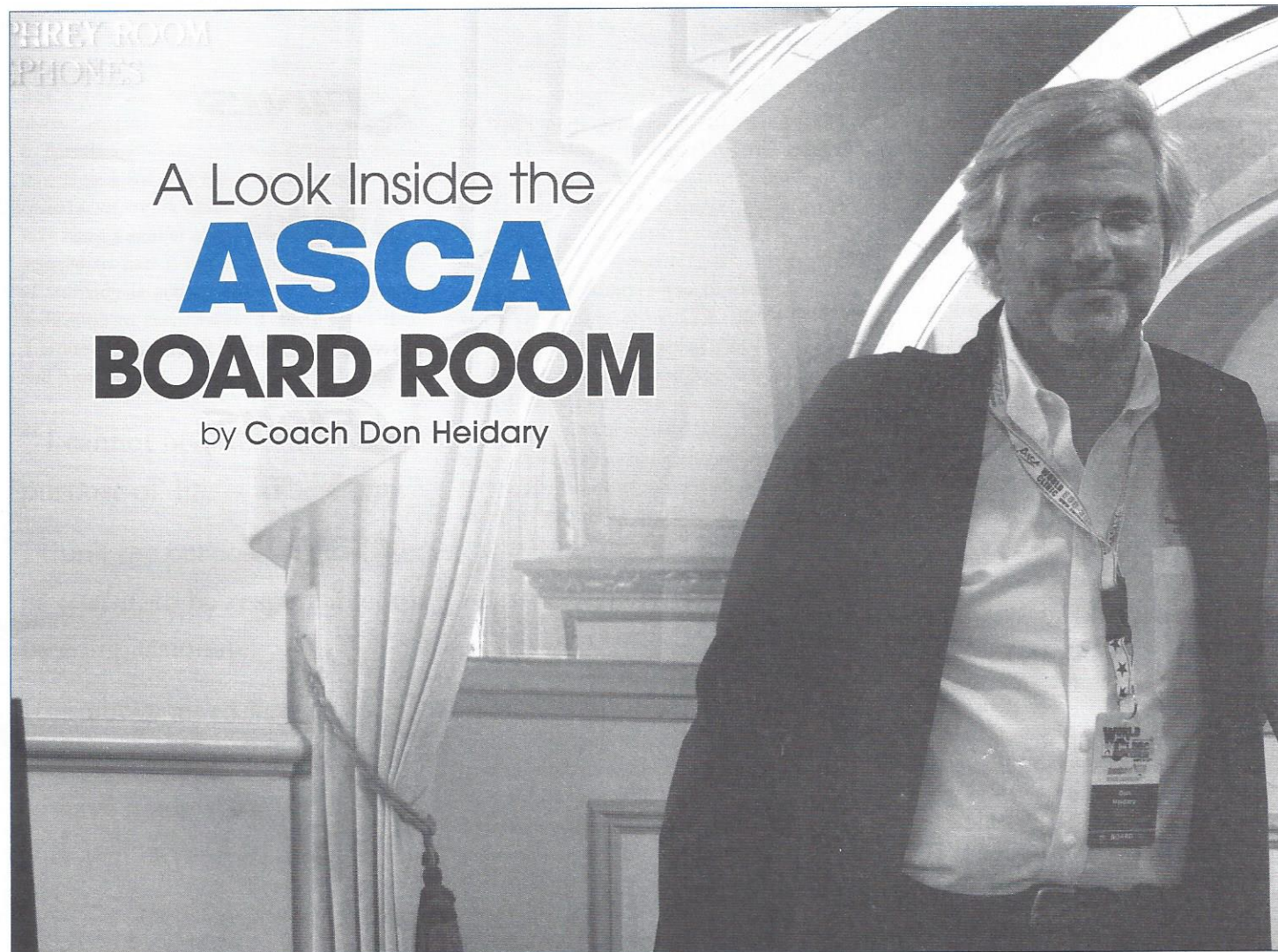


ASCA NEWSLETTER

American Swimming Coaches Association

Leadership • Education • Certification

2015 EDITION | ISSUE 12



A Look Inside the **ASCA** BOARD ROOM

by Coach Don Heidary

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I was one of the last ones to enter the room and took the seat closest to the door, hoping to not be noticed. If I wasn't nervous enough just being in the room, I glanced to my left and realized I was sitting next to Gregg Troy, and to my right, Dick Shoulberg. I felt like the cartoon character with the red-striped shirt hidden in the tall buildings, in the "what doesn't belong in this picture" game. As I looked around the room, at the other "tall buildings", I saw Olympic team coaches, coaching legends, college coaches who win national championships like I win dual meets, department heads of USA Swimming, and authors whose books I had read. Thoughts ran through my mind, such as, how can these people even relate to a typical smaller struggling club, or to a new, young coach, and,

should I make eye contact or not? But, while the room may look like a proverbial who's who of coaches, beyond the credentials and iconic stature, are men and women who are at the core, passionate coaches dedicated to helping the sport, the broader coaching community, and young athletes, in any way they can. What has become truly striking about these people is not their resumes, but their humility. These are people who would have coffee or lunch with any of you and share their growth as a coach, their struggles, and their (made public) secrets to success. And don't be surprised if they look to see what they can learn from you. Incessant curiosity and learning is their nature.

I could not imagine a sport where the best and most successful coaches care so much about

ASCA Newsletter

Published for the American Swimming Coaches Association by the American Swimming Coaches Council for Sport Development.

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The Newsletter for Professional Swimming Coaches

A Publication of the American Swimming Coaches Council for Sport Development, American Swimming Newsletter (ISSN: 0747-6000) is published by the American Swimming Coaches Association. Membership/subscription price is \$70.00 per year (US). International \$120.00. Disseminating swimming knowledge to swimming coaches since 1958. Postmaster: Send address changes to:

American Swimming Coaches Association

5101 NW 21st Avenue, Suite 530

Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309

(954) 563-4930 | Toll Free: 1 (800) 356-2722 | Fax: (954) 563-9813

swimmingcoach.org | asca@swimmingcoach.org

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Continued from Cover: A Look Inside the ASCA Board Room

its constituency. John has said repeatedly that ASCA has the “best board in the world.” I always assumed it was simply generous praise to friends and volunteers, but sitting in these meetings, I see that his compliments are not casual at all. While other coaching associations may make a similar claim, you would be hard-pressed to find a more accomplished group of individuals acting with the sincerity and dedication to every facet of their sport that this one does. As a coach, it is equally inspiring and comforting.

“I cannot believe that the purpose of life is to be *happy*.

I think the purpose of life is to be *useful*, to be responsible, to be compassionate.

It is, above all to *matter*, to count, to stand for something, to have made some difference that you have lived at all.”

- Leo Rosten

The range of topics truly staggers the mind. Issues addressed in these meetings range from the role of energy drinks and technical suits in age-group swimming, to saving the entirety of collegiate swimming, to restructuring the international swimming landscape, all for the betterment and protection of our/your athletes. Nothing is off the table if it helps the sport or the coaching profession, and every topic is deliberated with sincerity and purpose. They speak honestly and openly and debate and dissect any issue that affects our sport. These people know where they came from (clubs) and know who they serve (children).

The meetings are lead by ASCA's long-tenured Executive Director, John Leonard. John lives by a Zen saying: “*Chop wood, Carry water.*” He not only espouses the virtues of hard work, but he

lives it every day, for about sixteen hours, all of which are dedicated to our profession. As far as “chopping wood” goes, it can metaphorically refer to his daily commitment to “chip” away, or more often than not, “chop” at the inequities that exist in our sport, such as doping or FINA. And carrying water can easily relate to his pursuit of educating, or nourishing an information-starved world, bringing resources such as online video, newsletters, or clinics to far corners of the globe. The board meeting held at the recent World Clinic in Cleveland had an agenda that looked like a recap of a decade of work. The topics were not only critical issues of today but truly transformational endeavors for the future. He spends little time on trivial organizational issues to get to the heart of the meeting and the most pressing needs of our sport. He runs the meeting with intensity, emotion, and laser focus. He apologizes only for caring too much, and will “chop wood or carry water” until the objective is accomplished or the problem is resolved. John is every bit the “put the team on your back” kind of guy. And often, it is the sport. There may be those who wonder why he is involved in so much. The real question is what would happen if he wasn't? In a casual conversation about a regional clinic that had some challenges financially, he made a comment that really struck me. When I asked him if it was worth running the clinic, he looked at me without hesitation and said, “We don't have to make money. We are here to teach and help coaches.” This simple response exemplifies his perspective on everything he does.

George Block is a walking encyclopedia and carries the torch for John's advocacy efforts and the restructuring of the international swimming landscape. He is one of the most intelligent and well-thought people I have ever met. I was on a shuttle with him heading to an ASCA World Clinic a few years ago. In making small talk I asked what he had been doing since he retired from coaching (and building a dynasty at Alamo). He responded with, “I built a homeless shelter in Texas that served thousands with room, board, rehabilitation, and spiritual guidance.” And I go to the movies in my free time. While it seems, and is, daunting, it speaks to his character, values, service, and expectations, and offers little surprise that he

was so successful as a coach and now as the President of the World Swimming Coaches Association. He is truly invaluable to the efforts of coaches and athletes worldwide and is a gift to the sport.

And of course, Gregg Troy, a fiercely intense coach, who speaks softly, humbly, and deliberately. When he offers an opinion or advice, everyone sits up and takes note. He is a Hall of Fame and Olympic coach, who once said in a board meeting that the “best coaching in the country was being done at the age group level.” I had to absorb that one for a while. So for those coaches who believe these people operate on a different plain, they don't, a different pool deck maybe, but their hearts are right where yours are and they know where their Olympians' careers began.

A (Swimming) History Lesson—Mine

To be honest, I never really felt it applied to me; people I didn't know, doing things I couldn't really relate to. What I didn't really know was that those “people I didn't know, doing things I couldn't relate to” did in fact create the world I have dedicated my life to. And there is a connected reality that coaches of today will be the historical figures of tomorrow, and we hope that the coaches of tomorrow, who may be in learn-to-swim programs today, will recognize and respect the impact and contributions of these people, the David Marsh's, Gregg Troy's, Bob Bowman's, and Teri McKeever's of today. What a tragedy to not only forget, but to not be influenced by the great work they have done, and are doing. In reality, we are not disconnected from history, we are an extension of it, and we are creating it.

“Help Wanted”

I spent the first fifteen years of my coaching career running a club and offering nothing to the LSC, Zone or to USA Swimming. I felt entitled because I paid my dues to ASCA and USA Swimming, all \$150 of it, and that I would get what I needed and do what I wanted. What a great deal. Although oblivious to (swimming) world around me, I was happy to have someone else do the heavy lifting, behind the scenes, whatever they were. Having now

been involved to a degree, I see clearly that this globe doesn't simply turn on its own, it is set in motion with a trajectory that people like me were oblivious to, and yes, by a handful of people who live by the quote at the beginning of this article. I have truly become inspired by the work of driven volunteers, people like the ASCA board, LSC volunteers, and so many who build bridges for us all to cross.

The coaching community in this country is truly extraordinary and unrivaled, and the sport craves your support. I would implore you to extend your reach, lend your passion and expertise, and to not make the mistake that I did. Reach out in some capacity to help create a better meet, LSC, zone, sport, and future. We see impact and inspiration in areas from advocacy to outreach, from administration to competition, from the work at ASCA to efforts of the USA Swimming Foundation. You are this sport's greatest asset. If not you, who will lead the next generation?

Regarding ASCA, there are truly incredible efforts going on that will transform the sport. The work that John, George, and coaches around the world are doing is monumental. It needs and deserves our support. They exemplify Margaret Mead's words, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, commitment citizens can change the (swimming) world, indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." What I would ask is that we move forward together as a profession and a coaching community, six thousand as opposed to six. Look for John's advocacy updates in the newsletter and don't hesitate to reach out if you have a question.

In Conclusion

This note, for what it is worth, was completely unsolicited. It is no pitch for ASCA. They don't need one. My motivation came from this past World Clinic sitting in awe of the fierce passion and dedication that comes from ASCA's board members, and to let you know

that you are not only in good hands, you are in the best of hands. I feel truly honored and blessed to be in a room with these people, let alone share a pool deck. But more importantly, I wanted to pass on my observations and insights to every coach that might not have the opportunity to sit in a meeting and peer through the tall buildings of humility and service. If you do though, feel free to look them in the eye and offer to buy them a cup of coffee. And no need to wear a red-striped shirt. You'll fit in just fine.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of The American Swimming Coaches Association, thank you for all that you do for children, for dedicated athletes in pursuit of Olympic dreams, and for providing life guidance to our most precious resource. ■

Very sincerely,

Don Heidary, ASCA Board Member

Don@oridnaaquatics.org



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From the 2015 World Clinic: **CULTURAL HEADWIND**

By Don Heidary, Orinda Aquatics

Introduction: My name is Kathleen Prindle; I am a club coach from Florida and I am on the ASCA board. I am here this morning to introduce Don Heidary. For those who don't know, Don is the co-head coach and co-founder of Orinda Aquatics in California, along with his twin brother Ron. Orinda is a smaller club with about 125 swimmers. For those of you familiar with USA Swimming's Club Excellence program, they are a Silver Medal Team. They have consistently placed high in major competitions despite their smaller size. They have won Junior Nationals, Sectionals, Far Westerns. They were 3rd in 2012 at the long course Junior Nationals in the men.

The overriding philosophy of Orinda Aquatics is character first; putting character first in swimming and in life. For those who do not know, he co-authored this wonderful guideline which I spend some time reading last night (it is available from the ASCA website). But he did a talk once that was so well received that he was asked to write a manual for it, and it is called Developing High-Character Athletes and High-Character Teams. So Don really focuses on the part of our sport that is so fundamental to the success of every athlete. I will leave you with a quote, which is in the front of this guide. I thought it was funny, because it is by a musician—there is a lot of rocker quotes in there, I don't know if you know that. Vince Gill says, "Success is always temporary. When all is said and done, the only thing you have left is your character." I think that is a fitting introduction to Don Heidary.

Heidary: I will start with: this is not one of the

sexiest talks in the conference. John asked me to do it, and I would say that of all the things that you have available to you, from stroke technique and training, in my opinion this may very well be the most important. So I do want to thank ASCA for the opportunity to be here, and specifically John Leonard for supporting this truly invaluable message, a message that transcends swimming and coaching.

What I am going to talk today about is cultures, and this slide is culture of cultures. I think they are the elephant in the room. What we are going to talk about is understanding why cultures exist; rather than accepting them, trying to understand why they are what they are. Understanding their effect on kids and on society, and then redefining them in terms of what is right for humanity and right for athletics. To sell the benefits of a new culture, to implement them, to change the paradigm, change the world and I truly believe to give kids back to themselves as individuals and athletes.

So a change in culture and a change in life. This is a true story of a 17-year-old girl who changed her culture and changed her life. She wrote a note that said:

I think about where I would be had I not changed teams and honestly it's scary. I was becoming a person I did not want to be. I have learned what is truly important in life and I'm not sure when or if I would have figured it out. I realize what it was like to be around negative people, because that was the type of person that was always me. Additionally I dreaded swimming, and now I love it again and

it has been a rebirth. So this is a typical kid that was a high level swimmer; you change the culture, you change life.

Analysis, awareness and evolution. I would ask you to indulge me for a minute and close your eyes. You do like the kids, where some of you won't; but close your eyes and visualize your team or your group. So your eyes are closed and you see your team. What I would like you to do is imagine an impeccable culture. A culture of training where everybody embraces the work, they are positive and supportive. They are focused on technique; it means a lot to them, every stroke matters. Your team at meets: what do they look like? Arrive early? Team attire? Positive, supportive, cheer for one another? A perfect culture. Your team traveling. Team attire? Impeccable integrity? Always doing the right thing? Team respect? An apparent culture.

I would refer to the quote on the slide (you can open your eyes now—if they were closed). The rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single person contemplates it bearing within him the image of a cathedral. What if your cultural image was a cathedral and you could sell it to your team?

So our image and our reality. I only say this to show that over 20 or 30 year period, we had an image and we went through the exercise. Our team right now is about 170 swimmers, but it is about a 100 teenagers—so we are top heavy. We have a lot of kids who join our team at 13, 14, or 15 years-old. There is a massive culture change that has to happen.

Well, this is the reality. No bad language, ever. No inappropriate attire. No disrespect, ever. No ego. No complaining—that we are aware of. Kids are always in team attire at meets. There is a strong leadership awareness. Incredible relationships with kids and coaches; they do view it as a second family. The kids set-up a 50m pool with no coach on deck, every day. There is 95% retention for 14 and under swimmers, and virtually every swimmer wants to swim in college—which is what we all want.

We have virtually no parent problems; a few with the younger ages, which you could imagine, but with the high school kids, none. We travel with no chaperons—we never will. We most recently went on a trip with 91 high school swimmers, all coach-run and coach-supervised: three coaches, zero chaperons. We do not do bed checks, no one was ever late for a meeting, and there were no problems. But it relates back to culture.

So this talk is about developing athletes against a societal backdrop that challenges the very core of our sport and the essence of human development.

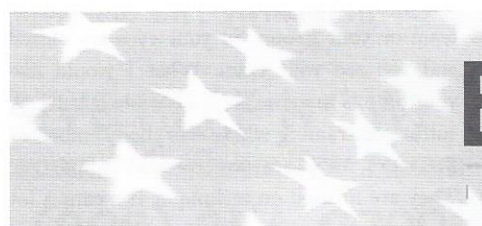
Someone said to me once: most kids are good, I don't necessarily agree with your premise. I responded with, "Well, most kids are good and most cultural influences are light headwinds; in too many cases, they can be destructive forces wreaking havoc on a program, dismantling its very foundation." Analogies are: when a cancer exists in the body, most cells are healthy, and in most cases, we do not even know; a few reckless drivers on a highway can create risk for everybody and entice others. So it is with a culture.

This is significant: how do you get from this, to what we know as these cultural creators? I had a meeting with parents for our character camp, and there were parents with 10-14 year-old kids and they were adorable kids—they do everything right and they want to please. I talked about issues in our community: drug and alcohol issues, bullying, disrespect. They said, Well, that's really bad. I said, "Well who do you think is doing this? They are your kids, four years from now. You need to understand that. There's a cultural change." So are these cute kids the culture creators?

A giant youth party fueled by alcohol, and the internet turns violent and abusive. Mob scene at a high school: 500 students participated in what was a mob scene with rampant alcohol use, hazing and bullying. Two busloads of students on a ski trip detained for massive drug and alcohol use and possession, which the parents defended. This was in our area.

This [presentation slide] was a random, text chat from a group of girls, 14-18 years-old, on another team. It is not an indictment of the kids, but it is emblematic of the culture. I do not think I need to read through this, you can read it; but this verbatim. I would add at the bottom: could this possibly sound like a reality TV show?

On a swim team homepage: a photo of a group of guys making a culture gesture towards women—the most degrading that you could imagine. Now these are great students, well to-do families, great athletes, and these kids will all go to great schools. So, on the surface everything works—the resume works. It is not an isolated example; it is cultural. This high school environment... fantasy sex-league,



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physical assault led by team captains, drafting girls to have sex with, part of a bonding experience involved alcohol, and teammates intimidated not to tell. Or the incident in Texas: brutal freshman hazing.

My question is: Is this what parents hope for when they started their kids in sports—and drove and paid and watched and hope and cried and waited? Is this the end result of the athletic evolution?

Or: Hi, coach. Something I wanted to run by you, if you have a chance. The national group here has had a plague of dismal problems, and it has come to a head. In general the problems with the group are: lack of leadership, lack of general respect, attendance issues, very little team concept, immaturity. What do we do now? The coach added that their Age Group program was great.

Or: the most moral guy in a Division I program, and the fastest, is not voted team captain because he is the character outcast. How does that happen?

So culture exists, whether we acknowledge it or not. The question is: is it good or bad?

Can you name three positive culture trends in youth today? Can you. Can you name one? One trend that makes kids and athletes better people. A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in. Where does this existence in society, even with those who have the capacity? Who thinks this way? Who is looking to live a better culture; a better legacy? Can kids think this way, and can they live this way?

So what is a culture? So rather than surmise, dictionary.com suggests: the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another. It is just a baton being passed along. Culture is the way you think, act and interact, collectively. I would add: your intention and values.

So the old masters are out—and I do want to be clear: this is not a religious statement.

- » Dalai Lama – insight,
- » Confucius – truth,
- » Jesus – forgiveness,
- » Gandhi – tolerance,
- » Lao Tzu – leadership,
- » Buddha – suffering,
- » Mohammad – service,
- » Mother Teresa – compassion,

- » Aristotle – wisdom, and
- » Helen Keller – perseverance.

The greatest lessons of humanity, and, coincidentally, all of the attributes and virtues of an extraordinary person, athlete and teammate. Insight, truth forgiveness, tolerance, leadership, suffering embraced, service, compassion, wisdom and perseverance. An impeccable culture.

The new masters are in. I do not mean this at all facetiously. Apple, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, reality TV, MTV, Kim Kardashian, Miley Cyrus, Abercrombie & Fitch and Kanye West—although he did refer to himself as Jesus, so he may not belong on this list. Uncoincidentally all of the attributes that detach children from their true human potential and personal growth possibilities, and I would add their athletic potential: vanity, insecurity, need, entitlement, dependence, anxiety, materialism and social pursuit.

I am sure you know the quote by Will Rogers: “Too many people spend money they haven’t earned to buy things they don’t want to impress people they don’t like.” But the question is: why? Why does this happen? Virtues should not be culturally driven; they should be constants. They should be constants in life and in sports. Can anyone see into the future? Can you see into the future of your culture? Do you know the trajectory? Do you know in 10 years what it is going to look like?

When and how does it know it is right? When does a culture know that it actually is right for humanity. Years ago a swimmer came up to me and said to me: you don’t understand our culture. My response was, “What if you don’t understand your culture?” Where is the greater risk?

So who does decide team culture and our athlete’s culture? Is it:

- » Madison Avenue – fashion, image, need for things;
- » Silicon Valley – technology, social media, the need to be connected;
- » Reality TV – which really is repulsive content of language, nudity, sex, alcohol, etc.;
- » Wall Street – a focus on status and materialism, that money can buy happiness; or
- » Corporate marketing – rotating the same 25

people on magazine covers, telling us what to buy, wear, think, look like, and value.

Who decides our culture?

Cultural questions: Is it possible that culture can be the biggest determinant of individual and team success? Would you entertain that. Who determines/determined your team’s culture? Who determines/determined our teen culture? Who determined/determines society’s culture? What are the influence drivers of our collective values, virtues, priorities, sacrifices, social choices, appearance, integrity, service and compassion?

You will never influence the world by trying to be like it. We all know the peer-pressure loop: each teen acts goofy to fit in with peers; goofy acts becomes the teenage norm; teens think that if you are not goofy, you are not normal; and non-goofy teens are often singled-out. The peer-pressure loop. Well, I would content that peer pressure should exist; the pressure to act with integrity, to be respectful, to look out for others, to follow all rules, to be grateful and to be humble.

Healthy pressure and a new dialogue. What would it look like or sound like if this was the dialogue among teenagers?

- » Dude you are a joke, you didn’t help anyone today?
- » Hey, you really don’t get along with your parents? That’s lame; I owe my parents everything.
- » You don’t like to work hard, well that’s not going to fly here; we love it, better get onboard.
- » Or: you really drink? I can’t believe you fell for that teen trap.

Is it possible that this was the dialogue in high school campuses?

Or what about a change in mindset? Instead of looking-out for #1 mentality, what about looking out for another mindset? Instead of followers, how about how many people would follow you in a time of crisis? Do you really know. Instead of “likes”, how about how many people truly love you.

The butterfly effect asks: does a flap of a butterfly’s wing in Brazil cause a tornado in Texas? So what does it mean for your life? It means that every decision or action you make, no matter how small, could potentially, dramatically,

alter the course of your life. I would add that: know that the flap of a butterfly's wing can significantly alter or create a cultural tornado. We see this happen all the time.

This [presentation slide] did not happen on its own. Now the question is: why did so many follow this, and why did so many fight for it? The cartoon at the bottom [of the slide], one student says, "Dude your underwear is not showing." That has become the cultural norm.

So challenging the societal status quo. Where in our community do we celebrate culture and humility? We would argue: society is anything but character-based. How does one become humble, self-confident, positive and selfless, when marketing tells us we are not good enough and society tells us the only measure of achievement is success. It is either self-doubt or ego, and neither supports a healthy athlete or team.

Quintessential questions that we should all ask:

- » Why can't the most successful people be the most humble?
- » What if we lived in a society, and had a culture, where the most success you had the more appreciative you were, the more humble you became.
- » Why can't athletes instinctively put the team first and look to ensure the success of others ahead of their own? What if that was the driving force?
- » Why can't kids welcome and embrace every challenge?
- » Why can't kid's best friends be their parents?
- » Why can't children dream of being a leader as well as an Olympian?

Again: change the paradigm. See the culture for what it is, seek to understand its origin and evolution, evaluate the impact on human growth and value as well as athletically and team-wise, and redefine and demand a culture based on core values and virtues. Imagine the old masters as your team captains. Wouldn't Gerald Jampolsky's "love is the answer" be a better mantra than Miley Cyrus' "I smoke pot and I don't give a f...."

The integrity headwind. From the article "Why is it so hard to be a better person?", the sad irony is that while goodness is the thing that most want from everyone else, few want it most

for themselves. Why can't young adults put an integrity stake in the ground and remain tethered to it? What happened? Why can't there be an integrity line in the sand that you never cross? Why is integrity not in our cultural DNA? Why is not the default response, when it is the most important thing? Does the integrity headwind really look like this? Where in society is ironclad integrity a foregone conclusion? Can you name any place. Or where is it cultural?

We use this quote often, and it is on our website: **"Integrity has no need of rules."** - *Albert Camus*. It becomes the basis for everything we do. And: **"Wise men, though all the laws were abolished, would live the same lives."** - *Aristophanes*.

There is a cartoon that I think summarizes the concept. "Bro, what's the one personality trait you need to make it in this world?" His friends asked inquisitively, "Integrity?" The other start laughing, laughing louder, laughing hysterically, and says, "No, Lars, it's awesomeness, but don't ever lose that sense of humor."

Trust. We believe with it, you have everything; without it, you have nothing. To be trusted is a great compliment than being loved. How many athletes do you trust implicitly with every fiber of your being in any situation? The bar has been raised for academics and athletics—and, yes, maybe awesomeness—but what about for integrity, character, morality, compassion, attitude, humility and selflessness. For the most important things in life—and I would argue in athletics—there is no standard. We know how hard is to get into college and to achieve the highest level in Swimming.

This is a *would you rather* that I ask to kids and to parents. You can answer as a coach, you can answer as parent. I think it helps define the integrity headwind. Would you rather have a 4.0 in school and cheat to do it; or a 3.0 (with integrity) and know that it will affect your grade and ultimately the college you go to? Would you rather be a Junior National qualifier who is not respected by anyone on the team or staff, or a novice swimmer who is an inspiration to the team and a team captain? Would you rather be popular and active and drink and do drugs, or stay at home on Friday and Saturday night and not? What would you choose?

I think it gives a glimpse into where we are as a society. There are too many people who think that the only thing that is right is to get-by or

to succeed, and the only thing that is wrong is to get caught. Do not try to be different, just be good; to be good is different enough. One lie is enough to question all truths.

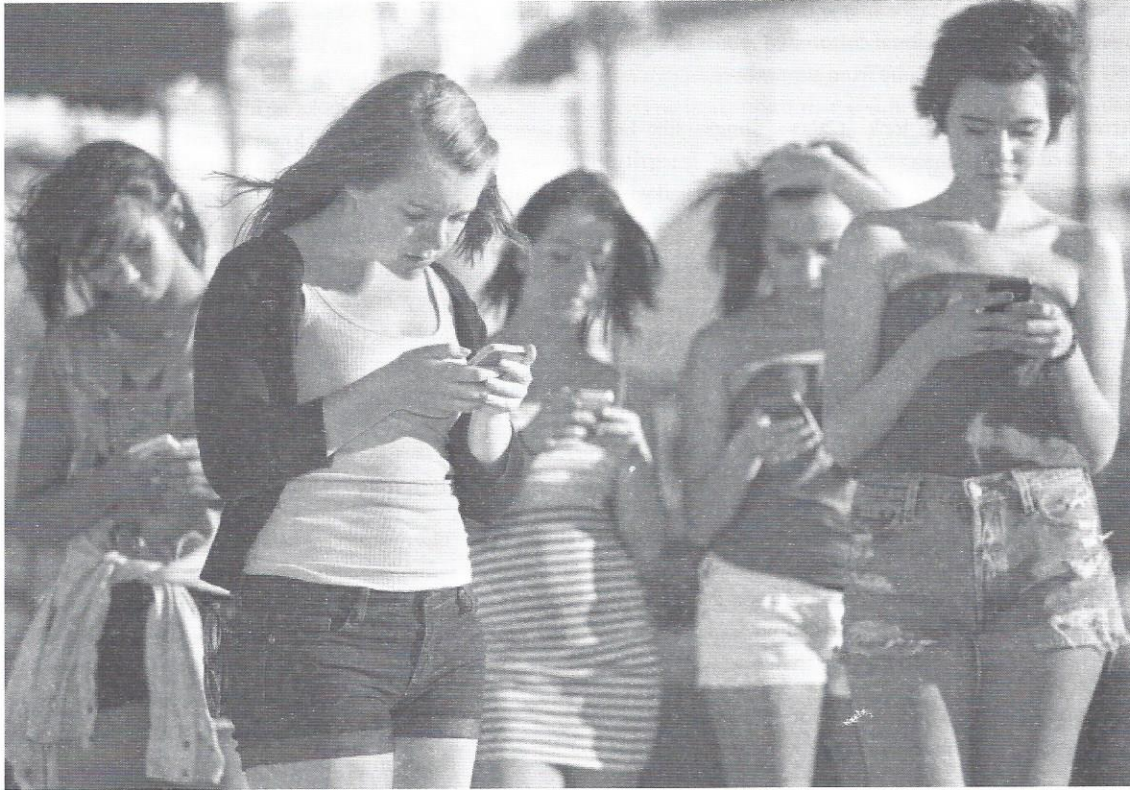
Recent articles in the newspaper in our area; this is a shortlist. As a society, we have almost become numb.

- » The Demise of Guys: online porn and video games,
- » Using Drugs to Get an Edge in High School,
- » Theft and Vandalism in a Middle School,
- » Parents Defend Pranks and Vandalism,
- » Drug Dogs Patrol High Schools,
- » Teen Marijuana on the Rise,
- » Water Bottles Banned in a Middle School Because of Alcohol,
- » 3 abuse cases in a local newspaper,
- » 3-year-old Obsessed with Looks, and
- » Superintendent, Teachers Indicted on Cash-for-Drugs Scam.

These are all integrity and societal issues. Students used to take drugs to get high; now they take drugs to get higher grades. Online gambling—I read this the other day—everyone does it, so just legalize it. I am just giving people what they want. What is the problem? Cool kids have marijuana cards. And on and on.

If you move into the adult realm, nothing changes; and it is no coincidence. There was an article written by Andrew Ross Sorkin on CNBC after the financial crisis in 2008. In 2015, it is even worse. The article concluded with: "Quite a few said that they had signed, or been asked to sign, a confidentiality agreement that would prohibit them from reporting illegal or unethical behavior." A theme with youth.

I think the pinnacle of an absence of integrity was this—and I was not aware of this until recently. A company that went public was hailed on Wall Street as one of the fastest growing companies. It glamorizes cheating—marital cheating—facilitates it and profits from it. A quote from the CEO: "If we base marriage on monogamy," i.e. integrity, "I think we are setting ourselves up for failure." "Undiscovered cheating is good." What is really repulsive is the activity: they sign 35,000 people up a day, 120 million visitors a month, 1.2 million communications every day to cheat on your spouse. Now I am not making an indictment on cheating, although



sentimental value of a picture. In my opinion, it is analogous to the miracle drug that has no long-term history of potential side effects. Realize that the real experts are probably between 14 and 18 years-old. What I tell kids is: this story has not played out; you do not really know how it is going to go.

This was a great article: *"How Not to Raise a Deluded Narcissist"* by Dr. Keith Ablow. A socially addictive world "prepares a whole generation to join our entitlement nation where untold millions don't believe in their genuine abilities anymore and don't even know how to go about finding them because there's no GPS system that will map out a path to self-esteem and no app that tests your courage."

There was a stinging exchange that I wanted to share with you from the movie *Birdman*. If you saw it, you may remember. If you did not, the movie was about a retired, superhero movie star that wanted to create a play and somewhat resurrect his career. He was at odds with his daughter, who was a typical 20-something. They had an exchange, and he said, "Listen to me; I'm trying to do something important."

Her response was: "This is not important; it's because you want to feel relevant again. Well, there's a whole world out there where people

fight to be relevant every day. You act like it doesn't even exist. Things happen in a place that you willfully ignore, a place that has already forgotten you. I mean who are you? You hate bloggers. You make fun of Twitter. You don't even have a Facebook page. You're the one who doesn't exist. You're doing this because you're scared to death, like the rest of us, that you don't matter and you know what? You're right, you don't. You're not important; get used to it."

Now if this is the backdrop, and the premise, of social media, isn't it a little bit scary that young adults feel this way?

In a review from the movie *Steve Jobs: The Man in the Machine*, a critic said,

"So he found a way to teach us how to be more like him, to cherish the shiny metal over the person standing next to us. Apple's marketing sold us on how technology connects the world, but in day-to-day life, the results are the opposite, the film notes. We stand in a crowd, staring into a glossy screen, scrolling into oblivion, lost to ourselves. Alone."

Do we even know?

On the opposite side, I had a conversation with a kid on our team who went on a church mission trip. It was one week in Mexico; one

of the caveats was you had to leave your cell phone at home. I thought, 'Well this is different.' I asked how was the adjustment? Her response was, "It was liberating. I felt closer to the people I was on the trip with, I felt more connected to the people I went to serve, I felt I got to know myself better, and I felt closer to God." Wow; don't we want that for kids every day?

Television is another culture destructor. I am not going to go through the TV shows, but if you watch them, they really are repulsive. This comment on *The Secret Life of an American Teenager*, which is on the ABC Family channel, received the highest rating from teenagers. I

felt this show was morally degrading because of the obscene lack of respect these teenagers have for themselves. Not just the teenagers, even the parents were downright atrocious, self-centered specimens.

Why it matters. Well this is obvious: kids who watch shows with alcohol are more likely to drink than those who do not. From a study on Millennials—that analyzed different generations—they are more self-interested, they like a life of luxury, helping others was less of a priority than any other group.

Kim Kardashian, who you all know. Worst offense: promoting appearance over achievement. It is not a personal indictment, but it is a theme. Primary talents: successfully promoting herself—she does it very, very well. Yet aside from her self-marketing, she has produced little else but a sex tape and thousands of tabloid covers. She teaches kids that it is not what you do that makes you important, it is how you look and how you leverage those looks. The video game she created netted nearly \$100 million with the goal of becoming a Hollywood A-lister with flirting, sex, alcohol, shopping and photo-shoots. This is where kids gravitate to.

The *Housewives* shows, across the board, feed a

very negative stereotype of women. Reality TV themes: the #1 theme is conflict. Going back to that text-chat session, that is exactly what it was: it could have been taken from the reality TV show. Conflict, sex, nudity, promiscuity, alcohol, partying, language, appearance, shallow human interaction. Why do girls aspire to be divas? If you watch the show *Naked and Alone*: you could not just be alone, you had to be naked and alone. Or: you could not just date, you had to be naked and dating. Clearly, it is a sponsorship, and it is a revenue, issue.

Are we raising resumes at the expense of high-character individuals? I would say the answer is yes. If you go back to the raise-the-bar of academics and athletics, versus integrity and character and compassion, it clearly is the case. How many parents even know if their kids work hard, care, respect others, are at risk, have any leadership skills, and deal with adversity? We as coaches do.

A contrast in behavior: random acts of kindness and compassion. Where did these go, with kids? I just need a hug; not a quick hug, but a long tight hug that makes me feel like I am wanted on this earth. *"Life's most urgent question is: what are you doing for others?"* - Martin Luther King, Jr.

Could kids ask this question? *"The most valuable learning is not about memorizing facts and figures. It is not about higher grade point averages and accumulating degrees. It is about life itself, and the impact on the heart."* - Rodney Smith

A policeman handcuffs himself to a potential suicide victim on the ledge of a building and throws away the key. Who would do that? A man jumps in a freezing-cold bay to save a dog. A runner guides the leader to the finish who became disoriented and stays in second place. Who does these things? An Ohio teen takes his great-grandmother to the prom. We ask for kids to not look at these examples, but be these examples. A man returns \$22,000 that had fallen off an armored car, and is shocked that anybody made a big deal about it because that is the way he lives his life.

So as a kid, or an athlete, I would ask: what about you? You walk into the pool area and see ten people playing a game to your right and a new swimmer standing alone to the left; where do you go? You are the last one to leave the team area and it is a mess; what do you do? There is only one kickboard left and two swimmers who

need one; who gets it? Your friends are negative in the locker room; what do you do? The coach needs help with pool covers in the wind and rain; do you go to the showers or the pool-cover reel?

As a coach: why pursue a character culture? We would advocate it is preparing the child for the path, not the path for the child. You do not get paid for it, you do not get recognized for it, you will get pushback, the time you commit to it will cut into coaching, and, for the most part, colleges do not recruit character. But the real benefit may very well be in the unseen: self-esteem; self-awareness; accountability; connectedness; improved academics; saying no to a drug, alcohol or sex introduction; choosing a role model over a social model; a better, healthier family life; a more productive college experience; being a better employee; dealing with a life crisis; becoming a true leader; and making a difference in the lives of others. And, yes, becoming a better swimmer and teammate: more drill-focused, better warm-up/warm-down, being on-time, positive in the locker room, train harder, train with focus, positive workout environment, better meet culture, more positive travel, and a better coach-swimmer relationship. You will mitigate, if not eliminate, burnout.

"Why Do Young Swimmers Burnout?" was an article in *Swimming Science*, where the author asked if anybody had a solution to the burnout in swimming. USA Swimming would pay handsomely. The answer is culture. We know that if you continue to improve, most likely you will stay in the sport. But a positive, supportive culture will generally keep everyone in the sport.

Why we do it? We want leaders; elite athletes; people who put the team first; people we trust implicitly; happier, healthier kids; better people; and impeccable travel. Culture creation for you as a coach: a culture of integrity, a culture of team, a culture of attitude, work ethic, compassion, leadership and caring. They are not concepts; they are ways of life. Stay ahead of the culture by creating the culture. If you could wipe your culture slate clean and rebuild it, what would it look like? Like the exercise earlier: what would be the ideal culture for your program?

A cultural pursuit: the comment says, "I haven't read your proposal yet, but I already have some great ideas on how to improve it." We should be constantly seeking to improve our culture.

A cultural shift: the idea is to create a tailwind and not a headwind. So what if challenge equated

to growth? So everything hard was equated to growth, which is a good thing. Can you create a culture where the harder the better—the path of most resistance. What about where success equals gratitude and humility; the more successful you become, the more humble you become. That is our culture. Status equates to mentor; the higher you move up the ladder, the more you must mentor other people to do the same. Teammate equates to leader. If you are on the team, you are a leader; you are either a leader in training, if you are young, or you are a mentor, if you are older; there is no other option and there is no middle ground. Gain equates to reciprocity. The team is the family—that is the culture. Humanity equates to compassion; if you are here, you are compassionate.

To be extraordinary, in something—we talk to kids about being extraordinary—find what is in your heart, what drives you, what is a strength; but be extraordinary at it. We did this exercise years ago and we asked kids: What are you extraordinary at? Most of the responses were blank—they said I don't really know. So we had a meeting, and I said, "But why not?" There is something that you have a drift towards. It may be compassion, it may be work-ethic, it may be leadership; but be extraordinary at it, make a difference, be a leader.

The real world: for three hours a day teenagers are fully engaged, with no use of a cell phone, no social networking/selfies/posts/tweets. They are not worried about their appearance, their makeup, clothes. They are not drinking. It is the healthiest environment possible for kids. That happens for 2-4 hours a day. It is our world, and it is proof that the old world of interactions and basic virtues still reigns supreme. It always is, and you all know that.

The life classroom. The mental and physical nature of sports magnifies the most critical things in life: work ethic, sacrifice, humility, resilience. We control those things; we can allow kids to flourish in those areas.

Why? Kids really do crave: respect, empowerment, the opportunity to make a difference, being challenged, and leadership. Even the worst kids do; they are desperately seeking these things.

A true team culture. The team is the most important thing. Kids need to understand that and they need to learn it. Whether the team is their family, the swim team, their community,

their college; you need to have a culture where you always look-out for the greater good and you take a back-seat. Are you the type of person or teammate that others would want to cheer for, support, and care about? Are you? We ask kids: do you know? If so, why? If not, why not?

"When he took the time to help the man up the mountain, lo, he scaled it himself," a Tibetan proverb, is the theme. Also: *"Your greatest success may very well be in creating success for others."* What if that was a cultural theme?

A positive attitude: eliminate negativity from your culture. There is only one way to act and think, and that is with a positive tone. Where does negativity enhance, athletes, sports, teams, cultures? It does not. We talked about complaining, it adds no value; kids know that, so why don't you just stop doing it.

A culture of embraced work and challenge; it is the path of most resistance. It is the essence of sports; why would you ever challenge this? So we asked kids: "If challenge creates growth and opportunity, why you would ever resist it? Why wouldn't the harder be the better?" It doesn't matter what you do, if you had a culture of the-path-of-most-resistance, the kids would see that growth created opportunity that way. Adversity introduces a man to himself.

In a culture of compassion and caring, can you create a culture where kids just care. They care about everyone, they care about the team. Two questions we ask the kids: How can you help? Who can you help? Imagine if kids came on the deck every day and those two questions were in their head: How can I help? Who can I help? How transformative that would be. Real social networking is compassion.

In a culture of perpetual leadership. If you are older, you know it is the most important thing that you teach leadership, that you mentor, that you leave a legacy of leadership. It is the most important thing you do. If you are young, it is that you are learning how to be a leader. It is the most important thing that you do; there is no middle ground. Whether you are 8 years-old or 18 years-old, there is no excuse and there is no middle ground. If you do not want to be a leader, or learn to be a leader, then you should do something else. That should be implied and inherent in sports.

A culture of humility—which is easy. A quote: "Humility finds those who credit themselves,

and credit finds those who humble themselves." So, again, the more successful you become, the more humble you should become. You have just eliminated ego from your program, and you have made kids healthier and happier.

A culture of protection. This may be the most difficult. The greater good should squeeze out that which does not support a positive culture. 90% of the kids should take a stand against the 10%. Group-think mentality should come from an ethical perspective. Create subcultures: a technique culture, a training culture, a travel culture, spirit/team attire, a parent-support culture, academics, mentorship. Whatever you want, create a culture, a way of life, a this-is-who-we-are mentality.

Ask for everything. Can we create something powerful, different, life-changing? Would you commit to being a part of that? Can you live your life with iron-clad integrity? Can you? Will you walk a different path, care more, help more, sacrifice more, lead more? They must think on a higher plane. Why it is important? You need to start young. Who will they follow? What culture will evolve? In hindsight, in over 30 years no swimmer has ever looked back and been proud of poor behavior—ever. The profound appreciation has been for caring, guiding and holding kids accountable. Most apologize and ask for forgiveness for anything they have done wrong.

The derivation of bad behavior. We generally know there are external influences. It comes from a disconnection from a few key concepts: sense of connection, self-worth, peer pressure, poor role models and crying out for help. 90% of bad behavior comes from a few key detachments that we can address.

This is a letter I wrote a group of high school kids years ago, that had done some bad things. I will share a little bit of it with you. It talks about culture.

That a small group of athletically-morally deficient individuals could taint and tarnish a 50-year reputation is more than bewildering, it is near criminal. You have no right to be an athlete, to represent a school, a sport or a coach. You embarrass us all and you will regret it. That you have attempted to justify your actions, and believe your own lies, only makes you that much more arrogant and ignorant. For all of your tutors, counseling, and top-rated academics, you have made some of the

most imbecilic choices a person can make.

For those of you who were sold a bill of goods of popularity, of glory, of adventure, of leadership, of tradition, shame on you. You were raised better. You were taught better. You were led astray and now you are guiding vulnerable down the same (self) destructive path. You are passing a baton that you don't even know why you are holding. You will virtually guarantee that more hopes, dreams, potential, character and integrity will be diminished. You and your protégés will never know the growth, inspiration, and life-changing lessons that come from sports.

That went to the whole team, and it was an attempt to mitigate cultural deviation.

The future. Our children and our culture will always be under assault from forces that have absolutely no interest in kids' emotional well-being, personal growth or human potential. That is a fact.

Your role and your power. Marketing does not care and only has a profit motive. Parents generally cannot stop it and do not want to get in the way. Kids do not know and are too vulnerable. You are the last line of defense. If you do not think you can change the culture, think about who wins and who loses. We as coaches can be the ones to redefine youth culture. It begins with sports and it ends with life.

I will conclude with a quote:

"I cannot believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. I think the purpose of life is to be useful, to be responsible, to be compassionate. It is, above all to matter, to count and to stand for something, to have made some difference that you have lived at all." - Leo Rosten

The kids it was addressed to—and I will be honest: it was a group of water polo players that were swimming—I addressed it aggressively and hit them pretty hard. They were close to near rock-bottom, anyways; and the parents could do nothing, the water polo coaches could do nothing. The kids that were not involved basically saw it for what it was, which was my intention. I think the kids that were at the heart of that were pretty much at a bottoming point, and I do not know that my moral message was going to change their behavior. I think since then, they have grown out of it, but at the time it was pretty bad. So

I wanted to make a statement; I wanted people to know right and wrong, and that their lead was not the right way to go, on the whole cultural message.

The parental response was supportive. I had a couple of meetings with parents of some of those kids, and they... you know, it was interesting. They kind of wanted to know what was the problem. I said, "Well, you can see the problem. Maybe your head's in the sand, but it's pretty obvious to everybody else. The kids know." I do not know, maybe neutral. But nobody would get upset with me: they know I care and that I am trying to do the right thing.

The problem is if the parents defend, if they look the other way, nothing changes. You know, it may be one day their kid gets into a car accident, or you know it is just.... But it is unfortunate... the point of the whole character talk was: we should never get to that point. If we just had that culture protection concept, where 90% of the kids that do do the right thing take a stand, then that stuff gets alleviated much earlier than it did.

Audience: Other than write nasty letters, what are the things that you do? As you go through a season, as you go through a week, as you go through a practice, what are your activities that you deliberately do or put in place to build results?

Heidary: Everything; it is a daily pursuit. Every day we are vigilant to integrity and culture—every day. Anything that takes away from a positive, high character culture, a team-first culture, is dealt with. Whether somebody walks out of the locker room a little bit late, a hint of negativity, disrespect, we are very, very aggressive.

The other thing we do, which I think is positive, is we sell this message constantly about humanity and about life and compassion. The few things that really matter in this world, we talk about constantly. So we try to sell those to teenagers. While they are getting bombarded with everything else that you know, we are trying to sell the opposite. Our challenge is to win that battle. So that at the end of the day they would say I chose this and I am not going to get caught up in that.

But it is everything. We give out articles, lectures, talks. We address kids individually, one-on-one. The kids know, culturally,

negativity is not allowed, disrespect is not allowed—ever. They do become empowered by it: they do not want to be a part of that. They want to be the ones that inspire, that lead, that are compassionate. So we do not really have a lot of issues, but it has been kind of a long process.

Audience: Do you have zero tolerance? Or do you given second chances, a third, a fourth?

Heidary: I think some people have said we are pretty hard-lined about what we do. We are hard-lined about the philosophy and the policies, but not with kids and saving kids. So, it just depends. If you do something, and I know your intentions are ill-willed and you really do not have respect for the program, maybe it is one chance—Listen, this is what you're doing and it's not who we are and you need to understand that. I think you should look in the mirror, but you can walk your own path but it won't be here. But we have had kids that have had serious problems—drug addictions—and we lock-in and we will not let go—we will not let go. If you want help and you want to do the right thing, we will not let you go.

So, you know, it just depends. I think it is what is kind of in the heart of the kid. If you are just a bad kid and you have no interest in living a better life and contributing to the culture, then you need to go your own way. But if you want help and you want to be a part of the program, we will do anything for you. We have had kids that have had addictions and severe life challenges, and we have not let them go.

In one instance we had, our board of directors said Hey, we know what's going on; you need to ask this kid to leave. I sat in a board meeting, with eight board members, and said, "With all due respect, I appreciate everything you do, we're not doing it. It's what we do, we're going to lock-in with this guy, and we're going to help save him." They said, okay, you can make your decision.

So it just depends, but there is no hard line and there is no set rule.

Audience: The same thing with parents?

Heidary: I hit a little bit on parents here, but I will tell you: the better the culture with kids you notice, the better the culture with parents. Those problems that seem commonplace kind of go away when you have a better relationship with the kids. So we do not really have it. At

the Senior level basically zero—zero parent problems. We have had some with the younger kids' parents, because they get a little more neurotic—you know, the 12-year-old's parents, they are always following kids and times. That is maybe one every three years that we have had to deal with. But a better culture with kids leads to a better culture with parents.

Audience: I know you founded this team on these concepts and ideas. But imagine you are walking into a team that is less-than-moderate or worse, where do you start?

Heidary: So the question was: we founded the team, did that make it easier? Yeah, maybe. But if you started with a team, what do you do? I think you do the same thing. I coach a high school team, as well. When I walked into that team it had a pretty toxic culture, and we just tried to rebuild the same lessons. Humanity and virtues, and what do you want to do with your life and what do you want to stand for and what should this team stand for. Will you buy-into that and will you commit to that.

It is that same cycle. You have the good kids that are all-in, and you have the vulnerable kids that you can sway and sell, and then you have got the bad kids. You kind of go one-by-one and you eliminate or you draw in. It takes a little more time. Changing a bad culture will take longer, but I think that the message is still the same: there is a right way to live your life, there is a right way to be an athlete. That was the slide on virtues should never change; they should be the constants, in life and sports. So we just keep going back to kids that way.

We give articles out about some of those cultural norms. Do you really want to get caught up in it? Is this who you want to follow with your life?

Be better than that, and be bigger than that and don't get caught up in it. You be the role model. So it just takes a little bit longer. ■