

DESERVING VICTORY

Winston Churchill's rallying cry for the British people during WW II was simple and succinct: hoping and praying for victory was fine, but deserving it was what really mattered.

What does it mean to "deserve victory"?

According to Churchill, victory comes only to those who work long and hard, who are willing to pay the price in blood, sweat, and tears. Hard work is also the basic building block of every kind of achievement: Without it, everything else is pointless. You can start with a dream or an idea or a goal, but before any of your hopes can be realized, you truly must deserve your success. This may sound old-fashioned in this age of instant gratification, but from the Sistine Chapel to the first transcontinental railroad to today's space shuttle, there's no mystery as to how these things of wonder were created. They were created by people who worked incredibly hard over a long period of time.

RICK PITINO

If you look closely at all great organizations, all great teams, all great people, the one common denominator that runs through them is a second-to-none work ethic. The intense effort to achieve is always there. This is the one given if you want to be successful. When it comes to work ethic there can be no compromises. Any other promise of achievement is fool's gold.

We can see the evidence of fool's gold around us every day. It's the people looking for the quick fix. The easy way to lose weight. The no-pain way to have a better body. The instant way to get rich. The easy, no-assembly-required way to feel better about yourself, as if all you have to do is follow some simple directions and your problems will disappear like frost in the noonday sun.

But shortcuts fail.

The bottom line: Nothing meaningful or lasting comes without working hard at it, whether it's in your own life or with people you're trying to influence.

Take our basketball program at the University of Kentucky: We see ourselves as the hardest-working team in America. That is our standard, the yardstick by which we measure ourselves. We try to live up to it every day.

Are we the hardest-working team in America?

Who knows?

And who cares.

The important thing is we believe it. That's our edge. In close games, when the pressure intensifies and the margin between who wins and who loses can be as thin as an eggshell, we believe that all our hard work, all the long hours, and all the perspiration will enable us to come out on top. Why? Because we deserve it. We deserve our victory; we feel we've swatted more blood than our opponents and will earn it the old-fashioned way.

In my years of coaching I have worked with many players and seen a variety of attitude problems. Some players were selfish. Some doubted what we were trying to do. Some weren't as committed to the team concept as they should have been. I can live with all that. What I can't live with is a player who won't work hard. If players are willing to give the effort, they have no problem with me.

And you know what?

What's true on the basketball court is true in business and in life. You want to succeed? Okay, then succeed. Deserve it. How? Outwork everybody in sight. Sweat the small stuff. Sweat the big stuff. Go the extra mile. But whatever it takes, put your heart and soul into everything you do. Leave it all out on the court.

But that won't happen unless you choose to make it happen. Success is not a lucky break. It is not a divine right. It is not an accident of birth.

Success is a choice.

* * *

People ask me, why a motivational book, Rick?

Simple.

This is what I do.

It's what I've done for twenty-two years, ever since I graduated from the University of Massachusetts in 1974 and began to coach. I learned quickly that motivating people would be the most important responsibility of my career.

When I became a head coach at Boston University, I was just twenty-four years old. I was stepping into a program that hadn't had a winning season in years. I knew that if I didn't find a way to get the players I'd inherited to play appreciably better in a very short time, my dream of coaching was going to end in a small college gym somewhere. I immediately began reading about the coaching legends like Vince Lombardi and

John Wooden, looking for clues as to what had made them connect with their players, looking for anything that I could emulate and use as my own.

What I found had nothing to do with strategy but rather with how these great coaches motivated players to achieve victory. Very early on, I learned that I was simply unleashing the potential in the people I was coaching. I was motivating them not by intimidation but by showing them that it was their choice to win or lose. By giving them an "outside" perspective on who they were and how they presented themselves to the rest of the team and everyone who watched them, I helped the players realize their strengths and weaknesses so that they could figure out how they were going to improve.

I have no illusions about myself as a basketball coach. I wouldn't dare say that I know more about basketball than other coaches or that I have a better strategy. I know that many other coaches work just as hard as I do, put in as many long hours, are just as dedicated. I learned long ago that coaches can be successful using many different philosophies and that there is no sure-fire method to success.

* * I have been successful as a coach because I've been able to get people to do things they didn't think they were capable of doing.

An example:

When I became the coach of Providence College in the spring of 1985, I was inheriting a program that had been languishing near the bottom of the very competitive Big East Conference ever since the conference began in 1979. I had been an assistant coach with the New York Knicks at the time, and there were people who warned me that the Providence job was a graveyard for coaches.

* * In one of my first meetings with the team, I listed four categories on the blackboard: basketball, school, work ethic,

family. The four supposedly most important parts of my new players' lives.

"How many of you want to be professional basketball players someday?" I asked.

This is for any sport!

Virtually every hand in the room went up.

"Well, since you've had a losing season last year and there is no one here in this room who averaged at least ten points a game last year, it's obvious you are not a success in the basketball part of your lives," I said, erasing one quarter of the blackboard. "And since I've seen your grade point averages, it's also obvious you aren't successful in school either."

The room was silent as I erased another quarter of the blackboard. Then I turned to the trainer and asked him how many players had been in the gym every day since the season ended. I wanted to know how many had been working on their games.

"No one, Coach," the trainer said.

* "So it's obvious you don't work hard either," I said, erasing another quarter of the blackboard.

Then I started raising my voice.

"Let's see," I said. "You aren't successful in basketball, you aren't successful in school, and you don't work hard. What's left?"

I paused for emphasis.

"Well, hopefully, you're a close team," I finally said. "Hopefully, you care about each other."

"Oh, we do, Coach," said a player named Harold Starks. "We're a close team."

I pretended to think for a minute.

"Okay, Harold, how many brothers does Steve Wright have?"

Starks slowly shook his head.

"What does Billy Donovan's father do for a living?"

RICK PITINO

Harold now looked like a deer stuck in the headlights.

“So you really don’t know anything about each other, do you?” I asked.


No one spoke.

I made each player stand up and talk about himself and his family. Then something wonderful happened. What had been twelve individuals suddenly had become a cohesive unit. The makings of a team.

Twenty-two months later that collection of individuals—now a team—would be in the Final Four, the greatest stage in all of college basketball. The message I tried to communicate had started the players on the road to becoming a cohesive, hardworking group of people whose change in attitude about themselves as individuals had made all the difference.

Fiery speeches and locker-room dramatics can be effective and certainly have their place, but you have to remember that their message is essentially short-lived. True motivation must go way beyond that; it must make people understand the process required to achieve success. In this case, that message was the bonding of individuals sharing the same dreams and goals.

But the most important thing I learned was that the keys to performing well—on or off the court—were the same for all of us. Whether it’s a college athlete playing at a level he never thought he could, or a salesperson striving to break records, or anyone taking more control of his or her life, the formula is the same.

 Hard work and togetherness help us to soar to the next level.

Success means different things to different people. For some, it’s money. For some, it’s power. For others, it’s the respect of their peers, or it’s self-satisfaction. For many, it’s the

DESERVING VICTORY

desire to have better relationships with the people in their lives.

Everyone wants to succeed, no question about that. Even people who are the most cynical and pessimistic. We all want to be more productive. We all want to feel as though we are reaching our full potential. We all want to feel as though we're controlling our destiny, that we're not being controlled by it.

I have often been approached to do a motivational book. Although I was convinced that I could tell people the correct way to go about achieving goals, I had always refused. Over the past several years, I have witnessed many rags-to-riches stories and have been around so many athletes who have gone on to accomplish things that even they once thought were impossible. Yet I have also seen promising people get swept up by victory and fall back into laziness and complacency. I have seen people face tough times and give up, shielding themselves with excuses you will never hear from people who are true lifelong winners. It is the knowledge I've gained from watching both these groups that makes me feel that I'm now ready to share what I've learned. You see, from these experiences and various efforts, it has been proven to me over and over that success is truly a choice for people, and there is a formula for a lifetime of successful behavior.

That can't be stressed enough.

We want to reach our dreams but often lack the proper direction necessary to see those dreams come true. We seem to be forever floundering without knowing why, our good intentions wasted, all but programmed for failure.

We all want to be recognized for what we do.

We all want to feel we have value.

The problem is that many of us don't know how to get there.

Most of us, of course, don't have a coach following us

around in our lives to make sure we're on track. I hope that this book will be your own personal "coach" or tool for success.

It will show you how to create discipline in your life, establish a work ethic, create a sense of self-esteem in both yourself and others, learn how to fight through the inevitable adversity we all encounter in life, and be able to accomplish things you never dreamed possible.

All these goals are attainable, but each requires action and commitment.

It's up to you.

WE NEED A PLAN OF ATTACK

A lot of young people come in to see me after finishing four years of college. I sit them down and ask, "What do you want to do with your life?"

Many of them give me a blank stare and then invariably say, "I don't know."

* ** "I don't know" is the classic sign of the underachiever. They don't know because they haven't thought about it. Or, if they have thought about it, it's in fuzzy, unfocused terms. Or else they have dreams but no idea how to achieve them. The point is that there's no plan, no vision of what's necessary to get from the starting point to the finish line. No discipline.

Such people have not established a motive. Nor have they thought about establishing one. However, that doesn't mean that a motive can't change completely or be altered to adjust to events or circumstances in life. But first you must establish the direction you are heading in, and there's only one way to do that. That's by planning.

Discipline can be many things. It can be punishment. It can be hard work.

To me, it's a code of conduct, an organized plan of attack.

Discipline is our plan, our awareness of where we are starting from and what road to take to arrive at our destination. Without a plan we end up going in many different directions, lost in some personal maze, some labyrinth that just takes us around and around, wasting time and energy and distracts us from our goals. Without a plan we keep covering old territory.

There's more to it than simply making the effort. The effort must be one with a purpose, a sense of direction. You must have a purpose, and that purpose is called motive. By creating this discipline and by combining it with organization and methods, you are leveraging this motive for positive results. You have no more doubts.

Why?

Because you have a strategy. Because you are dedicated to fulfilling it. Because you have paid the price to be successful.

THE 10 STEPS

Okay, you want to succeed. You're willing to do everything possible to realize your dreams.

Where do you start?

With the 10 steps.

The steps in this book represent the plan of attack. They mark the various way stations on the road to being more successful. They constitute the process of achieving dramatically greater results, whether it's at your job, in a classroom, whether you're trying to improve at a sport or hobby, or any activity you're involved in. It makes no difference. The techniques are the same.

The 10 steps are based on the premise that any of us can

achieve things we never thought possible—because **most of us constantly undersell ourselves**. We are conditioned to think we can't do things. We are conditioned to settle for less. We are conditioned to think our dreams are always going to be out of reach. We are conditioned to think that it's always going to be other people who grab life's brass ring. We are conditioned to fail.

But we don't have to.

We don't have to underachieve. We don't have to see our dreams recede in the distance. We don't have to fail. We can better our performance. We can reach our potential. We can change our lives.

The key is the 10 steps, the actions and behaviors rooted in more than two decades of my experience with success, with failure, and with learning how people's commitment—including my own—to these techniques makes the difference.

Attitude. Action. Persistence. These are the fundamentals we have to master in order to stretch beyond what we know. It is that self-challenge that keeps us reaching out for something better—that vision of ourselves running at peak performance all the time, constantly raising the level of our play.

But, again, we have to choose to commit to these fundamentals. Or we will simply maintain the status quo.

It's up to you.