

WINNER'S MINUTES: TEAM BUILDING STARTS WITH YOU

BE A YAYSAYER TO NURTURE POTENTIALITY

The greatest value you bring to a relationship is your enthusiasm. Your enthusiasm will help your team members develop to their greatest potential. Most of us have experienced naysayers in our lives—those people who pointed out every possible way that our dreams would not work, those people who tried to bring us down—and without strong enough resolve, we plummeted to the bottom of our doubts.

Your job is to be the yaysayer, the one who sees the possibilities in your team's dreams, the one who projects "You can" rather than "You can't." You are not the spoiler, determining limits to your team member's ability. You do not have to set your team members straight, define what goals they can attain, or save them from failure. You share your deepest convictions with your team members that all things are possible.

Your agenda in this relationship is to encourage your team members to establish their personal boundaries and then to help them visualize beyond their self-limiting beliefs.

My father was born right after the Great Depression. He grew up in a tiny house with one bedroom that all five children shared. He picked cotton by hand and had no spare change. He matured into someone who avoided financial risks. Even as he became increasingly successful, becoming the first child in his family to get a college degree and then a PhD, he saved each penny as if that coin would purchase his last meal. He pressed his conservative views on us. His message was to save, take no risks, and prepare for a worst-case scenario. He wanted to spare us from the pain of growing up as he had—from the pain of failure. He went further and defined what he thought we could and could not do. His message to us was: Do only what he thought we could do and no more.

His intentions, however honorable they were from his perspective, were limitations. Despite his best intentions for his children, he became a naysayer, instilling in us a fear of risks and having us believe in the limits he set. It took me thirty years to overcome these beliefs, to take financial risks and to embrace my own success.

Who are you to decide what someone else cannot do? How often have people surprised you by transforming and expanding their lives in ways you had not imagined or thought possible? How often have you been mistaken when you limited your definition of someone else?

NURTURE IN OTHERS WHAT YOU BELIEVE

While enthusiasm adds great value to the relationship, being a cheerleader is not enough. Cheerleading by nature is confined to the sidelines. Cheerleaders yell their rah-rahs and then join the spectators. They get the fans excited, and the fans in turn rally the team. They are entertaining, and they are part of the game, but they are not *in* the game.

As a player and as a coach, I barely noticed the cheerleaders. They were visible from the bench but were not a factor in to our wins or losses. They were not as much invested in the game as they were in their performance for the fans.

You want to be invested in your relationships with your team members. Being invested does not mean that you can affect the outcome of the game—whether people win or lose is up to them—but you show your support by believing in them. This belief, this show of faith, can be enough to help them remember who they really are.

In the 2006 basketball season, I had a 6'2" player, Mandy, who hated playing where she should be playing—in the paint posting up close to the basket. She wanted to shoot the 3-point shot. By mid-season, she was shooting a paltry 18% from the 3-point line, which is far below the 33% average. We were about to play the Glenville State College Pioneers at their gym to determine who was going to be number one in the conference. The Pioneers hadn't lost a game all season. I had a choice to make. I could tell Mandy to stop shooting the 3, or I could convince her to make those shots.

The practice before we played Glenville, Mandy passed up a wide open 3-point shot. I yelled, "Mandy, you shoot that shot. That's your shot. You're a great 3-point shooter. Don't think about it. Shoot it."

Trust that I was nervous saying those words. By encouraging her to shoot, I could be unleashing Pandora's Box. Giving Mandy the green light might mean that she would shoot even when should pass the ball.

During the first ten minutes of the game at Glenville State, we were down 13 points. Their crowd was in pandemonium, screaming so loud my players couldn't hear me in the huddle. The Glenville State Pioneers were having their way with us until Mandy hit three 3-pointers in a two-minute time stretch. Suddenly, we were back in the game; and by halftime, we led by one. The crowd's enthusiasm deflated, and the momentum swung to our favor. We went on to hand the Pioneers their only three losses in a 30-win season, and Mandy was a major factor in all those victories.