



Reflections of a Trip Around the Sun

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Most people enter into a profession with the dream of rising to the top of that field. Coaching is no exception, as the majority of young coaches enter the job because of the appeal of competition, which they learned as players and then carried it with them in their individual journey. They set a personal challenge to compete with colleagues to rise through the ranks and establish themselves as a leader of a team or program.

I was officially given the opportunity to achieve this milestone of leading a program one year ago today. I took a chance on a school that some have publicly called “one of the toughest jobs in the state of Texas” despite not truly feeling like I was ready to be in this position. I battled self-doubt and wondered out loud if I was qualified or ready to assume this role. And just like when I became a dad -- another title that no one ever feels truly ready for until they have to jump right into it -- I learned many lessons very quickly and understood the phrase “trying to drink from a fire hose” on a new level. As I reflected on these lessons and the many challenges our communities faced during this trip around the sun, I came across some bits of wisdom that I would like to impart on you in case any of it can apply to your own personal path through the coaching profession.

1. **To do this job, you must be able to adapt.** To paraphrase a good buddy of mine, once you’ve been through hell, you don’t mind the heat. Many times this year, it felt like we were going through certain circles of hell. But the fact of the matter is that we were just experiencing things differently than we were used to. Things were challenging and unusual, but none of it was beyond what we could handle. We just had to adapt to the new rules of engagement and do the best we could. This is the same thing we do each year, we just had more adjustments to make. This is the beauty of our sport and our level, that we are not ever able to

relax. As soon as you feel like you have things under control, graduation happens, grades happen, staff changes happen, districts realign, and teams mold into new versions of themselves daily. Without the ability to adapt to new parameters, we end up stuck in last year’s routines and this year’s opportunities have passed us by.

2. **Perspective is everything.** Every situation can be seen as positive or negative depending on how you frame it and what context you choose to view it. Is water a good thing? You will get a different answer from someone who has spent 24 hours stranded in a desert and someone who has spent 24 hours stranded at sea. When you lose a game 80-0, you can look in the mirror and call yourself a bad coach, or you can see yourself as someone who learned 80 new details that need to be taken care of before you experience the success that you want. The choice is there for you to take something positive of a bad situation or something negative of a good situation. How many players and coaches have you seen upset after a big win because their selfish motives get in the way? The frame of mind that you approach things determines how a day goes, and this is a skill you can train in low pressure situations so that when the lights come on, you are able to see the good in every play, every day, and every action that you take.
3. **Focus on your people, and you can’t be wrong.** The number one priority of a coach is his or her players. Always. I told my team early in the year that they could still be players without coaches, but by definition I wouldn’t be a coach without any players. This job involves making hundreds of big and small decisions that

have to be made every week, and the impact of some of those decisions is felt by every member of the program. The best approach is to outsource the smaller decisions, and when the big ones have to be made, you'll still have the energy to think clearly. If you have to make a decision and you aren't able to think clearly, always choose what is best for the kids. If kids aren't involved, choose what is best for your staff. This is easier said than done and I'm certainly still learning how to do this, but it's ultimately the best approach to coaching.

4. **Games are supposed to be fun.** As I walked out to a soccer game on a beautiful 75 degree afternoon, I realized that part of my job description involves enjoying days like this and watching sporting events. Coaching is a profession for those of us who refuse to grow old. We are organizing games. We are playing games. We are watching games. Games are universal entities created to spread enjoyment to an individual or group. Kids of all ages and in every country in the world play games to be able to smile and enjoy times with those around them. We get to do it for a living. I have tried to take a step back before every game of my career and made sure that I enjoy some aspect of it, whether it is the performance of the players, the excitement of the crowd, the energy of the band, or the smile on the face of a coach when a scheme is executed according to the plan.
5. **Gratitude can have a profound impact on any situation.** Most of all, the prevailing feeling that has permeated through my office is gratitude. I am thankful for the opportunity to be in this position. I am thankful for the athletes that sacrifice so much for each other. I am thankful for the school and district administration who do what they can to make sure that we feel supported. I am

thankful for the coaches I work with and their relentless pursuit of growth. I am thankful for my family and the sacrifices they make to allow me to do what I love. I am thankful for my colleagues who have provided so much insight into their experiences and have helped answer any question I may have. And I'm thankful for the lessons I have learned that allow me to coach this way. When the good outweighs the bad, the job doesn't feel like a chore.

6. **People are people.** No one is perfect. Everyone has individual flaws, and every group will have good and bad people in it. But we are all people. We all have strengths and flaws. Sometimes we get caught up in power struggles and take things personally, but the reality is that everyone is doing their best with what they have. Some people haven't acquired the tools to handle difficult situations the way others would, and it makes them seem weak or ignorant in that instance. That's why we have to be able to help each other and sometimes have difficult conversations in order to grow together. No one, myself certainly included, has ever been fully prepared for a job or situation before they encountered it. But as long as we take those challenges and learn from them, the people we are in charge of will be able to develop into success stories.
7. **This is my unique experience.** I don't have the same career as anyone else. I don't have the same personality as anyone else. I don't have the same team as anyone else. If I were to try to compare myself to others or follow the exact model that any other coach has put forth, I would not be successful. I have to be able to discern what the right path is for me and for my team. I decided when I began this that I would stay true to myself and do things my way. If they didn't work, I would be able to look at

myself in the mirror and know that I did my best and that I did it my way. Maybe my way is not right to lead a program. But I am thankful for the opportunity to find out, because some won't get that. When I do find my own success, no one else will be able to follow it because their journey will be unique to them.

There is a really good chance that I'll never achieve the level of success of Nick Saban or Bill Belichick. But the reality is that those guys are who they are because they are special, and none of us will ever have the same combination of talent and experiences that they had which ultimately brought them to their current position. We must embrace who we are and what our journey is, knowing that the final destination is different for everyone. Some of us will be championship coaches, some of us will finish with a .500 record, and some will never even get the chance to be a head coach. But we will all leave our marks in our community, our schools, and in our profession. Because we are in the business of influencing others, and there is no such thing as neutral influence, only positive or negative. By waking up every day and choosing positive, we will only create more positive experiences for those around us.



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