

TEAMWORK INTELLIGENCE

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STUDENT-ATHLETE
EDITION

Prepare to Win

Life is Right Around the Corner by Cory Dobbs, Ed.D.

What are you gonna do when the day comes to put your trophies and sporting memorabilia in the closet?

The world is filled with ex-athletes who had their fifteen minutes of fame. You may be a big fish in a small pond today, but tomorrow it's likely you'll be a small fish in a big pond.

There's something we need to get straight from the get-go. Without a well-thought-out game plan, you're not likely to score big in the game of life. Participation in sports is fun but a reality check reveals (1) it's going to end and (2) is the price you pay worth the results?

This is straight forward talk to get you thinking about how to use your sports experience to maximize your human potential. Life is right around the corner. So, what's your game plan?

A recent *Job Outlook Survey* (put together by the National Association of Colleges and Employers) reveals that when it comes to the skills and qualities employers are looking for the top item is team players that can lead with others and communicate. Survey participants rated "ability to work in a team structure" and "ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization" as the two of the most important skills and qualities for tomorrow's workforce.

Remember, the world is filled with ex-athletes. So why are employers today saying it's extremely difficult to find team players? You'd think all those ex-athletes would fill the need for exemplary team players in all organizations.

As a corporate leader I used to hire ex-athletes with the expectation that they would be ideal team players. This assumption didn't hold true. Some were; most weren't. I spent a great deal of my time during my doctoral research studying work teams, observing and evaluating teams at *Fortune 500* firms and small local firms. My findings reveal that ex-athletes do not necessarily possess the qualities of an ideal teammate in the workplace context. If I were to have provided report cards to ex-athletes they would have been very average. So what's going on?

Life is increasingly a team sport. Yet today's culture of individualism has created a desperate need in the world for people with the ability to work in a team structure—to place the team above one's self.

The pathway to success in life, just as it is in sports, is teamwork. If you desire a compelling future start developing your team building skills now. Prepare to win. Be a great teammate every moment of your team experience. And by the way, a great teammate is not someone who simply goes along to get along.

Your team is a lab for practicing unselfish acts, helping others maximize their potential. Your athletic experience is the classroom for learning how to get along with others in a stressful environment. We grow stronger by learning from each other and being accountable to one another. When you help others you learn and grow too. Doing your most for the team will *always* bring something good for you.

To be a great teammate you need to constantly ask others "What can I do for you? How can I help you? This will require you to stretch beyond your comfort zone. One thing is clear to me: commitment to teammates requires humility—a humble attitude. Ideal teammates build reciprocal relationships, share responsibilities, and take risks by giving time, energy, and attention to one another.

Teamwork requires commitment. If you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and respect, you'll enjoy the results of cultivating an environment that lifts the level of everyone on your team. You'll also be cultivating the ultimate characteristics necessary to become an ideal team player and an outstanding team leader.

Are you preparing to win? The rest of your life is right around the corner.