raids during World War II.

Evidently, Churchill graduated in the bottom third of his high school class. There was absolutely nothing special about his scholarship or leadership back then. But many years later, when he was the prime minister, his alma mater invited him to give the commencement address. The story is told that he walked to the podium and, in the course of his speech, told the students, “Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never.”<sup>1</sup> After he sat down, the audience broke into an uproarious ovation.

For decades, ministers and speakers have used this anecdote

about Churchill to motivate people to keep on trying when faced with adversity. It used to be one of my favorites, too, until Coach Smith readjusted my thinking about it.

When I told him how much I liked the tale, he responded, “David, I hate that story.”

“But why?” I asked. I was genuinely puzzled that this master motivator would loathe an example of dogged determination that paid off in eventual victory.

“Because there have been many times in life when I’ve had to give in,” he replied, “and give the matter to God.”

As I reflected on this statement, I realized he was right. Sometimes you *do* have to give up; there’s simply nothing else you can do but quit trying and realize that, ultimately, you are not in control.

Few people know just how difficult those early years were for Dean Smith as the head basketball coach at UNC. He wasn’t a Hall of Famer. He didn’t have more wins than any other college basketball coach back then; he lost a lot of games and became the frequent butt of jokes. Art Heyman, Duke’s all-American during Coach Smith’s first two seasons, was amazed when he discovered how revered Smith had become. “Dean Smith?” he said. “Why, he was the biggest joke around.”

Larry Brown, probably the best player on those early teams, said, “I don’t know many men who could have persevered through those first few years.” When Coach Smith was hung in effigy, the question on everyone’s mind changed from “Will he leave?” to “When will he leave, and who will be his replacement?”

During this painful time, Coach Smith’s sister gave him a book by Catherine Marshall titled *Beyond Ourselves*.<sup>2</sup> He was particularly close to his sister, and she had a keen interest in spirituality and theology.

## Helplessness Is an Asset

Coach Smith focused on one chapter in particular, titled “The Power of Helplessness.” He began to see how little in life he could actually control. Winston Churchill’s dramatic exhortation to never give in may be great fodder for motivational speakers, but life had taught Coach Smith that it simply wasn’t true.

“Crisis brings us face to face with our inadequacy,” Catherine Marshall wrote, “and our inadequacy in turn leads us to the inexhaustible sufficiency of God.”<sup>3</sup> That described exactly where Coach Smith was: face-to-face with his inadequacy and insufficiency. “No sinner is hopeless; no situation is irretrievable. No cause is past redeeming,”<sup>4</sup> she said. “Helplessness is actually one of the greatest assets a human being can have.”<sup>5</sup> Catherine Marshall’s book had Coach Smith’s full attention.

Before the next game against Duke in Durham, Coach Smith gave a spirited talk to the team. That was unusual; it wasn’t his style to give fiery pep talks. But he motivated the players that day, and Carolina beat Duke, 65–62. Two years later Coach Smith made his first Final Four.

No one but Coach Smith knows exactly what happened during those days after he was hung in effigy. In an article written about him in the *Fellowship of Christian Athletes* magazine, he referred to this tumultuous time in his life. He reflected how he went home after all this turmoil and told God that he had given his life to him many years before. Now he was giving him everything again, basketball included.

He learned an important truth that many great leaders have learned in the darkest days of adversity: Key men need to learn who really holds the keys.

Coach Smith recounted for me that time when he totally gave

it all up and turned it over to God. It's a habit he never gave up. "I don't want to act like a saint, for I am not one," he told me. "But deep down, every day, I try to turn it all over to God. I know I have to let go and let God guide me every day.

"I try to set some kind of example as a professing Christian, but I realize I fall far short. I choose the Christian faith because I know I am weak. I need help for strength and guidance. Of course, I believe all humans are sinful and weak until we creatures make contact with God's grace and forgiveness and learn that he is in control."

Life holds mysteries that only God understands. Coach Smith comprehended that. He realized, as many of us do, that the most frequently spoken word in heaven is probably going to be "Oh" when God reveals to us why he did what he did in the hard moments of life.

The truth that it is sometimes necessary for us to give up is stated in one of Coach Smith's favorite prayers. It's called the Serenity Prayer, and he often gave copies of it to people. It was written inside a pamphlet that was placed on the chair of every person's seat at his private funeral service. Almost everyone is familiar with the first part of this prayer attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr; here is the full version:

God, grant me the serenity to accept  
the things I cannot change,

Courage to change the things I can,  
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;

Enjoying one moment at a time;

Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.

Taking, as He did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have it.  
Trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His will;

That I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.  
Amen.

One of Coach Smith's thoughts for the day read: "If you can't do something about a problem, it's a fact of life." Sounds like the Serenity Prayer, doesn't it? Accepting the things we cannot change is an important leadership principle.

## **The Role of Faith**

### *Roots of Faith*

Coach Smith was raised in Kansas in a relatively strict Baptist family and church environment. His parents sowed the seeds of faith in his life at an early age. They required that he attend Sunday services, sometimes spending most of the day at church. He went to youth camps at Ottawa University. During his high school and college years, his family belonged to the First Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas.

Smith's personal faith was always an important part of his life. When he moved to Chapel Hill, the first thing he did with his family was to find a church home. Church was very important to him. Eventually he joined a small group of twenty-five people who began a new church in the area. The group committed themselves to racial justice and being a part of the lives of hurting people. That was the beginning, in the spring of 1959, of the Binkley Baptist Church.

That was his church home for all his years in Chapel Hill. He

attended regularly, win or lose. When in town, he was always present. Even three weeks before he died, he attended in a wheelchair, worshipping his God revealed in Jesus Christ, whom he knew controlled everything. That congregation had a tremendous effect on Coach Smith and his faith.

Coach Smith readily understood what Christianity is supposed to be. Therefore, he often gently criticized the church at large for castigating wounded people, for not loving them unconditionally. He teased me that Alcoholics Anonymous probably had a better understanding of how to create a loving community than the church did.

“The purpose of the church,” he said, “is to give people strength so they can move on with their lives. In my own congregation, we very much see it as a church headquarters. We gain strength from each other. Consequently, many of our members are in politics, and many are involved in bringing about social change. That’s what the church should be doing—caring for one another so we can help a hurting world.”

Although I am a pastor, I did not become defensive when he criticized the church in this way. Coach Smith was right. It’s all too easy for the people in a church to get caught up in taking care of their own people to the neglect of the hurting souls all around them.

Coach Smith was also a frequent speaker at Fellowship of Christian Athletes gatherings. Though he didn’t enjoy public speaking, he knew this venue gave him an opportunity to unabashedly share his faith.

Yet his faith was also very private. Smith was not ostentatious about anything in his life. He followed the example recorded in Matthew 6 of Jesus, who instructed his followers to pray, fast, and give their money away, but to do it quietly or in secret. Smith desired no earthly recognition for what he believed was the right thing to do.

He once said to me, “You know, David, you and I have the toughest jobs in the state of North Carolina. People vicariously live through how we perform. If we do well, they feel good about themselves. If we don’t, they don’t. Isn’t that sad? Only God should be able to do that to our insides.”

One Easter Sunday, anyone in the congregation who wanted to was invited to sing George Frideric Handel’s “Hallelujah” chorus with the choir. Coach Smith quickly left his seat and joined the choir. Though he didn’t have a particularly good voice, he didn’t care. With every ounce of energy, as if he was yelling at a referee’s bad call or joyously encouraging one of his players, he belted out, “For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” That’s what he believed. God was in control of everything.

### *Expressions of Faith*

After Carolina defeated Georgetown in 1982 for the national championship, Coach Smith gave some interesting insights into his faith in an interview with Wendy Ryan. He complained that athletic competition produces what our society calls winners and losers. “Those terms,” he said, “certainly have different connotations which, in my opinion, isn’t good. The ‘loser’ and those associated with losing sometimes feel badly, and the ‘winners’ have external affirmation for the wrong reasons. I don’t think our Creator meant for one person or one group, the ‘losers,’ to feel bad in order for another group or individual to feel superior.

“The total emphasis on winning versus participation is the problem,” he continued. “Why doesn’t the Christian church invite the guy who dropped four touchdown passes to come and talk about his faith? The fact that so many want to interview me after a national championship instead of when our team has a bad year is an example

of what I'm addressing. The Christian culture has adopted the secular culture's ideas of success."

In one of my meetings with Coach Smith, he related the story of a boxer who observed his opponent at prayer just before a match. The boxer anxiously asked his trainer if that meant anything. "Not if he can't fight," the trainer replied.

Coach Smith often struggled with athletes who credit God with all their success. "I have to admit that it bothers me when a Christian calls on the Lord as a celestial bellhop," he said. "Of course, a pro athlete may indeed perform better because his lifestyle as a Christian helps overcome anxieties experienced by other players. However, constant practice would help his performance the most. But do these same athletes ever credit God when they fail?"

"If Christianity promised a magic wand that made it possible to receive everything one wishes—such as perfect health or a perfect performance—one would choose Christianity for the wrong reasons. I believe God created each human being to have freedom of choice. If I choose to smoke three packs of cigarettes a day, then I should not blame God if I get lung cancer someday. If some drunken driver crosses over the middle of the highway and kills my son or daughter, I don't think that is God's will; it's the wrong choice of the other to drink and drive. So if some athlete intercepts a crucial pass, that athlete has made a choice to practice and to use his talent. The quarterback throwing the pass may have prayed to have it completed."

One of Coach Smith's favorite authors, Robert McAfee Brown, said this about our freedom of choice: It is like we are all in a symphony, sometimes choosing wrong notes, and God, the Conductor, can still make beautiful music from it.

Although Coach Smith was often open about his faith, he would

never force it upon others. He honored people's freedom of choice. He respected his players who came from both Jewish and Muslim backgrounds. However, he did believe in what Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard called "the indirect witness." In his thoughts for the day handed out at each practice, Coach Smith always tried to plant a seed that would last for a lifetime in the players' minds. It was often a verse taken directly from the Bible.

James Worthy, one of Carolina's greatest players, remembers that Coach Smith used to be very open about conversation regarding his faith and seeing how his players' faith was developing. "But it wasn't something he forced on us," Worthy noted. "We said the Lord's Prayer before every game [the teams I played on did too]. That was a reminder to us, because in college you tend to forget those parts of your life. You aren't consistent with the way you were brought up. He was reminding us not to forget our roots.

"And before every meal he would mention faith. Because he wanted to remind us that sometimes things could happen and we aren't in control. And he wanted to remind us to thank God from whom all our blessing come."

For many years, Coach Smith insisted each player attend a house of worship each Sunday. The only way a player didn't have to go was when he supplied to Coach Smith a written note from his parents saying they didn't want him to attend. Sometimes he even requested that players bring a bulletin from the church they attended to prove they were actually there. "Sometimes," he said to me, "people don't do what you expect but inspect!"

Coach Smith saw coaching as a calling from God in the classic sense of the word *vocation*. "My pastor, Dr. Robert Seymour," he said, "has helped me understand that any vocation is acceptable to God if it involves work that is necessary in God's world or work

that makes a positive contribution to man's well-being and happiness. There is no double standard between sacred vocations and secular ones. I once thought I had reneged on my promise to God to put him first by pursuing a career in coaching. But now I know I can faithfully serve God as a coach.

### *Foundation of Faith*

Without understanding Coach Smith's faith perspective, you can't really understand why and how he operated. Consider these examples.

Why was he so loyal to his players? Why did he put them first? I believe this was birthed from his spiritual conviction that we are to live this life first of all for others.

Why did he demand racial equality? Because of his conviction that all people are created equal in God's sight, he believed we must do everything possible to make sure people are treated appropriately and fairly. Why did he begin recruiting black athletes in the mid-1960s? "When I became the coach at Carolina," he said, "my pastor advised me that I should recruit a black athlete. He thought most vocations are and should be *Christian* vocations, and as the coach, my first responsibility in my Christian vocation was to have a black athlete in a predominately white Southern university." He saw himself as an instrument in God's hands for racial equality and justice.

Why did Coach Smith take teams to practice and even play against death row inmates in the prison at Raleigh? He had read Matthew 25:31-46 and knew he was called by his Lord to visit the prisons. He was commanded to do so by his God.

Why was cheating simply not an option for him? He believed that rules needed to be followed. Otherwise, there is chaos. He had a firm conviction that taking what does not belong to you is wrong,

and that the necessity of telling the truth is an immutable law of the universe, created by God to be obeyed by his creatures.

Why did he consider the team more important than the individual? Because of his conviction that God created us to live together, in community, and one way that can be learned and demonstrated is through team play.

Why care for the poor and oppressed? He followed the biblical example of Jesus, who taught that we are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and reach out to those who are suffering. His conviction was that we are all citizens of the world and responsible for one another. Before his death, Coach Smith asked that Matthew 25:31-46 be read aloud at his funeral. This passage records powerful words from the lips of Coach Smith's Lord and Savior, Jesus, demanding that his followers care for the needs of the poor. The verses say that when Christians do this, they are caring for Jesus himself.

Why did Coach Smith love others so deeply? He also asked that 1 Corinthians 13 be read at his funeral, the great chapter on love in the Bible. He believed that the greatest quality of God was love. He desired, above all else, that people love God and their neighbors as they loved themselves. Coach Smith believed that the best way to love God is to love those whom God loves: our neighbors in the world, people created in his image.

Unabashedly, Coach Smith believed Jesus' words in Mark 10:45 should be reflected in his life: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Coach Smith saw his job as an opportunity to serve, not be served, and to give his life away to others.

Coach's faith defined his life. Therefore, why not give in to failure? Because he believed that all things are possible with God. Also, he was absolutely assured that God is the God of the second chance.

Why was Coach such an encourager? Because he felt encouragement from God to keep on going, making failure his friend, even when the odds seemed overwhelmingly against him.

Why his emphasis on self-effacement and humility? Because he followed the example of Jesus and knew that humility is one of the earmarks of the Christian faith. Therefore, it needs to be practiced as a way of life.

The list could go on and on. If you fail to understand Coach Smith's faith, you cannot understand the principles by which he lived. He believed God created the universe with certain underlying principles that defined reality. And he made those principles an active part of his leadership.

### **The Overriding Life Principle**

One year Coach Smith and his wife spent each Thursday during the Lenten season with other church members studying a book entitled *Unconditional Love* by Father John Powell.<sup>6</sup> Powell asked a question in that book that had profound implications for his life: What is your overriding life principle?

"For some people," Coach Smith said to me, "it is money, to some it is power, to others it isn't clearly defined as they look inward. The question I have studied is, 'What should be the motivation for turning a life over to God, or essentially to be a Christian?' . . . I have believed that the motivation for the Christian faith is gratitude, a gratitude for being loved and accepted by God, gratitude for forgiveness and gratitude for giving us life.

"We can pray for and acknowledge gratefully the many resources of strength and courage and alertness, which we receive as the gifts of God. . . Thus, as Christian laymen with athletic interests and talents, we see that anything we do, we do because God qualifies us to

do it as we respond to the gifts he has given. Each of us then has a sacred calling.”

One of my friends in Charlotte, Greg Keith, is a successful developer who was an all-American basketball player in high school. He was recruited by many schools across America, North Carolina included. Keith recently shared with me a conversation he had with Coach Smith during the recruiting process. Coach Smith said to him, “You know, Greg, you can’t take God out to dinner, or to a sporting event, or any other place. But there is one thing you can always do for God, and that’s to love his children. Whenever you do something good for his children, you are serving him.”

Keith remembers something else Coach Smith said: “God is sovereign over his universe. I am not in charge. He is. It rains on the just and the unjust. We’re all returning to dust one day. Until then, we simply do the best we can for other people.”

This is the kind of faith that enabled Dean Smith to withstand the critics for thirty-six years.

This faith was the foundation for caring for others before himself, placing the team before the individual, and building personal character. It’s essential to understanding his greatness and effectiveness as a leader.

It’s rooted in the wisdom of knowing when to give in and surrender all to God. It can only occur when someone knows who really is in control.

## **INSIDE COACH SMITH**

### **A Life of Faith Expressed in Service to Others**

Coach Smith had two celebrations and remembrances of his life. The first one was held at Binkley Baptist Church on February

12, 2015. It was for close friends, family, and any former players and managers who could attend.

Unsurprisingly, Coach Smith had planned the entire service. For several years he had known the end of his life was near. So he sat down with his family and put together the order of the service that would commemorate his life.

It was a decidedly Christian worship service. On each seat was a small pamphlet with a picture of Coach Smith on the front. On the back was a quote from his book *A Coach's Life*—a quote that expressed the gratitude all Christians should have because of the love and forgiveness available from God through Jesus Christ.

In the service itself, from the prelude music (“Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring”), to the call to worship and the antiphonal readings at the beginning, to the congregation’s recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, to the New Testament lessons (1 Corinthians 13 and Matthew 25:31-46), to the chosen hymns (“Amazing Grace” and “Now Thank We All Our God”), to the sermon preached by Coach Smith’s longtime pastor and friend, Robert Seymour, it was a carefully planned Christian service, honoring the life of Dean E. Smith as he understood his Christian faith.

Reverend Seymour talked about how Coach Smith had said that if the world loved God’s grace half as much as it did basketball, it would be a far better place in which to live. He quoted Søren Kierkegaard’s pointed statement that people need to do what is right for no other reason except it is right. Coach Smith loved this quote. He lived it.

For example, when Coach Smith helped bring about racial integration at Chapel Hill, some called him courageous. Seymour reminded everyone that Coach Smith never considered himself courageous. Coach Smith would say, “It’s not a matter of being

courageous when you're simply doing what's right." Finally, Seymour said that Coach Smith believed what James 2:26 teaches: "Faith apart from works is dead." "He believed that every person has dignity. We all need to fight for the rights of others," Seymour said.

Seymour also told of how Coach Smith loved St. Augustine's insights into hope. Augustine said hope has two twin sisters: anger and love. Anger means you hate something that is wrong in the world. Love means you direct your anger toward the wrong and do something to change it. And that brings hope to the world.

It was a powerful, poignant, joyful celebration of Coach Smith's life.

The second memorial, for the public, was on February 22, 2015. It was held at the Dean E. Smith Center. Well over 10,000 people attended. It was broadcast on national television. Many former players and managers were present.

Several were asked to speak, remembering the influence Coach Smith had on their lives. Phil Ford had tears in his eyes when he spoke. All said they were better men for knowing Coach Smith.

I was asked to do the invocation for the event. Roy Williams called me and said, "David, there is no one I'd rather do it. There's no one else Coach Smith would want to do it." I was deeply touched and honored he would ask me.

Here is the prayer I offered on that day, for that moment, for my friend, coach, and mentor Dean Smith:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the extraordinary life of Coach Dean E. Smith, a magnificent husband, father, teacher, coach, and friend. His life expressed a deep, personal faith in Jesus Christ, one where he knew the profound forgiveness of his sins. Because of this forgiveness, he lived his life in gratitude to his Lord and Savior. This

gratitude was seen in how he chose humility over pride, generosity over stinginess, serving over being served, the team over the individual, academics over athletics, grace over bitterness, friendship over personal gain, integrity over hypocrisy, justice over inequality, the poor over the powerful, and life over death.

Gracious God, this world is a far better place in which to live because of his life. He believed that faith in you gives eternal life. Therefore, we rejoice today that he is not only with you, his mom and dad, his family and loved ones now departed, but also that now he has a healthy body and a fully functioning mind. We grieve the loss of this great man but also grieve with a heartfelt hope that we will see him again one day.

Glorious Lord, I pray you might open a small port-hole in eternity and allow Coach Smith to glance at this moment in history and see the thousands upon tens of thousands of family, friends, lettermen, and fans thanking him for the pass, for making us all better people because of his eighty-three years on this planet. Thank you, Coach Smith. Thank you, Lord God of the universe. I pray this prayer in the name of the one I personally know as my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

The last speaker was Reverend Seymour. He challenged all present and watching the service on television to learn from Coach Smith's life. And the best way all could honor him was to live as he lived—a life of deep faith in God that expressed itself in service to others.

Amen and Amen!

**LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE 12:**

## Commit Yourself for the Long Haul

*“It’s daily living that really matters.”*

THE TAR HEELS HAD just suffered a heartbreaking loss in the first round of the NCAA tournament in 1979. On the ride back to Chapel Hill, a great silence engulfed the bus. The sense of failure among the highly ranked Tar Heels was overwhelming.

What did Coach Smith do? He went to the back and spoke to Ged Doughton, who had just played his last collegiate game.

“Come by the office first thing Monday morning, Ged, and let’s start talking about your future.”

That was typical of Dean Smith. Putting failure behind him, putting his players and their futures first. Coaching for the long haul, not just a winning season.

Contrast his style of long-term leadership with someone like

“Chainsaw Al” Dunlap. A month shy of his second anniversary as embattled Sunbeam’s supposed savior, Dunlap was fired as chairman and CEO during a weekend meeting. The chairman who followed Dunlap said, “We lost confidence in his leadership.”

Dunlap entered Sunbeam as a corporate superstar with a reputation for turning around businesses that were performing poorly. How did he receive the nickname “Chainsaw Al”? In the course of turning businesses around, he was known for slashing thousands of workers in cost-cutting efforts. In time, the term *dunlaping* became a synonym for downsizing and layoffs.

While Dunlap was at Scott Paper, where he cut a third of the workforce, the company’s stock tripled during his eighteen-month tenure. Sunbeam’s shares soared nearly 60 percent the day Dunlap’s hiring was announced. At Sunbeam, Dunlap cut 6000 jobs, half the workforce. He shut down eighteen of twenty-six factories.

When word of Dunlap’s firing spread, none of Sunbeam’s former workers felt sad. In fact, they couldn’t hide their happiness. They were ecstatic that the “chainsaw” had been sawed in two, so to speak.

Dunlap was not the only corporate superstar whose brilliance faded in time. A physicist who had previously turned around ailing National Semiconductor, Gilbert Amelio, lasted seventeen months at Apple before being fired and tagged with the label “plodder and technocrat.”

AT&T president John Walter, after much previous success, lasted only nine months, unable to build consensus and gain the support of the board.

Hollywood’s superagent Michael Ovitz was sacked by Disney after a short time. When Wall Street is performing well and your business performance is lackluster, you must have a corporate scapegoat. In such a scenario, no CEO seems safe.

It’s interesting that, shortly after joining Sunbeam, Dunlap

told an interviewer that if a company couldn't be fixed in a year, it couldn't be fixed. He displayed the same arrogance in the title of his book about corporate restructuring—*Mean Business: How I Save Bad Companies and Make Good Companies Great*.<sup>1</sup>

After Dunlap's dismissal, Sunbeam told its workers and shareholders that management was determined to turn things around. But one official, as he tried to encourage people, asked for patience. He said, "We're in absolutely no hurry. We are long-term players."

### A Contrast in Leadership

Long-term players versus corporate quick-fixers. That's the contrast in leadership between a "corporate genius" like Al Dunlap and long-term leader like Coach Smith. Dunlap was concerned about the profit line first and people second. Coach Smith was concerned about people first and wins second. Dunlap loved the spotlight and claimed it whenever possible. Coach Smith shied away from public adulation, always wanting the players and the team to receive it.

Dunlap looked for immediate results—fix it in one year, he said, or it can't be fixed. Coach Smith was a leader for the long haul, patiently, year after year, building his foundation on the core values of people first, the team above the individual, and personal character. Dunlap was nicknamed "Chainsaw Al" by his work associates and peers. Coach Smith was and is affectionately called "Coach."

What were the results of these two different styles of leadership? Dunlap was fired in disgrace and many who worked under him despised him. Coach Smith led the UNC basketball program for thirty-six years and retired with universal acclaim; those who worked for and played under him adored him.

Coach Smith understood that great leadership is a slow, steady process. He stayed put in one place for the long haul. Both Pat Riley, a former NBA coach, and Rick Pitino, presently the University of

Louisville's head basketball coach, have written books on leadership. I've read both, and both are good. However, the major difference between their styles of leadership and Coach Smith's is that Riley and Pitino have moved three or four times during their coaching careers. That's not necessarily wrong. But when you're in one place for thirty-six years and you consistently practice positive leadership principles, you affect many people for a lifetime.

W. Edwards Deming, whose work with industrial leaders transformed Japan from the post-World War II rubble to a contemporary economic superpower, said that we must first have a purpose or a mission, and that it must have constancy.

That was Coach Smith. Successful leaders are committed to building values and principles and living them out over a long period of time. Walton said his success actually began about twenty years into the business. He didn't look for windows of opportunity. Rather, he maintained a steadfast obedience over the long haul to his core values.

I have been the senior pastor of Forest Hill Church for more than three decades. I've dedicated babies, confirmed them, married them, and then dedicated their own babies. My work and service has developed into a beautiful long-term relationship with a congregation, allowing me the opportunity to impact people in a way that is possible only because I've been there for so long. When you commit yourself to the long haul, people have the opportunity not only to hear your words but to see you live them.

Who has the greatest impact—long-haul leaders or quick-fixers? Obviously, leaders who stick around for the long term impact more people and to a greater degree. As Jim Collins and Jerry Porras pointed out in *Built to Last*, nearly all of the early leaders of visionary companies stayed at the helm for long periods of time (an average

of 32.4 years). I believe Coach Smith led not only for the teams he actually coached, but also for the next generation and the next!

A part of Coach Smith's genius is that his leadership was not a sprint, but a marathon. He was consistent. He led with long-term goals in mind. And when he retired, it was on his own terms. He left on top. People did not want him to retire. They wanted him to coach for as long as he wanted.

Moreover—and this has been too often overlooked—he left the cupboard full for his dear friend and longtime associate Bill Guthridge. Look closely at the way Coach Smith's retirement unfolded. All his leadership secrets shine forth again: reciprocal loyalty, putting people first, the team above the individual, and personal integrity and character.

Notice also he endorsed someone who shared his core values and continued to live them out. Roy Williams, North Carolina's present coach, is teaching and living these principles to those who play under him. This ensures the values that built the organization for Coach Smith's thirty-six years will continue to lead Carolina basketball for decades to come.

Many today marvel at Jack Welch's leadership at General Electric. But he was raised in GE. He knew the culture, vision, and values. He wanted his successor to share those values.

That's why Walmart, 3M, Boeing, Johnson & Johnson, Merck, and many other visionary companies have maintained their staying power and influence for so long. It's why Carolina basketball will continue to be successful well into the twenty-first century.

### **Leaving at the Right Time**

Coach Smith's retirement did not catch his former boss, athletic director John Swofford, by surprise. For several years, Smith had

evaluated whether he had the energy and enthusiasm necessary for his players to do their best under his leadership. He had always said he would retire when October rolled around and he didn't feel he could give the team and players what it and they needed to succeed. Finally, in October of 1997, he didn't sense that excitement and announced his retirement. Swofford said, "He did it just like he said he would. His entire life has been first class. He had to go out on top."

What does it mean for a leader to retire at the right time? Swofford said, "Whenever we talked about his retirement, he would say every time that it was really important to him that he leave the program in good shape."

Leaving the program in good shape meant several things. First of all, from Coach Smith's perspective, it meant leaving the program in better shape than when he began. Looking at how he had developed the program since 1961, when he became the head coach, it was clear that had occurred. The program was in much better shape. Every effective leader should be able to look back and see a marked improvement from when he started.

Second, it meant leaving the cupboard full for his successor. Coach Smith had a deep and abiding friendship with Bill Guthridge. He wanted Coach Guthridge to have the job after his retirement—both to reward him for all his years of faithful support, and to give him a chance to earn enough money in a short period of time to ensure his financial security. However, a third and perhaps even more important reason to Coach Smith was to allow his loyal associate to succeed at the same level or perhaps even a greater level than he had.

John Kilgo, editor of the *Carolina Blue* sports periodical, is absolutely convinced that Coach Smith would not have retired in October 1997 if Antawn Jamison had decided to go professional after his

sophomore year. When Jamison returned for his junior year, Coach Smith knew the team would be very good. The year before, they had gone to the Final Four, and four of the five starters were returning. Yet without Antawn, the team certainly would not have been as good. Kilgo believes that Coach Smith would have persevered through another season so he could make sure the team was in great shape and ready to pass on to Coach Guthridge.

After Coach Smith's retirement was announced, Harvey Araton wrote in *The New York Times*,

Of course Dean Smith has never admitted this, never will, but the coach with a record of 879 wins turned what might have been a grand farewell tour with a championship cherry on top into an extraordinary show of appreciation for a man who stayed by his side for thirty years. Smith thanked Bill Guthridge for his assistance in a way so many others in this look-at-me industry absolutely could not. Telling a half-truth that he was too tired to continue, Smith gave Guthridge a team to run with... To many, Smith was the 1997 Sportsman-of-the-Year after breaking Adolph Rupp's record of 877 victories before losing to Arizona in the national semifinals. One year later, without being part of a single game, Dean Smith looks like a bigger sportsman than ever.<sup>2</sup>

This says much about Coach Smith's character, doesn't it? In a day when coaches jump to the next university in order to receive the largest amount of money and acclaim possible in the shortest amount of time, here was an example of longevity, perseverance, success, accompanied by a concern that his successor have the opportunity to experience equal benefits. Even in his retirement, Coach Smith was putting others first.

Contrast Coach Smith to Columbia Pictures and its president and production director, Harry Cohn. After his death in 1958, Cohn did not have these core ideologies in place. He didn't care first for people, and his funeral represented a Dunlap-like relief that he was gone. Someone at the funeral supposedly said that 1300 people came not to mourn his death but to make sure he was dead! Columbia limped along and finally ceased to exist as an independent company, rescued in 1973 and eventually sold to Coca-Cola.

When it comes to knowing when is the right time to leave, here are some questions that naturally arise:

- Is the organization I am presently heading better now than when I first became its leader? If not, why not?
- If it is better, what's the next stage to which my leadership is being called? Is it in this organization? Is it to another work?
- Am I nearing the time to retire? Am I still feeling the same passion for my work?
- Am I giving my work associates and my team my best energy? If that energy is beginning to wane, when should I step down?
- Who should my successor be? Am I choosing a time for retirement that gives him or her the best opportunity to succeed, perhaps even beyond my own success?

After Coach Smith's retirement, Bill Guthridge gave me these insights regarding why Coach Smith finally retired: "He just didn't have the energy to coach the 1997–98 team that he knew it needed. And I think a lot of those energies went to former players, and in many respects, that just wore him down. I personally don't know

how he lasted as long as he did... the number of people that he cared about and was trying to help out overwhelmed him.

“When I was his assistant, I deferred as much of that as I could so he could concentrate on the big things, but I couldn’t shield him from everything. No one knows the demands on his time, the long hours of work he put in, and all the people he genuinely cared for. I don’t know of another person who could have managed all of this, but he did.”

Perhaps one of the most meaningful letters Coach Smith received upon announcing his retirement came from Dickson Gribble, a former player from his first season as head coach at North Carolina and presently a colonel in the United States Army. He wrote:

Coach Smith,

I am saddened by [the news of] your retirement, but understand. As my own mandatory retirement date (thirty years active duty) soon approaches, I often reflect on what’s next. You alone know when you are ready—you alone. I admire you for knowing when it was time and doing it the way you did.

Having been a part of an organization and a culture for so long that passes leadership, I reflect on it often. And I am often asked to speak about it. Even in military work, I often used him as my example. Note I didn’t say always, in that I have had my life also cross with Colin Powell’s. I cite your commitment to excellence, to integrity, and to caring for others as specific traits worthy of emulation. I often note your commitment to equal opportunity has been a part of the Carolina program since during the days of Willie Cooper and Charlie Scott.

I also talk about the importance of teamwork in my successful organization—be it on the sports field or battlefield. People understanding their role—as a soldier, civilian, point guard, or bench player. At Carolina, you taught us that we all had a role and to fill that role to the best of our ability for the overall benefit of the team. Thanks for that.

It's a fitting tribute that all of us would love to have written to us when we retire.

### A Stunning Insight

Coach Smith's passing was huge news all over the world, especially in the state of North Carolina. I had twelve interviews within twenty-four hours on local radio and television stations.

The one I especially enjoyed was with Mick Mixon, the former color man on the Tar Heels sports network with Woody Durham and presently the play-by-play announcer for the NFL Carolina Panthers, Scott Fowler, a sportswriter for the *Charlotte Observer*, John Kilgo, a close friend of Coach Smith's who co-wrote his book *A Coach's Life* with Sally Jenkins, and myself.

During the show, John Kilgo dropped a bomb on all the listeners and us in the studio. He shared a conversation he once had with Coach Smith after the final game of the season against Arizona in the semifinals of the Final Four in 1997.

“Coach Smith told me that in the final minutes of the game, as UNC was down to Arizona and frantically trying to catch up, he called Ed Cota, his outstanding point guard, over to him to get instructions. He told Ed to foul a certain Arizona player. Cota did so. Right after the foul, Coach Smith called Cota over and demanded to know why he had fouled that player! Hesitatingly, Cota responded, ‘Because you told me to do it, Coach.’”

Kilgo believes with all his heart that Coach Smith realized at that moment that his memory was beginning to slip. He knew that both his mom and dad had died with some kind of dementia. Coach Smith was too bright a man not to know what was going on, according to Kilgo. He also believes Coach Smith had a gut feeling that it was time to retire, at least partly because of a feared memory loss. He didn't announce it for another six months, until the fall of 1997. But he knew something wasn't quite right.

Interestingly, I remember a time I was with Coach Smith in 1998. We were having a cordial conversation. As always, he asked me about my family. Specifically, he asked about my daughter, "Brittany." I didn't say anything at the time—my daughter's name is actually Bethany. I just thought perhaps Coach Smith had made a casual mistake.

That is, until I heard John Kilgo's story. Coach Smith never forgot people's names, much less his players' children's names. His razor-sharp memory was one of his greatest gifts. He knew Bethany. They had talked on several occasions. I wonder if his memory was beginning to slip a bit, as Kilgo suggested, as early as 1997. The actual neurocognitive disorder wasn't diagnosed until 2008. But my mom struggled with a similar disease. The first memory slip my family noticed with her was seventeen years before she finally died. Coach Smith's was first noticed in 1997. He died in 2015. That's eighteen years.

I wonder if Coach Smith did sense it. If so, it gives even more credibility to his decision to leave and give to Coach Guthridge a very good team that would make it to the Final Four in 1998.

### **A Legacy That Lives On**

As the news of Coach Smith's retirement spread around the university, hundreds of students gathered outside the Smith Center. At the press conference to officially announce the retirement, they all chanted, "Four more years! Four more years!"

He didn't stay four more years. He did retire. But his legacy lived on after his official retirement. He continued to help former players in whatever ways he could. He watched UNC game films and gave Roy Williams advice when asked or needed. He spent time with his family. He especially enjoyed trips to the beach. He would speak occasionally, very occasionally, for special events. He played a lot of golf. He wrote his biography.

And people didn't forget him. Accolades continued to come after his retirement.

In 1997, Coach Smith was named Sportsman of the Year by *Sports Illustrated* magazine.

In 1998, he won the Arthur Ashe Courage Award, presented at the annual ESPY Awards hosted by ESPN.

In 2000, he was named the best coach in any sport in the previous twenty-five years by ESPN.

On November 17, 2006, Coach Smith was recognized for his impact on college basketball as a member of the founding class of the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame. He was one of five, along with Oscar Robertson, Bill Russell, John Wooden, and Dr. James Naismith. This was the inaugural class.

In 2007, Coach Smith was elected into the FIBA Hall of Fame.

On November 20, 2013, President Barack Obama awarded Coach Smith the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award given to a US citizen. It was awarded to him for his commitment to justice for all.

On Sunday, February 8, 2015, the day after Coach Smith's death, more than a hundred students gathered in front of the Dean Smith Center. They sang the UNC fight song one time through. Then they silently paraded around a monument where people had laid flowers. Some had left about twenty-five candles that remained lit.

Others had left signs stating Coach Smith's motto for how to play the game of basketball: "Play hard, play smart, play together." Then they went home.

Coach Smith's first win occurred against Virginia, 80–46, in 1961. After the game, he met several sportswriters and Bob Quincy, the Sports Information Director.

"So," the young Smith said as he looked at those gathered, "what do I do now?"

He figured out what to do next, didn't he? And many fans and followers are glad he did.



*Coach Smith in 2010 at the UNC lettermen reunion in the building that bears his name, shaking the hand of Charlie Scott. That's me straight ahead of Coach Smith, smiling and admiring one of life's truly great men and leaders.*

Used with permission of Lindsay Reed.

Coach Smith's legacy will live long after his death. Many will want to learn from his life.

That's because he knew, perhaps better than anyone else, that winning wasn't nearly as important as how you play the game.

## **INSIDE COACH SMITH**

### **The Best Way to Honor His Legacy**

For several years, the only person I had shared the following story with was my wife, Marilynn. I never knew exactly what it meant. After Coach Smith's death, I may have received some helpful insights.

In 2010, all the past basketball lettermen assembled in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to celebrate one hundred years of UNC basketball. A game designed for us was played in the Dean Dome. It was divided into five-minute segments. Players from each decade, dating back to the 1930s, could get in the game and play for a few minutes. I had played in Carmichael Auditorium. So for me, and those who had never played in the Dean Dome, it was a real treat.

The game was a blast. I even made a free throw! It was fun being with all the lettermen who had been part of the program over a stretch of fifty-plus years.

After the game, all the lettermen remained on the court. Then Coach Smith was introduced to the uproarious applause of the 20,000-plus in attendance. It went on and on, as you can imagine.

Many lettermen had the chance to greet Coach Smith personally. We were told to introduce ourselves to him, for he might not remember our names. It felt like an awkward and unusual request. He never forgot our names. But we all had heard about his mental demise.

When I approached him, I held out my hand and said, “Hi Coach, David Chadwick.” He quizzically looked at me and, with a hint of irritation, said, “I know who you are!” We hugged. Then he looked me in the eye, my hand still in his, then looked up into the rafters where all the UNC all-Americans’ jerseys were hung with their names on the back. Then he looked at me again and said, “You know, your name should be up there.” I laughed incredulously and, feeling awkward, said, “Thanks.” Then the next former player greeted him.

I told my wife Marilyn about the encounter. I was perplexed by what he meant. She wasn’t sure either. Finally, we both concluded that perhaps he misunderstood momentarily how good a player I was. Or maybe he was just being extraordinarily kind and gracious to me. Or perhaps he mistook me for someone else. I had helped UNC win some games. I was a decent player. But I was no all-American. His memory must have been confused, we concluded.

That is, until he died.

After Coach Smith’s death, I was with Richard Vinroot, one of Coach’s really close friends and former players, interviewing him on my weekly radio program on WBT Radio in Charlotte. We spent the hour reminiscing about Coach Smith. Story after story flowed between us to the listeners. We laughed a lot. We both felt the loss of our friend. It was one of my favorite programs ever.

At the end of the program, I decided to share with Richard what had happened between Coach Smith and me at the one-hundred-year celebration of Carolina basketball a few years earlier. I told him I didn’t understand the meaning of what Coach had said.

“Oh, David, that one is easy for me to understand,” he said. “You know how important his faith was to him. He saw life as caring for others. And you were his only letterman to have become a

seminary-trained pastor and theologian. You also had an earned doctorate! You committed your life to serving others. He was so proud of you. He told me so on many occasions.

“I think he was simply saying to you that in the scheme of importance in life, what you are doing as a minister of the gospel is every bit as important, if not more so, than the all-Americans. I think he was just saying that in life, you are one of God’s all-Americans.”

I don’t know if that’s what Coach Smith meant. I’d like to think so. But I do know with certainty that Coach Smith believed caring for others was far more important than a game called basketball. And I do know I love and respect Coach Dean Smith. I’m a better man, father, husband, and citizen for having played for him. I will deeply and dearly miss him.

And I’ll continue to make his principles my principles. I’ll choose to live in a way that honors his life. That is the best way I know to honor his legacy.

I hope the principles that led Coach Smith’s life will help you to do the same.

That’s because, after all, what’s most important in life is how you play the game.

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