



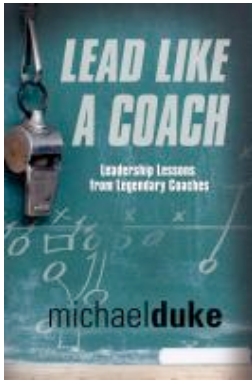
LEAD LIKE A COACH

Leadership Lessons
from Legendary Coaches



michaelduke





LEAD LIKE A COACH: LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM LEGENDARY COACHES is the how-to book in creating and sustaining excellence through teams. Michael Duke's passion and insight into coaching as a leadership style is on every page. Great coaches have mastered the keys to making each player great. The legends know what winning really means. This book is educational and inspiring, full of plenty of real world stories that will motivate you to lead like a legend.

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By Michael Duke

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Delivering the Bad News

Years ago, I became an ordained minister and pastored a church in Georgetown, Kentucky when I was in my young twenties. Late one night, I got a phone call, and the person on the other end said, “Is this the Michael Duke who preaches? We’re from a church in Red Oak, Alabama.” The person went on to say that they needed my help. When someone calls you late at night to ask for your help, it makes you pretty curious, right? Don’t forget, I was young—maybe just 23. I was certainly not very seasoned or experienced. So, the guy said, “Well, this is why I have called you. One of our members is a truck driver, and he’s at a hotel there in Georgetown, Kentucky. He has been calling all day long to check on his daughter. He’s very concerned that she’s taken her life, and in fact, she has. What we’re worried is going to happen is that he’s going to find out that she’s dead, and he’s going to turn around and barrel back here to Alabama in his rig and hurt himself. We have people on their way to Georgetown right now, but here’s what we want you to

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do. We want you to go to the hotel and tell this gentleman that his daughter is dead, and we want you to stay with him until the people get there from his hometown. Will you do that?”

Now, what do you say to a request like that? How do you say “no” to that? Of course, I said “yes” before I really knew what I was saying. Then, they gave me the clincher: “By the way, he’s armed. We want to make sure you know he’s armed.”

So, I called the state trooper, and he said, “Well, I’ll go over there with you.” By now, it was after midnight. So I asked the trooper to stay there just long enough to know that everything was okay. So, what happened? Well, the trooper went with me to the motel office, and they gave us the room number of the man from Alabama. The trooper knocked on the motel room door. When the door opened he verified the man’s identity and then he said, “This gentleman has something to tell you” and stepped back.

There I was. What do I say? How do I say it? How do you give someone such horrible news? Well, the last thing to do is

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hem and haw. Have you ever been in a conversation with your boss when he or she just couldn't seem to get to the point? There's bad news to be conveyed, and they just beat around the bush. Well, I learned the lesson at 23 that there's only one way to give bad news, and that is straight up. It's disrespectful, painful, and simply lacking in common courtesy to talk around the harsh truth.

Of course, talking to someone about their performance isn't as dramatic as telling someone about a death, but it's still a very uncomfortable conversation. Again, if your role as a coach is to make people better, you have to have the conversation that makes them better.

So, here's how I told that poor man about his daughter. I said, "Sir, I've got some terrible news. Your friends from Alabama have called me, and they know that you're concerned about your daughter. In fact, she has passed away. She has taken her own life today. They have asked me to come and sit with you until they get here. Will you let me do that?" So, I sat

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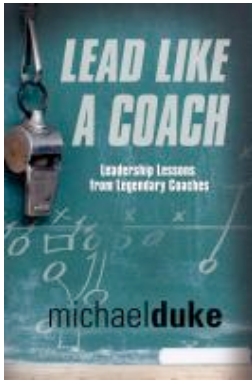
with him until his friends got there, and he drank and cried while we waited. We were in his hotel room, and his suitcase was open with the holstered revolver sitting there in plain sight. I've never seen or heard from this man again. But I learned that day that plain talk, straight up, is the only way to give bad news.

You simply say, "I need to talk to you about your performance. It's less than satisfactory." Or you say, "We have to talk about your attitude. You have missed this expectation, and here's the immediate consequence and ultimate consequence." Be clear about what was unacceptable so that they know how to get better. Don't leave them guessing. Describe it so that they understand how to improve and exactly what the consequences of continuing the behavior will be. Perhaps the ultimate consequence of continuing the behavior will be losing their job. If so, they need to know that. You can say, "I have to have a conversation with you, and I'm not going to enjoy it. But we have to have it anyhow, because unless you get this, you're not going to be the best that you can be."

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Many times, as coaches, we're not man or woman enough to tell our team members what they need to do to keep their jobs. Then, when they're terminated, they're surprised. No one should ever be surprised to be fired. It's your job to let any team member know the seriousness of their behavior or attitude problem. In coaching moments, clearly state what they did wrong, how they missed the mark, what the consequence is, and how you're going to help them get better. It's relational, but it's clear in terms of the expectations.

In my seminars, we do role-playing to create hypothetical but common coaching moment scenarios. What follows are four examples of these role-plays.



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