

Cain Explains 8 Great Habits For Baseball Coaches

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Special To Collegiate Baseball

BURLINGTON, Vermont — One of the all-time best selling self-help and leadership books is *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Dr. Steven R. Covey. Covey has since written *The 8th Habit - From Effectiveness To Greatness*.

In this article, top Peak Performance Coach Brian Cain looks at breaking down the 8 Habits for coaches and gives them some strategies they can use to help be more effective.

Habit 1 – Be Proactive

Great coaches take responsibility for everything that happens in their programs.

They take responsibility for their time and for making sure that every day they are working towards their goals.

When you are proactive, you take control of your time and you stay in green lights.

When you start acting reactively you fall into red and yellow lights more quickly.

“Being proactive is one of the traits I see most often in great coaches,” Cain said.

“Being proactive means that you have prepared for the unexpected and are comfortable being uncomfortable. I think one way that coaches can be more proactive with their players and to get them expected for the unexpected is to create a list of various situations that they may face throughout the season and have their players run through that list with mental imagery and visualization as a part of their everyday practice routine.

“One of the things that stuck with me the most about being at Cal State Fullerton and having had the chance to work closely with George Horton, Dave Serrano and Rick Vanderhook was how detailed they were in their preparation and planning.” Cain said.

“I remember when they used to pass out the calendar for the season and how detailed the entire process was. They had identified what they wanted to teach and when they were going to teach it. There were no stones left unturned.

“The emphasis was totally on the process and often Fullerton teams would start the season slow, but you always knew they were going to be there at the end.

“Take the 2004 team for example that started 15-16 and went on to be National Champions. That type of turnaround doesn’t happen unless you have began with the end in mind. If you have created the image and the mentality of

being champions, you will always have a chance of getting there. I truly believe that you can never outperform your self-image and that you must create the blue print for success in your mind before your body will be able to know what it is supposed to do.

“I talk a lot with athletes about being able to put off what they want in the moment for what they want most. Unfortunately I have seen a lot of athletes and teams that choose drugs, alcohol, hazing and other detrimental choices over championships. They don’t realize it in the moment and often regret their decisions afterwards, but what the root cause of those poor decisions is, is that they have failed to keep the end in mind.

“They have lost the vision of what they want to become and where they want to go. To help keep that image paramount and in the forefront of their minds, I encourage coaches to get a photo of the stadium where their conference or state finals will be or a business card with the team photo on one side and everyone’s phone numbers on the back so that they can constantly be carrying a piece of the team with them. That card will often serve as a reminder for athletes to make the type of decisions that will benefit what the team wants most, and let them avoid getting hooked in the moment.”

Habit 3 – First Things First

Effective coaches will put themselves and their teams first.

One of the black holes that coaches must step into but not get lost in is the black hole created by things outside of your control.

Coaches can get sucked into media, fans, community appearances, scouting, recruiting and a whole host of other things that need attention, but can take your time away from what is most important, your team, your preparation and your family.

“Great coaches prioritize things on a daily basis and have systems and routines in place to help them be most effective. The word system is an acronym for Save Yourself Stress Time Energy and Money. When you have a system you will be able to manage all the media and public appearances and still have enough time to prepare with your staff for what is most important, today’s practice. You will also be able to say no and not beat yourself up about it.

“In today’s coaching profession, internet, e-mail and cell phone are things that can zap you of your time. I encourage coaches to turn the cell phone off at practice and a part of their preparation and practice routine. Also, when they get home, I encourage them to turn a period of time where they turn the cell phone off so that they can have that 30 minute or one hour of uninterrupted family time.”

Scott Jackson, pitching coach at Liberty University has taken this a step further and put a Daddy’s Home reminder sign next to the front door of his house. Having young kids at home who need your full attention can be difficult. Having systems in place can keep you at your best both when on the field and with the family.

“I put the Daddy’s Home sign next to my front door and will not allow myself to walk into the house until I have totally let go of the days game or practice.” Jackson said.

“As a coach you totally immerse yourself in what you do and you can often let your coaching life interfere with your family life. The sign has helped me to remember to ‘flush it’ before I walk into the house.

“It has also helped my wife and my children to know that on the days when I come home and stay in the garage for sometimes 30 minutes, that I am dealing with something that needs to be taken care of so that when I walk through that door I can be Super Dad. This simple routine and sign is a good reminder for me and has really helped me separate family and field and has helped me to keep first things first and live in the moment.”



BRIAN CAIN

Habit 4 – Think Win–Win

Coaches are only as good as the support staff they have around them. Manage your relationships well. Think of a working together vs. working for relationship and think win-win. Make sure you show that you care about their careers and development and that you will help them to get better and advance their careers. The better your assistants become, the better your program becomes, and the better you look as a head coach.

“Win-win situations in baseball and coaching come in the form of people working together to achieve things they may not be able to do on their own.” Cain said.

“I look at weight training, mental game training, nutrition and academic advising as areas in which a win-win can be achieved by the coach and specialized. When the two can be on the same page there will be more synergy and a greater win-win for the athletes in the program.”

Habit 5 – Seek First To Be Understood, Then To Be Understood

Taking the time to get to know your players and to invest time into your relationships with your players, seeking first to understand what they are going through will allow you to develop a greater relationship and lead to better results on the field.

“I have been very fortunate to spend some time with Dave Serrano when he was an assistant at Cal State Fullerton and then as the head coach at UC Irvine and I think one of the things most impressive about Dave is his ability to relate with the players.” Cain said.

“He is extremely knowledgeable of the game and is one of the best pitching coaches in the country, but what makes Dave so special is that he understands that athletes

don't care what you know until they know that you care. He invests a lot of time into getting to know his players and I think that really helps him to get the most out of their ability as a program.”

Habit 6 – Synergize

2+2=5 or more. Synergy happens by surrounding yourself with others who believe in you and help to make you better. Synergy happens

when you are in green lights and are have developed a climate amongst your program where athletes and coaches help take you to a place you could not get to by yourself.

Together we are stronger than when we stand as individuals. Finding ways to incorporate team building activities into your routine practice plan is a great way to help develop team chemistry and synergy in your program.

“Developing a team mission statement or running your team through some simple team building activities is a great way to develop synergy.”

Cain said, “We have a *How To Develop Championship Team Chemistry* training package that shows you about 20-25 different drills and games to help develop team chemistry. Great programs have a team chemistry that allows them to achieve things they could not do on their own. You can get this program online at www.briancaim.com

“One of the best things you can do as a coach is get your leaders or protectors of your program and explain to them that you want to have a team building activity each Wednesday the last 15 minutes or so of practice. Then put them responsible for coming up with ideas. Something as simple as an egg toss or a dizzy bat race can work. When you put it on the team

to come up with the idea, they will usually be more creative and more fun. When the athletes have a say, they also take ownership and that goes a long way.

“There is a caution with this however. As a coach you want to be sure you communicate with your leaders about what they are going to do. A team at a college I was working with did a dizzy bat relay race and when one of the freshman went, the seniors came out and ripped the kids clothes off.

“What was funny to them was actually hazing and could have gotten the coach fired. As I put my athletic director's hat on, you want to be very clear of the expectations and guidelines. Those type of activities will cause class divide and will cause team chemistry to go south. They can also cause emotional and psychological harm that can cause a bad situation for the coach.”

Habit 7 – Sharpen The Saw

Sharpening the saw means continuing to refine and rejuvenate your greatest tool... you.

Getting adequate exercise, rest and relaxation and having an understanding of nutrition and how you can eat to win is an area that coaches and athletes need to tap.

Having consistent sleep patterns, consistent eating schedules and consistent performance routines helps lead to consistent performance.

“Coaching is a tough profession. At the collegiate level, your livelihood depends on the performance of 18-22 year olds.” Cain said.

“At the high school level, if you took the amount of time put in compared to your compensation, you would realize that often you could make more pumping gas. What drives coaches is not the money, but the relationships, the competition of the game and the pursuit of excellence.

to do at your best as a coach, you have to make sure you are taking care of your physical and mental health. Having a routine in which you exercise regularly, eat a well balanced and prescribed

nutritional program as well as have things you can do to escape from the stress and pressure of competitive athletics is critical.

“I worked with a football coach who would go fishing for an hour on game day and worked with a baseball coach who would get a massage every Wednesday during the season. Those are just two examples of things you can do to help keep yourself rejuvenated and energized to be your best everyday. Remember that your energy is contagious. If you are flat because you missed a workout or a meal, your team will be sure to follow.”

Empty your cup young grasshopper. The greatest coaches in the game are constantly learning.

They are the coaches who are learners and understand that the knowledge you had five years ago was effective in a world that no longer exists.

Vince Brown, a California coaching legend and athletic director at Foothill High School, explained it best.

“I remember early in my career as a coach going to the ABCA and sitting in the front row with some of the games best.” Brown Said.

“Rod Deadeaux, Pat McMahan, Ron Polk, Ron Fraser, they were all in the front row and they were all there to learn. That snuck with me for the rest of my career. The best coaches were also the best learners.”

Habit 8 – From Effectiveness To Greatness

Greatness is achieved by having positive and productive habits as well as consistent routines that you can follow on a daily basis. It is learning from your mistakes and

Greatness is becoming a student of yourself and knowing what you need to do to be at your best on a daily basis.

It's knowing how to get from yellow and red lights back to green as quickly as possible.

“I look at moving from effectiveness to greatness as doing what you know on a daily basis.” Cain said.

“The two words I hear most as a peak performance coach is, ‘I Know.’ I hear that from coaches and athletes all the time. I then come back with the equation K-A=0. Knowledge minus action gets you nothing.

“It does not matter what you know. All that matters is what you do. The best team in baseball never wins. The team that wins is the team that plays the best. Moving from effectiveness to greatness is taking action on what you know is the right thing to do.

“We all know that alcohol and tobacco are bad for our health, yet we still have coaches and athletes who dip and drink. We know that imagery and visualization can dramatically help our performance as can eating during competition. For whatever reason, many people do not utilize their mental skills or have a nutritional plan.”

(Note: *The 8 habits of highly effective coaches is based off the ground breaking book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Dr. Stephen R. Covey. Great coaches practice, play and live in the present moment and do everything within their control to give themselves the best chance for success. They understand that winning is a byproduct of doing the little things the right way. For more on how you can be at your best on a daily basis, join the Brian Cain Mental Game Inner Circle at www.briancaim.com*)