

# Leadership Lessons from Gonzaga Basketball and Coach Mark Few

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### Those of you that

know me are very aware that I am a passionate supporter of Gonzaga basketball and head coach Mark Few. I read everything that is Gonzaga Basketball. Coach Few has built a national program of unimaginable success at Gonzaga. Twenty straight trips and counting to the NCAA Tournament would attest to this success. This seems unimaginable for a small school located in Spokane. I'd like to share what I feel are the leadership lessons all of us can learn from Coach Few and the Gonzaga program as we work tirelessly to provide outstanding leadership in all the schools we have the honor to lead.

### 1) MAKE THE BIG TIME WHEREVER YOU ARE!

Mark Few has had many opportunities to leave Gonzaga for more money to a "bigger school" in a "better conference." More than a dozen times, Few has been romanced by programs that have hung national-championship banners. Time and time again he declined these offers and chose to stay loyal to his university, his players and staff.

We at AWSP are very aware of the principal churn throughout our state. The average stay for a principal in a school in Washington state is three years. Research shows that it takes anywhere from five to seven years for sustained and systematic positive change to take place in any organization.



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Personally, I am beginning my 26th year as a principal and this is my third principalship. I challenge you to think about your staff, students and community when you feel the need to move to the next school or district. Positive, sustained change can only take place when the leadership in the building stays consistent.

### 2) SET A CLEAR VISION.

Mark Few and other leaders at Gonzaga University had a clear vision on how to make Gonzaga basketball "big time." The first step in the mid 90's was to influence the McCarthy family to invest millions

in the building of McCarthy Athletic Center (Gonzaga's home court), which forever changed the landscape of Gonzaga basketball. If not for that one influential conversation, Gonzaga may still be playing in a small, high school-like gymnasium. With the continued success of basketball and the revenue it produces, the vision has been to continue to upgrade both academic and athletic facilities for all faculty and students.

Your vision, as the leader of a school, needs to be just as clear to all stakeholders. Does everyone, including your students and families, understand the goals you are working to accomplish? Are all stakeholders included in the creation and the work necessary for attainment of these goals? Is everyone pulling the rope in the same direction? To produce positive results, everyone needs to be on the same page and working together to achieve success. And, you

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need to be passionate and unwavering in your leadership around continuous improvement.

### 3) RECRUIT (HIRE) GREAT PEOPLE.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that success at the collegiate level in athletics is extremely dependent on recruiting talented players and coaches. Coach Few has been quoted as saying this to an assistant coach: "Of course, you can only make guys so much better. Player development is crucial, but so is recruiting. You're a sharp basketball guy. You're doing a great job with player development. But if one wants to make a mark in this business... find a way to get great players." And, Gonzaga has recruited many great assistant coaches and players to become a part of the program. Just as important, Gonzaga has recruited assistant coaches, staff and players that fit their system.

In my opinion, hiring is the most important task we do as leaders of our schools. It is imperative that you hire the very best for your students and community. I remember, as a principal in a small rural district, I went to Montana in search of great teachers.

Additionally, you want to do everything to ensure that your school is one that the best teachers are attracted to. Remember that it isn't programs that teach kids — it's teachers. Take the time necessary when hiring. Make sure your hires

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fit the culture of your school. Hiring often takes place when you are the most tired: late in the year or in the summer. You may be great at teacher development, but many would argue that the very best teachers are somewhat inherently great. Hire the best!

### 4) CREATE A FAMILY OF TRUST AND CELEBRATE SUCCESS.

Many players will talk about the family chemistry that Gonzaga and Coach Few have instilled the program. Many ex-players stay in Spokane to raise a family. An assistant that has been at many programs prior to Gonzaga said this: "Most places talk about family, and that's all BS. This place is truly family, and they live it. You can feel it just being on campus. The professors, the administration... it just seems everyone is here for the same reason. I never felt that before on a college setting."

I firmly believe the culture of your building is the most important leadership factor in increasing student achievement. And, I believe you can feel this when you visit a school. I want staff and students knocking the door down to work or go to school at Ferris High School. We often talk with each other about our

"Ferris Family." Create opportunities for staff to have fun together. Take time to celebrate your successes and achievements with staff, students, and the community. Lead in an environment that develops trust and where people truly care for one another. Don't let the need for efficiency override the need to build rapport with your staff and school community. Instill in your staff the love of coming to work each day. Steven Covey says, "Without trust, we don't truly collaborate; we merely coordinate or, at best, cooperate. It is the trust that transforms a group of people into a team."

We can learn so many leadership lessons from other leaders, like Mark Few. The examples above are just a glimpse of how Gonzaga Basketball and Mark Few have influenced my leadership development. We need to be passionate about using the influence we have to inspire other leaders, adult learners, and teachers to do incredible work. The great thing is you do not have to do this alone. ■



Ken Schutz is principal of Joel E Ferris High in Spokane Public Schools and is serving as AWSP president for the 2018-19 school year.