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The People Principle

Nothing is More Fundamental to Tap Human Potential than the Power of Relationships

Think about this: How often do your decisions and actions influence the direction of a student-athlete's life? It's an incredibly humbling thought, isn't it? That a person's life-direction can be guided by your views, your values, and your choices.

Simple truths are often overlooked, yet powerful in action. Nothing is more fundamental to tap human potential than the coach and player relationship—let's call this *The People Principle*.

The People Principle, when applied, increases the utilization of human potential in the team and school settings, creating conditions that generate commitment to a meaningful experience. The skillful and authentic use, or neglect, of The People Principle can make the difference between change for the better or no change at all in the student-athlete.

As a coach, administrator, and educator of young student-athletes your ability to help them become their best is perhaps your greatest responsibility. Yes, you need to win to validate your coaching skills and abilities, but how do you know when you're succeeding in developing future leaders and people of character? How do you nurture, challenge, and build young people up, equipping them to make a difference in the lives of the people they'll interact with throughout their lives?

Here's a short story of a former professional athlete who chose to make a difference in the lives of special students.

In Honor of Randall McDaniel *Article By Lilja Behr*

Several years ago, after a winter vacation in the Southwest, my husband and I boarded a plane in Phoenix, headed home to Minnesota. As we neared our assigned row, a large man stepped out into the aisle to let us get settled. In those close quarters, I proceeded to haul out a huge afghan and crochet hook. I apologized for the jumble of yarn that spilled onto our feet, but the big guy next to me kindly said, "Hey, that's OK. My mom crochets like that, too. Nice traveling companion, I thought to myself. The flight attendants had just begun to snap shut the upper compartments when I first sensed that I was sitting next to more than a nice guy. A woman tapped him on the shoulder and asked for his autograph. A little girl shyly approached him and requested the same. I think it was his kindness and patience with that little girl that caught my attention. I whispered to my husband, "This man next to me must be famous...people are asking him for his signature." My husband whispered back, "Ask him who he is," but shy Minnesotan that I am, I hesitated.

The flight took off, the seat belt sign dimmed, and with all my courage, I leaned to my left and meekly said, "I couldn't help but notice that some people wanted your autograph. You must be someone very special." To my everlasting delight, the gentle giant next to me responded, "My mother thinks I am."

With that simple introduction, I met Randall McDaniel, who told me that he had been visiting his family in Phoenix and was returning to his home in the Twin Cities. My own son and son-in-law were mortified when I told them later that even while speaking to Randall McDaniel on the flight, I still had no idea who he was. I only read the sports page because I like the writing. So, when Jim Souhan and Mark Craig wrote in Sunday's StarTribune (2/1/09) that McDaniel was a superior player, a former Vikings guard, and now a pro football Hall of Famer, I knew I had to add a few kudos to their list. For even now, after reading a few articles about Randall McDaniel, I think I know a little more about this humble and unassuming hero than even the sports writers do.

You see, Randall McDaniel and I had a long talk on the way home to the Twin Cities. During that talk, McDaniel told me about his football career, but I think he could tell that I knew absolutely nothing about the sport. So, we moved on to other topics, including the fact that at the time, he was student teaching with kids under the age of eight at a Twin Cities' elementary school. As a former teacher, I could understand those play-by-plays.

When Randall McDaniel spoke of the excitement and challenges of teaching little ones to read, I could feel the commitment and drive in his voice. His eyes lit up when he said to me, "You know, I have a basement full of trophies, but the greatest award I've ever received in my life is no match to the thrill of helping a child learn." As McDaniel described his game plans for the classroom, I tried to imagine the kids who would be blessed as he knelt down and helped them decipher strategies that would allow them to tackle a new word. On that flight home from Phoenix, Randall McDaniel inspired me to be grateful for all the teachers like him, who are there on the front lines, encouraging this generation of students.

"Did you get his autograph?" my son and son-in-law asked, as soon as I told them of the new hero in my life. No, I didn't get a Hall of Famer's autograph. But I did get something much better. I was given the opportunity to sit next to and speak with a man of integrity. Yes, as Jim Souhan writes, McDaniel's got a bad knee, and he may look off-balance and unorthodox as he kneels next to struggling reader, but I know he'll hang on to that kid until the word or the sentence makes sense. That's a winning move every time.

Pro football player, All-Decade team member, first-team All-Pro for nine years, and Pro Bowl starter for 12 consecutive years??? I knew none of those facts when I sat next to this giant of a guy and crocheted my way home. But there is one thing I know for sure: as all good teachers do, he touches the future. He will never make the headlines or the Hall of Fame as a second grade special education instructor, but think of the young minds he will have the opportunity to guard and guide.

Nice traveling companion indeed. This world needs more tenacious, strong men like Randall McDaniel. Mrs. McDaniel, you are right: your son is special!

**This article was reprinted with the permission of Mrs. Behr and Mr. McDaniel*