

University of Nevada, Reno

**Successful NCAA Division I Baseball Coaches' Understandings of their Roles and  
Responsibilities as Leaders in a Higher Education Context**

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
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by

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## **Abstract**

Certain coaches seem to have a basic blueprint for success that consistently puts them at the forefront of their respective industries. Within this blueprint are various components of leadership. The purpose of this study was to identify how successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context. Eight NCAA Division I college baseball coaches were interviewed. Each guided his respective program to at least three regional playoffs over an 11 year span (2005-2015). A qualitative analysis indicated two major themes, and one minor theme. The two major themes were Winning and Coach as CEO, and the minor theme was Need for Personal Life. First, the coaches recognized that their main responsibility was to win. Before the team can win collectively, each member of the program had to win individually. Second, as the CEO of the organization, coaches understood that it was their responsibility to create a culture of winning throughout their program. This was done by setting high expectations for assistant coaches, and focusing on the overall development of student-athletes. One of the main challenges in strengthening a culture of winning was the entitled beliefs and behaviors of student-athletes. Third, coaches realized that in order to truly be a successful leader, they had to balance their personal and professional responsibilities.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the coaches and leaders who have inspired me.

Your thoughts, beliefs, and ideas have made me realize my true passion. For that, I am forever grateful.

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

### **Background**

Researchers have long been intrigued by the role leadership plays in creating successful organizations. Since the early 1900's, researchers have investigated various military (Bass, 1990; Jago, 1982; Fiedler, 1964, 1967; Hemphill & Coons, 1957; Stogdill, 1974), business (House, 1971, 1976, 1996; Evans, 1970; House & Mitchell, 1974; Garrett, 2009; Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, & Cogliser, 2010; Mann, 2003; Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001), and educational organizations (Stogdill, 1974; Amey, 2006; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015) to identify the most important components of successful leadership. A substantial amount of research has been done on leadership within higher education, but little has been conducted on intercollegiate athletics. As athletics play an important role in most institutions of higher education, it is important to understand the leadership of coaches and how they balance their various roles and responsibilities as leaders against the professional responsibilities of coaching a successful program. The focus of this study was leadership in intercollegiate athletics, specifically baseball. Specifically, a selected sample of NCAA Division I baseball coaches was recruited. Each coach led his respective program to the NCAA regional play-offs at least three times over the past eleven years (2005-2015). Semi-structured interviews were the main data source for this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been little empirical research on leadership responsibilities as they relate to NCAA intercollegiate athletics. Division I head coaches have many conflicting responsibilities, such as player development, fundraising, NCAA compliance, winning

games, and being a part of an institution of higher education. A coach can have good relationships and interactions with the coaching staff and student athletes, but if he does not have a winning season, the fans and alumni consider him an ineffective leader. Given the high profile of intercollegiate athletics, an understanding of how a coach understands his various leadership responsibilities may provide valuable information to assist coaches in being more effective leaders.

### **Design**

Constructivist grounded theory guided this study. The essence of constructivist grounded theory is to explore how people construct meaning of their activities or a particular situation (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz suggested a constructivist approach, “places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (p. 130). Charmaz continued, “constructivist grounded theorists take a reflexive stance toward the research process and products and consider how their theories evolve... The theory depends on the researchers view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it” (pp. 130-131). This study sought to examine how successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches construct meaning of their professional leadership roles and responsibilities. Specifically, relationships and interactions with the coaching staff and student-athletes were examined, followed by an exploration of how they balance these roles against the professional responsibilities of coaching a successful baseball program.

Since one of this study’s goals was to examine complex characteristics, such as one’s thought processes, leadership qualities, values, and culture, a qualitative methodology has a greater potential of conceptualizing this detailed information. In

addition, a qualitative research design was used because it is more conducive to the investigative nature of this study. Finally, a constructivist grounded theory design, utilizing a semi-structured interview format, was the most appropriate way to analyze characteristics associated with each coach's individual experiences. The intent of the design was to allow the researcher to examine the nature of the experience from the perspective of those involved.

### **Research Question**

How do successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their various roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study of successful NCAA Division I head baseball coaches consisted of some of the very best coaches over an eleven year-span (2005-2015), and aimed to explore the highly competitive landscape of NCAA Division I athletics where winning is an important variable of coaching success. While the main focus of this study was to identify how successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their various roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context, a subsequent focus was to examine the relationships and interactions with coaching staff and student-athletes and to look at how they balance their roles against the professional responsibilities of coaching a successful program.

As NCAA Division I baseball continues to develop into a major collegiate sport, the pressure to win, while simultaneously run an NCAA compliant program, will be imperative. Therefore, the need to increase the leadership knowledge of collegiate baseball coaches is essential. It is anticipated that through identifying the understandings

of this elite sample of coaches' roles and responsibilities as leaders in higher education, the information acquired could be utilized as a framework for current and future coaches. Additionally, the potential findings could be a valuable resource to not only other NCAA Division I collegiate baseball coaches, but coaches of all other intercollegiate sports.

The significance of this study is paramount as it attempts to introduce a field of scholarly leadership research that has yet to be substantially investigated. Within the vast framework of scholarly leadership research, NCAA intercollegiate athletics coaches have received very little attention. The results of this study may be utilized to not only help intercollegiate baseball coaches, but provide insight into how all intercollegiate athletics coaches understand their roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### *National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)*

The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a non-profit association that regulates student-athletes, institutions, conferences, organizations, and individuals. The NCAA manages the athletic programs of most colleges and universities in the United States. The NCAA currently has three-divisions: Division I, Division II, and Division III. Division I and Division II schools are able to offer athletic scholarships to student athletes. Division III schools are only able to offer academic scholarships.

#### *Division I*

Division I is the highest level of intercollegiate athletics sanctioned by the NCAA. Most schools in Division I are in major athletic conferences, have larger budgets, more elaborate facilities, and are able to offer more athletics scholarships than Division II and

III. Division I schools must meet minimum financial aid awards for their athletic programs. Additionally, a Division I school cannot exceed the maximum financial awards for each sport. For athletic scholarship purposes, Division I sports are divided into two categories: head-count and equivalency. Head-count sports limit the total number of individuals who can receive an athletic scholarship, but allows each student-athlete to receive up to a full-scholarship. For example, football is a head-count sport and most Division I football teams have 85 scholarships. Equivalency sports limit the total financial aid a school can offer in a given sport to the equivalent of a set number of scholarships. For example, baseball is an equivalency sport and most Division I baseball programs have 11.7 athletic scholarships that must be distributed to 27 players. Additionally, those 27 players must receive athletic aid equal to at least 25 percent of a full scholarship (NCAA Manual, 2015).

#### *Omaha*

Omaha, Nebraska is the location of the College World Series, which is the annual NCAA Division I baseball championship tournament that takes place in June of each year. The eight participating teams are split into two, four-team, double-elimination brackets with the winners of each bracket playing in a best-of-three championship series.

#### *Regional Play-Offs*

The NCAA college baseball regional play-offs are held each year at the end of May/early June. Sixty-four Division I programs, out of the eligible 298, are selected for the regional play-offs. Thirty-one teams are given an automatic bid as champions of their conference, and 33 teams are selected as “at-large” by the NCAA Division I Baseball Committee. During the team selection process, eight programs are given national seeds.

These eight programs automatically host a super-regional if they advance. The format consists of 16 host-universities that include four teams, seeded one through four. The regional play-offs are a double-elimination bracket with the winner of each regional advancing to the super-regionals (NCAA Manual, 2015).

### *Entitlement*

According to Hams (2012), entitlement is an attitude, a way of looking at life. Those who have this attitude believe they do not have to earn what they get. They get what they want because of who they are, not because of what they do.

### *Organizational Culture*

Organizational culture encompasses the values that contribute to a unique environment within an organization. Needle (2004) suggests that organizational culture represents the collective beliefs and principles of organization members and is a product of such factors as history and strategy. Culture includes the organization's values, vision, mission statement, symbols, and language.

### *Travel Baseball*

Travel baseball is considered a higher level of competition in youth baseball, which includes little league, recreational leagues, and high school baseball. There are generally competitive try-outs and costly, individual expenses associated with joining a travel baseball team. The players are generally chosen based on their ability and skill level, and playing time is based on on-field production and experience. These travel baseball teams play in competitive tournaments across the country. Similar to most levels of competitive baseball, travel baseball teams are ranked by various publications.

## **Limitations**

The study has the following limitations:

1. The sample of NCAA Division I baseball coaches was drawn from a select region; therefore, results may not be generalizable to all regions.
2. The sample of NCAA baseball coaches was drawn only from the Division I level; therefore, results may not be generalizable to all other NCAA Divisions.
3. The researcher brought personal biases to this study through personal values, beliefs, knowledge, and experiences in personally coaching intercollegiate baseball. Additionally, the researcher's cumulative personal experiences provided extensive knowledge upon which to draw regarding successful leadership characteristics specific to Division I college baseball. These experiences served in understanding the perspective beliefs, values, and philosophies of the study's participants. However, the underlying disadvantage was these experiences could inhibit the ability to remain fully objective and set aside preconceived biases while conducting the interviews.
4. Eight of the 15 coaches who qualified for this study participated; therefore, results may have been different with more participants.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with background information regarding this research. The remainder of this chapter included the problem statement, design, research question, significance of the study, definition of terms, and limitations. A review of the related literature that serves as the foundation for this study is discussed in Chapter 2.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to understand how successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context. A thorough understanding of the relevant research provides a valuable perspective when attempting to synthesize and conceptualize such a complex topic as leadership. Since the early 1900's, research has been conducted in order to identify the most important components of successful leadership. Several theories emerged from this research including trait theory, path-goal theory, contingency theory, style theory, and transformational theory. These theories will be reviewed along with Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leaders including model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart.

### **Trait Theory**

The trait approach was one of the first methodical attempts to conceptualize leadership. Stogdill (1948, 1974) and Mann (1959) established the foundation of trait theory research. Leadership traits were analyzed to determine what made certain people exceptional leaders. The great man theory, as it would become known, focused on identifying specific characteristics possessed by exceptional social, political, and military leaders. Research was designed to determine those traits that differentiated leaders from followers (Bass, 1990; Jago, 1982).

Trait theory has generated interest from researchers for its explanation of how specific characteristics influence leadership abilities (Bryman, 1992). Stogdill (1948, 1974) provided the strongest foundation for trait theory research. His two surveys articulated the various ways an individual's personality traits contribute to the leadership

process. In his first survey (Stogdill, 1948), he analyzed over one hundred personality traits related to the process of becoming a leader. The results illustrated that an average individual in a leadership role is different from an average person of a social group. He reduced the large number of personality traits to eight that were the most influential between the leaders and the average groups: intelligence, alertness, insight, responsibility, initiative, persistence, self-confidence, and sociability. Additionally, Stogdill argued that just because a person possesses these specific personality traits, it does not mean he or she is a leader. Rather, these personality traits must be present in leadership situations. Lastly, his findings illustrated leadership as a working relationship between the leader and other group members.

Stogdill (1974) later examined over one hundred and fifty personality traits that had been introduced in other studies and compared the results to his initial findings. The results suggested that both personality traits and situational factors were equally important components of leadership. Additionally, Stogdill updated the list of traits associated with leadership: drive for responsibility and task completion; vigor and persistence in pursuit of goals; risk taking and originality in problem solving; drive to exercise initiative in social situations; self-confidence and sense of personal identity; willingness to accept consequences of decisions and action; readiness to absorb interpersonal stress; willingness to tolerate frustration and delay; ability to influence other people's behavior; and capacity to structure social interaction systems to the purpose at hand.

Mann (1959) examined the role of personality and leadership in smaller group settings. Mann suggested that personality traits can differentiate leaders from followers.

The results of his research suggested that leaders possess six personality traits: intelligence, masculinity, adjustment, dominance, extraversion, and conservatism. Lord, DeVader & Alliger (1986) suggested intelligence, masculinity, and dominance were personality characteristics commonly associated with individuals' perceptions of leaders. The results further suggested personality traits are often used to make discriminations across situations between leaders and followers.

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) suggested that a great leader is in fact a very specific type of person. Building upon previous trait theory research, Kirkpatrick and Locke suggested that leaders are different from followers because of six specific traits: drive, motivation, integrity, confidence, cognitive ability, and task knowledge. Additionally, the authors argued that these personality traits can be innate, or they can be learned. Their overall contention argued that leadership traits make people different, and that unique difference is an important aspect of the leadership process.

More recently, researchers have investigated leadership traits associated with social intelligence (Zaccaro, 2002). Zaccaro (2002) illustrated social intelligence as social awareness, social acumen, self-monitoring, and the ability to provide the best response, regardless of the situation or social environment. Zaccaro, Kemp, and Bader (2004) suggested self-monitoring and social intelligence are two of the most important attributes a leader can possess.

Some agreement has emerged among researchers regarding the most common factors that make up a leader's personality: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1987). To investigate the relationship between the aforementioned factors and leadership, Judge,

Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of numerous leadership and personality studies. The results suggested a strong relationship between neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and leadership. Extraversion was the factor that most strongly associated with leadership. Judge et al. (2002) argued that extraversion was the most important trait of effective leaders.

The strength of the trait approach is the depth of research conducted in relation to the theory (Stogdill, 1948, 1974; Mann, 1959; Lord, et al., 1986; Marlowe, 1986; McCrae & Costa, 1987; Goldberg, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Judge et al., 2002; Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004). The longevity of the research provides a sense of credibility that other leadership theories lack. The research findings support the important role of specific personality traits in leaders. Additionally, trait theory provides an illustration of what traits leaders are assumed to embody.

Two weaknesses of trait theory are the lack of a definitive set of personality traits common among effective leaders and it generally does not recognize the role of specific situations on leadership. As Stogdill (1948, 1974) argued, it can be difficult to identify specific personality traits without also accounting for the demands of a specific leadership situation. Some individuals may possess personality traits that help them develop as a leader but lack the traits necessary to sustain their leadership over the course of time. Additionally, the selection of the most important leadership traits is subjective in nature. Because the results of the research have been rather broad, researchers have used subjective interpretations of the data to compile their list of important traits (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004).

Trait theory has continued to evolve with a more contemporary emphasis given to charismatic leadership (Bass, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Nadler & Tushman, 1989; Zaccaro, 2007; Zaleznik, 1977). Jung and Sosik (2006) argued that charismatic leaders possess traits of self-monitoring, engagement in impression management, and motivation. The researchers' theories began by identifying the qualities of great people, then included the impact of situations on leadership. Currently, the theory has shifted back to the role of traits in effective leaders.

Research pertaining to the traits of successful NCAA coaches is minimal. Vallee and Gordon (2005) conducted research on the personality traits of five Canadian female university coaches. They found that these coaches possessed personality traits such as being open-minded, balanced, composed, and caring. Additionally, Kajtna and Baric (2009) reported that successful Slovenian athletic coaches focus on the emotions and needs of their players, as well as a willingness to communicate about specific problems relating to their athletes' success.

### **Path-goal Theory**

Path-goal theory is based on the methods leaders use to motivate their team members to accomplish specific goals. Building upon motivation research in business, the theory is still relatively new. House (1971, 1974, 1996) is the main contributor to path-goal theory research. Additionally, Evans (1970), Dessler (1974), and Mitchell (1974) have contributed research to path-goal theory. The essence of path-goal theory is to enhance performance and satisfaction by focusing on team member motivation.

According to House and Mitchell (1974), leaders are able to increase motivation as they increase the number of rewards team members receive for their work. Leaders

can increase motivation when the path to the desired goal is clear and easy to understand. Removing challenging obstacles, coaching, and making work personally satisfying are additional methods to increase motivation amongst team members. Essentially, path-goal theory illustrates how leaders help team members work toward desired goals by selecting behaviors that are best suited to the needs of the organization and the specific workplace environment. Directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented behaviors are the most common within path-goal theory (House & Mitchell, 1974). House and Mitchell (1974) argued that leaders may demonstrate any of the four leadership behaviors with subordinates and in different situations. They also suggested that leaders should adapt their style to the specific situation. Different situations may require certain leadership behaviors.

House (1996) restructured his original research to include four additional leadership behaviors. In addition to directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented behavior, House included work facilitation, group-oriented decision process, work-group representation and networking, and value-based leadership behavior. His findings suggested that leaders must help subordinates by providing what is missing within their environment and helping them compensate for shortcomings in their abilities.

One of the most noticeable weaknesses of path-goal theory is the complex nature of the theory. Because the theory involves many aspects of leadership, such as behavior, motivation, and personality characteristics (House & Mitchell, 1974), attempting to implement the theory to improve leadership quickly can be challenging. Additionally, path-goal theory lacks the depth of research compared to other leadership theories. This has led to only minimal support from the findings of research aimed at testing its validity

(House & Mitchell, 1974; Indvik, 1986; Schriesheim, Castro, Zhou, & DeChurch, 2006; Schriesheim & Kerr, 1977; Schriesheim & Schriesheim, 1980; Stinson & Johnson, 1975; Wofford & Liska, 1993). The foundation of path-goal theory remains unstable because research findings do not provide a consistent picture of the basic assumptions of the theory (Evans, 1996; Schriesheim & Neider, 1996). Lastly, path-goal theory highlights the importance of the leader providing coaching and guidance to help subordinates tackle obstacles. This approach can portray leadership as a singular event; the leader affects the subordinate. Too much reliance can become counterproductive by taking responsibility away from the subordinate, leading to dependence on the leader.

Path-goal theory has continued to gather attention from researchers in a variety of fields. In business management, Satapathy and Mishra (2012) researched the influence of path-goal leadership styles on the effectiveness of self-help groups. In the music industry, Vandegrift and Matusitz (2011) conducted research regarding the path-goal leadership methods Columbia Records executives used to turn their record label into one of the most successful in the industry. In education, Dewan and Dewan (2010) researched how distance educators can use path-goal leadership theory to adapt to the needs of individual learners. Path-goal theory research is limited in NCAA athletics. The only path-goal research related to athletics is Kristiansen, Halvari, and Robert's (2012) research on media stress among professional football players, and Fletcher and Arnold's (2011) research on performance based leadership in elite competitive sports. They found that leaders in elite sports have a thorough understanding of their vision, operations, people, and culture.

## **Contingency Theory**

Contingency theory attempts to match leaders to appropriate situations (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974). The word contingency suggests that a leader's effectiveness depends on how well his or her particular style fits a situation. To properly evaluate the abilities of leaders, it is essential to evaluate the situation and environment which they lead.

Fiedler (1964, 1967) developed contingency theory by investigating the styles of leaders who worked in different contexts, especially military organizations. He was able to make grounded generalizations about which leadership styles were best for a given context. To measure leadership styles, Fiedler created the Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) scale. A high score on the scale illustrates a leader who is relationship motivated. As the name suggests, relationship motivated leaders are focused on developing interpersonal relationships. A low score suggests a leader is task-motivated. Task motivated leaders are more concerned with reaching a goal than building relationships.

Fiedler (1967) suggested that situations can be classified in relation to three factors: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power. Leader-member relations consist of the group atmosphere and the level of loyalty followers feel for the leader. Task structure involves how clearly the directions of a task are communicated. Position power refers to the authority a leader has to either reward or punish group members. Fiedler (1995) provided an interpretation of his theory to highlight the main issues. He argued that a leader whose LPC style does not match a particular situation experiences stress; under stress, the leader reverts to less mature ways of coping; and the leader's less mature coping style results in poor decision-making.

One of the strengths of contingency theory is that the basis of the theory is supported by research (Peters, Hartke, & Pohlman, 1985; Strube & Garcia, 1981). Many researchers (Fiedler, 1964, 1967, 1995; Fiedler & Garcia, 1987; Fiedler & Chemers, 1974) have tested the theory and supported its validity as a reliable approach to quantifying leadership. Additionally, contingency theory does not assume a leader must be effective in every scenario (Fiedler, 1967). The theory matches the leader and the situation, but does not require the leader to be comfortable in every situation imaginable. Lastly, LPC scores provide quantifiable data that could be useful in assessment. Scores can be used to identify in which scenario a leader could operate most effectively.

One of the weaknesses of contingency theory is it cannot completely explain why leaders with certain styles are more effective in certain situations. Fiedler (1993) suggested that a certain level of mystery remains regarding the relationship between task-motivated leaders, relationship-motivated leaders, and the proper setting for each. Another weakness involves the LPC score. Fiedler (1993) questioned the merit of the LPC scale because it does not correlate well with other traditional leadership measures. The LPC scale measures an individual's leadership style by characterizing another individual's behavior. It is difficult for participants to understand the value of measuring personal leadership style through the evaluation of another person. Lastly, the theory does not provide guidance about what an organization should do when there is a leader in a less than desirable situation. While Fiedler (1993) argued that most organizational situations can be altered to fit a leader's style, there is no instruction on how to change each situation.

Research has been conducted that directly related contingency theory to NCAA coaches. Chelladurai (1978, 1983) developed a sport-specific contingency theory of leadership: the multidimensional model of leadership. His sport-specific model is based on Fiedler's (1993) model. Chelladurai's (1978) model introduces the five dimensions of coach behavior: training/instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and feedback (Chelladurai, 1978). This model set the foundation for further contingency theory research in sports (Shields et al., 1997; Sullivan & Kent, 2003; Houghton & Yoho, 2005; Aoyagi, Cox, & McGuire, 2008).

### **Style Theory**

Style theory, which stresses the importance of a leader's behavior, is different from trait theory, which focuses on the personality characteristics of the leader. Style theory suggests that leadership is comprised of two kinds of behavior: task behaviors and relationship behaviors. Task behaviors help team members achieve their specific objectives. Relationship behaviors help team members feel comfortable with themselves and with various situations. The purpose of style theory research is to conceptualize how leaders combine the two behaviors to influence team members to achieve a specific goal.

Some of the first studies investigating style theory were conducted at the Ohio State University. Building on Stogdill's (1948) research, researchers at the Ohio State University analyzed how individuals acted when they were in a leadership position. The researchers had subordinates complete questionnaires about the number of times a particular leader displayed a certain behavior. From the responses, a questionnaire was formulated: the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) (Hemphill & Coons, 1957). The LBDQ was given to people in educational, military, and industrial settings;

results illustrated that certain behaviors were apparent in leaders. Responses to the questionnaire represented two types of leadership behaviors: initiating structure and consideration (Stogdill, 1974). Initiating structure behaviors are task behaviors, such as refining responsibilities, organizing work, and scheduling activities. Consideration behaviors are relationship behaviors, such as respect, trust, and camaraderie. These two behaviors represent the foundation of style approach: leaders provide structure and nurture subordinates (Stogdill, 1974). The Ohio State studies concluded that these two behaviors are mutually exclusive from one another. Essentially, the level to which a leader illustrates one behavior is not related to the level in which he or she illustrates the other (Hemphill & Coons, 1957).

While researchers at the Ohio State University were developing the LBDQ, researchers at the University of Michigan began to explore the impact of a leader's behavior on the performance of a small group (Cartwright & Zander, 1960; Katz & Kahn, 1951; Likert, 1961, 1967). Researchers identified two types of behavior: employee orientation and production orientation. Employee orientation refers to leaders who approach team members with a human relations emphasis. They care for team members as human beings, value their diversity, and recognize their personal needs (Bowers & Seashore, 1966). Production orientation refers to leaders who stress the technical and production aspects of work. From this perspective, team members are viewed as a means for completing a task (Bowers & Seashore, 1966). Initially, the researchers at the University of Michigan represented employee and production orientations as opposite ends of a spectrum. Essentially, they argued that leaders who were oriented toward production were less oriented toward employees, and vice versa. However, the

researchers restructured their constructs as two separate leadership orientations (Kahn, 1956). When the two behaviors were viewed independently, leaders were found to have the ability to be oriented to production and employees simultaneously.

The most well-known model of style theory managerial behaviors is the Managerial Grid (Blake & McCauley, 1991; Blake & Mouton, 1964, 1978, 1985). The grid was designed to conceptualize how leaders help organizational members reach their full potential. Concern for production and concern for people are the two main factors of the grid. Concern for production refers to the methods a leader uses to achieve an organizational task. Concern for people refers to how a leader caters to the team members who are trying to achieve a specific task (Blake & Mouton, 1964). The grid represents concern for production and concern for people within a model that has two intersecting axes. The horizontal axis represents a leader's concern for results, and the vertical axis represents the leader's concern for people. Each axis represents a nine-point scale on which a score of one represents a minimum concern and a nine represents a maximum concern. Plotting scores from each of the axes allows leadership styles to become apparent. The grid reflects five leadership styles: authority-compliance (heavy emphasis on job requirements), country-club management (high concern for interpersonal relationships), impoverished management (unconcerned with the task and interpersonal relationships), middle-of-the-road management (intermediate concern for the task and people), and team management (strong emphasis on tasks and interpersonal relationships). Blake and Mouton (1985) suggested that leaders generally have a dominant style and a secondary style. The dominant style is what a leader uses in most scenarios and the secondary style is what a leader refers to when under pressure.

The strength of style theory is the depth of research that supports the theory. First investigated at the Ohio State and the University of Michigan, Blake and Mouton (1964, 1978, 1985) and Blake and McCauley (1991) continued to research and develop the theory. Their research substantiates style theory and provides a credible approach to conceptualize leadership. Additionally, style theory research has introduced a foundation of leadership: task and relationship behaviors. In any situation, a leader experiences both task and relationship behaviors. Style theory suggests that to be an effective leader, there must be a balance between the two behaviors. This balance is the foundation of leadership.

Style theory research has not determined the relationship between a leader's style and performance outcomes (Bryman, 1992; Yukl, 1994). Researchers have not yet identified a consistent relationship between task and relationship behaviors and performance outcomes such as job satisfaction, confidence, and productivity. Additionally, researchers have not been able to introduce a style that is effective in most leadership scenarios (Yukl, 1994). Similar to trait theory research, which could not identify the concrete personality characteristics of effective leaders, style theory research has yet to introduce universal behaviors associated with effective leadership. Lastly, style theory research argues that the most effective leadership style is the high-high style (Blake & McCauley, 1991; Misumi, 1985), stemming from the leadership grid. The high-high style represents a strong emphasis on both task and relationship behavior. Yukl (1994) argued that the wide range of research findings suggests only partial support for the high-high style. Certain scenarios require different leadership behaviors. There is not

enough definitive research to conclude that the high-high style is the best for leaders in all situations.

Style theory's applications to sports and coaching have been researched at a minimal level. Aristotelis, Kaloyan, and Evangelos (2013) researched how Greek soccer coaches' behavior affected their leadership style. The researchers suggested that coaches perceived themselves as providing greater amounts of training and instructions, democratic behaviors, and social support. Additionally, there were differences among coaches on their leadership perceptions according to their characteristics. Magnusen (2010) suggested that certain behaviors, such as democratic leadership and socially supportive leadership, as displayed by strength and conditioning coaches, can result in enhanced cooperation and improved communication. Lastly, Sullivan and Kent (2003) researched the behaviors of intercollegiate coaches and their role in coaching efficacy.

### **Transformational Theory**

Transformational theory focuses on the charismatic components of leadership. Bass and Riggio (2006) suggested the popularity of the theory may have developed from the attention given to intrinsic motivation. Lowe and Gardner (2001) conducted a content-analysis of articles published in the *Leadership Quarterly* and found that about thirty-three percent of the research involved transformational theory. At its core, transformational leadership theory focuses on the process that transforms individuals. Emotions, values, ethics, standards, and goals are the foundational components of the theory. Transformational leadership involves a strong level of influence that inspires team members to accomplish more than what is typically expected of them.

Although Downton (1973) was the first researcher to use the word transformational within a leadership context, Burns (1978) introduced the concept as an important approach to conceptualizing leadership. Burns attempted to find a relationship between the roles of leaders and followers. He identified two specific types of leadership: transactional and transformational. Transactional leadership refers to the exchanges that occur between leaders and followers. Transformational leadership is the process by which an individual associates with others to create a connection. This connection will, in theory, increase the motivation levels of the leader and the followers. Bass (1998) introduced the term pseudotransformational leadership to describe leaders who are selfish and power-oriented. Pseudotransformational leadership ultimately focuses on the leader's personal agenda rather than the collective interests of the organization (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Authentic transformational leadership is socialized leadership (Howell & Avolio, 1993), which places the interest of others as the main priority.

House (1976) published one of the first theories of charismatic leadership, which has been described by others (Conger, 1999; Hunt & Conger, 1999) as similar to transformational leadership. Weber (1947) introduced the most well-known definition of charisma as a personality trait. He suggested that charisma gives an individual exceptional powers and results in a person being treated as a leader. Additionally, Weber identified the role followers play in validating charismatic leaders (Bryman, 1992; House, 1976). In his research, House (1976) argued that charismatic leaders act in unique manners that demonstrate specific effects on followers. Specific personality characteristics include dominance, desire, influence, self-confidence, and a strong sense

of moral values. Additionally, House argued that charismatic leaders are strong role models, appear content to followers, articulate goals that have moral overtones, communicate high expectations, and arouse task-relevant motives in followers. House's research has been built upon since its introduction to the academic community (Conger, 1999; Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) argued that charismatic leadership changes followers' self-image and attempts to mold the identity of followers to the identity of the organization. Leaders strengthen this mold by de-emphasizing extrinsic rewards and emphasizing intrinsic rewards. Shamir et al. (1993) suggested that throughout the process, leaders help followers gain self-confidence and self-efficacy.

Bass (1985) provided a more expanded version of transformational leadership that reimagined the definition built upon the previous research of Burns (1978) and House (1976). Bass (1985) focused more on the needs of followers, arguing that transformational leadership could apply to scenarios where outcomes were not positive. Additionally, he argued that transactional leadership and transformational leadership could be viewed as a single continuum, rather than mutually exclusive (Yammarino, 1993). Bass (1985) suggested that transformational leadership can motivate followers to accomplish more than expected by raising followers' levels of consciousness about the value of specified goals, allowing followers to transcend their individual aspirations for the betterment of the organization, and motivating followers to address high-level needs (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1993, 1994).

Bass's (1985) model of transformational and transactional leadership introduced seven different leadership factors, divided into three sections. Transformational factors

include: idealized influence (strong role models), inspirational motivation (communicate high expectations), intellectual stimulation (stimulates creativity), and individualized consideration (provide a supportive climate). The transactional factors include: contingent reward (effort is exchanged for rewards), and management-by-exception (negative feedback and reinforcement). The non-leader factor includes: laissez-faire (absence of leadership).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) identified four common strategies used by transformational leaders. First, leaders have a clear vision of the future that is realistic and attainable. Second, leaders are social architects who create the shared meanings of the organization. Third, leaders create trust within the organization by clearly communicating their own values and remaining true to them. Lastly, leaders know their personal strengths and weaknesses. According to Bennis and Nanus, transformational leaders choose to focus on their strengths, rather than stress about their weaknesses. Additionally, leaders are committed to learning and developing, so the organization is consistent on the learning process.

A strength of transformational leadership theory is the depth of research to substantiate its validity (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985, 1998; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Howell & Avolio, 1993; House, 1976; Conger, 1999; Hunt & Conger, 1999; Weber, 1947; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 1987, 2002, 2012). Additionally, the theory suggests that leadership is a relationship between leaders and followers. This dynamic takes total responsibility away from the leader and divides it between the leader and followers. The needs of followers are a foundational component of transformational theory (Shamir et al., 1993). Thus, followers play a more involved role in the leadership

transformation (Bryman, 1992; Avolio, 1999). Lastly, there is solid evidence to suggest that transformational leadership is an effective leadership theory. Yukl (1999) argued that transformational leadership positively related to subordinate motivation and performance.

One of the weaknesses of transformational theory is its wide range of analysis. Because the theory investigates broad components, such as vision, motivation, and trust, it can be difficult to synthesize the exact structure of transformational leadership theory. Tracey and Hinkin (1998) suggested that there is significant overlap within Bass's model (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), creating a less than clear picture of the exact parameters of the theory. Bryman (1992) argued that transformational and charismatic leadership can often be viewed synonymously, even though some leadership theories portray charisma as only a small component of leadership. Additionally, Tejada, Scandura, and Pillai (2001) conveyed that there is no proper tool to accurately and consistently measure transformational leadership.

Some researchers have argued that transformational leadership is rather elitist in nature (Avolio, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leaders are often viewed as being the direct change-agent in the organization. Critics argue that this notion separates the leader from the organization, and puts the leaders above the needs of the followers. Additionally, Yukl (1999) introduced the concept of a heroic leadership bias. The theory suggests that the leader moves the followers. Yukl argued that followers can influence a leader as much as a leader can influence followers. Lastly, critics have argued that transformational leadership has the potential to be abused (Bass, 1998; Bass

& Riggio, 2006). The theory proposes transforming individual values and mobilizing action towards a common vision. The charismatic component of transformational leadership provides some unique risks for an organization because it can be used for destructive purposes (Conger, 1999; Howell & Avolio, 1993). History has numerous examples of charismatic leaders who used coercive methods to bring destruction upon others (Northouse, 2010).

Transformational theory has a substantial amount of research related to athletics. Kent and Chelladurai (2001) used transformational leadership theory to test behavior and commitment within a team. Additionally, Charbonneau, Barling, and Kelloway (2001) suggested that transformational leadership affects sports performance in the manner of intrinsic motivation. Most importantly, Gomes (2014) proposed conceptual, empirical, and practical recommendations towards the application of transformational leadership to sports, suggesting that vision, inspiration, support, decision-making and intellectual stimulation are the essential components of transformational coaches.

### **Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model**

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model is built upon personal-best leadership experiences: experiences leaders believe are their individual standards of excellence. The five practices of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) model are: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. For the purposes of this analysis, each practice will be discussed separately.

### **Model the Way**

The first practice in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model is model the way. This practice begins with personal reflection to discover specific values and beliefs. These principles, such as trust or respect, are the foundation that guides a leader's personal and professional decision-making. In addition, Kouzes and Posner suggested that leaders "must find a way to express a leadership philosophy in their own words and not in someone else's" (p. 42). Leaders must also speak for their respective team or organization. Having a thorough understanding of their constituents' values allows an opportunity to affirm the shared values of the team or organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Through the consistency of their actions, leaders can model that they live by the principles they communicate. Consistency between communication and action builds leadership credibility. To efficiently model the way, Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggest leaders must "clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values, and set the example by aligning actions with shared values" (p. 42).

Finding one's voice is particularly important in coaching intercollegiate athletics. Burton and Raedeke (2008) suggested it is the responsibility of the coach to clearly communicate expectations, goals, and standards to their athletes. They illustrate this with a story regarding legendary Notre Dame Football coach Lou Holtz,

His recruiting coordinator developed a video to send to potential recruits, Holtz thought it did a great job of selling the program but wished it included some clips of him having positive interactions with his players. The recruiting coordinator

said he looked and looked but could not find any...this experience helped Holtz become more aware of his interactions with his players. (p. 2)

A lack of clarity and consistency can result in challenges relating to cohesion and focus. Without a clear set of values, it is difficult for the members of an organization to understand appropriate behavior and desired goals. This can be applied to an athletics coach who fails to provide core values for a specific team. Student-athletes on the team may wonder how to conduct their actions and efforts. Without clear guidelines for behavior, student-athletes might adopt an individualistic mentality, rather than focus on the needs of the team (Calipari & Sokolove, 2014).

Communication is one of the most important components of leadership.

Communication is the platform through which leaders and followers create, develop and strengthen organization values (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Smith, Arthur, Hardy, Callow, & Williams, 2013). Kouzes and Posner (2012) contended that without an authentic voice, communication that represents your beliefs, leaders speak a language that does not belong to them. If a leader's words belong to someone else, it becomes more challenging to match word and deed. Finding an authentic voice begins with a thorough understanding of what a leader values. Dodd (2015) added that trust, accountability, honesty, character, and hard work tend to be a few of the more common personality traits that are valued amongst leaders within collegiate athletics.

College athletics coaches, like Nick Saban, John Wooden, and John Calipari, all communicate their specific coaching philosophies through an authentic voice. Nick Saban's philosophy is built upon "the process". The philosophy suggests that by focusing on a more immediate and narrow task, such as blocking an opponent efficiently

or utilizing proper throwing mechanics, the long-term goal of winning a championship becomes more attainable. Essentially, completing simple, specific, daily tasks will accumulate to habits that create success on and off the field (Bishop, 2013; Anderson, 2014; Feloni, 2014). John Wooden created a very recognizable image of leadership within collegiate athletics: the Pyramid of Success. The pyramid embodies the many characteristics of a great teammate and a successful team. The essence of Coach Wooden's philosophy is: if each and every day, every member of the team gives his best effort, in competitive games, practice, in the classroom, and in the community, the team could theoretically never lose (Edelhauser, 2007; Norwood, 2010; Strauss, 2014). John Calipari employs a "players first" philosophy. The philosophy is built upon two foundations: always putting the needs of the student-athletes first, and putting the needs of the team ahead of the individual. Additionally, by recruiting the most talented basketball student-athletes in the country and teaching them to play for the welfare of the team, student-athletes actually increase their own position for the National Basketball Association draft. Essentially, putting the needs of the team first actually helps the individual more than taking an individualistic mentality (Calipari & Sokolove, 2014). A specific philosophy, combined with communicating that philosophy with an authentic voice, can give a coach the confidence to express ideas, make tough decisions, and take charge of situations.

### **Inspire a Shared Vision**

The second practice in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model is inspire a shared vision. A major component of leadership is creating a vision of what the organization could be in the future. However, a vision seen only by

the leader is insufficient for generating a collective movement. Effective leaders illustrate visions so team members can clearly understand how shared effort may contribute to the long-term success of the organization. With a clear vision, leaders can develop enthusiastic and passionate team members (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

The importance of a compelling vision on leadership effectiveness is well documented (Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994, Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Bennis and Nanus (1985) suggested that to be successful, the vision must manifest from the needs of the entire organization. The emergence of the vision originates from both the leader and the followers. Eagly (2005) argued that to be effective, leaders need to obtain *buy in* from the individuals in the organization. Leaders are able to obtain *buy in* by creating a vision that represents the beliefs and values of the followers.

Two ways to inspire a shared vision are to envision the future and enlist others. Envisioning the future involves developing a unique image of the future for the common good of the organization. Enlisting others involves building support for the imagined future of the organization. An important part of enlisting others is to animate the vision of the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Animating the vision involves motivating team members to join in a cause and act to achieve the vision. The ability to motivate is vital to any leader who desires to create memorable change. Leaders have the responsibility to inspire members of the organization to make forward progress. An important aspect of motivation is appealing to common values. A leader has to help team members see and feel how their personal interests align with the vision of the organization. “You have to paint a compelling picture of the future, one that enables constituents to experience viscerally what it would be like to actually live and work in an

exciting and uplifting future” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, pp. 139-140). The image of the future provides internal motivation to commit energy to make the vision a reality.

One specific hurdle that most leaders must endure is a personal lack of confidence in their own ability to inspire a shared vision. Kouzes and Posner (2012) articulated, “Despite the acknowledged potency of clearly communicated and compelling visions, our research finds people more uncomfortable with inspiring a shared vision than with any of the other leadership practices” (p. 140). Kouzes and Posner added that this mentality stems from leaders not seeing themselves as personally uplifting or attributing something mystical and supernatural to the process of being inspirational. Kouzes and Posner argued, “It’s your passion that brings the vision to life” (pp. 140-141). Zaccaro et al. (2000) suggested there may be more to communicating a compelling vision than just passion; skill in persuasion and communicating change are essential for leaders to efficiently communicate their vision. Additionally, Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggested that when there is resistance to change, leaders need to function as a mediator to help create the wanted change in the organization.

Animating a vision is particularly important in intercollegiate athletics. It is critical that the athlete leaders clearly define and show the coaches and student-athletes the importance of having a shared vision. This responsibility ultimately is that of the athletic director who is responsible for creating and developing a department-wide vision. The vision must portray a clear image of what the future could look like. A vision from an athletics director at a smaller institution could be different than a vision from an athletics director at a larger university. For example, at a mid-major university, such as the University of Nevada, Reno, Ball State University, or Louisiana-Lafayette University,

the vision for the athletics department might represent a desire to one day move to a larger athletic conference. The athletics director at the smaller institution could place an emphasis on creating a more personal fan experience than exists at some of the larger universities. A few examples that could help achieve that vision include knowing season-ticket holders by name or personalizing rewards for financial donations. The vision for the athletic departments at the University of Southern California or the Ohio State University might involve striving to be the most well-known national “brand” in collegiate athletics. Given the financial landscape within collegiate athletics, “power five” conference athletic departments are being run more akin to a fortune 500 company. Despite the university or conference affiliation, it is very important that an athletics director creates a clear vision and motivates department members to align their personal values and efforts with the vision.

Creating a clear vision and animating that vision is critical for a collegiate athletics coach. Bennis and Nanus (1985) argued that a vision should create an attractive, realistic, and believable picture of the organization’s future. Additionally, the vision should be simple, understandable, and energy-creating. Lastly, the vision has to grow out of the needs of the entire organization, not just the leader. Coaches work with student-athletes which provide a unique set of challenges. Because most student-athletes are not entirely physically and emotionally developed when they arrive on campus (Perry, 1968; Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1987; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009), it can become easy for them to lose sight of priorities. New surroundings, challenging classes, and physically bigger competition are a few of the specific challenges new student-athletes must face. A vision reinforces the importance of

enduring whatever challenges student-athletes may face in order to put the team in the best position to be successful.

In Division I college baseball, most coaches incorporate the city of Omaha into the team's vision. The College World Series is played in Omaha, Nebraska. Each year, teams play for the opportunity to compete in the College World Series and win a national championship. Some institutions use their stadium to display the vision. For example, at Cal State Fullerton, the exact mileage from Fullerton, California to Omaha, Nebraska is painted on the outfield wall. In other programs, apparel is used to display the specific vision. The University of Louisville places "OMAHA" in big, block letters on the back of their practice uniforms. Lastly, some universities create a strength and conditioning competition to illustrate the resilience needed to get to the College World Series.

Vanderbilt University created the Omaha Challenge. Every fall a competition of strength, speed, agility, and endurance challenges are designed to test mental toughness and team unity (Farnum, 2011). Regardless of the method used, Omaha is arguably the most common vision within Division I college baseball. The vision acts as a constant reminder that beyond wins and losses, beyond personal successes and failures, and beyond selfish attitudes, there is a larger goal that motivates team members to persevere.

### **Challenge the Process**

The third practice in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model is challenge the process. Exemplary leaders seek challenging opportunities to test their abilities (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). To efficiently challenge the process, Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggested leaders must, "Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve, and

experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience” (p. 156). It is important when experimenting and taking risks to learn from experience. Learning from past experience is a valuable tool for leadership development.

Whenever a leader challenges the status quo, there is an inherent risk of failure and setbacks are common. Individuals involved with an organization expect leaders to “get it right the first time” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 200). This mentality is neither realistic nor helpful to an organization. When attempting something that has never been done before, mistakes are a vital part of the transformation process. Trial and error becomes the means to conceptualizing new concepts, methods, and practices.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggested that there is value in making mistakes and learning from their experiences. Mistakes illustrate what behaviors, strategies, and tactics, can and cannot be used. Kouzes and Posner (2012) argued, “Without those experiences, respondents said, they would have been unable to achieve their aspirations. It may seem paradoxical, but many echo the thought that the overall quality of work improves when people have a chance to fail” (p. 200). By viewing failure as simply not achieving an initial goal, something can be learned from that experience.

Leaders responsible for a costly initiative or a losing season may face severe consequences. “For the individual who leads a failed project, it can mean a stalled career or even a lost job. For an adventurous leader, it can mean the loss of personal assets. For mountain climbers and other physical adventurers, it can mean injury or death” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 201). Regardless of the leadership position, failure plays an important role in achieving success.

Failure is never the objective of any leader. The objective is success, but success requires a certain amount of learning and developing. Mistakes and errors are necessary endeavors within the learning process. The most effective learning occurs when team members can openly collaborate about the successes and failures of the organization. Exemplary leaders do not place blame on others. They accept responsibility for the results and analyze how the organization can learn from the experiences (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Decisions of collegiate athletic coaches are often high profile and subject to criticism from supporters. Competition, as opposed to practice, provides the best forum to determine which coaching strategies and tactics are most effective. The scoreboard provides quantifiable feedback that can be used to grow and develop as a team and as individuals. The most successful coaches are able to identify specific strengths and weaknesses of their own team and the opponent, and develop strategies accordingly.

Baseball is rather unique, given the number of games played in a competitive season. The large number of games allows a longer window of opportunity to make needed changes. On the other hand, football coaches do not have that same opportunity. Because the sport of football plays a limited number of games, coaches must make adjustments in strategy much quicker. Coaches have a mental image of what they believe playing a perfect game entails. In a competitive atmosphere, the team that performs closer to the “perfect game” is often the team that is victorious. More specifically, the coach who learns from specific failures and properly corrects mistakes from student-athletes is generally the coach who will be the victor.

### **Enable Others to Act**

The fourth practice in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model is enable others to act. Exemplary leaders invest in nurturing trustworthy relationships. Additionally, they proactively involve others in preparation and give team members autonomy to make decisions. Kouzes and Posner (2012) argued, "Leaders bring people together, creating an atmosphere where people understand that they have a shared fate and that they should treat others as they would like to be treated" (p. 214). To enable others to act, leaders must foster collaboration by building trust and strengthen others by developing their competence and confidence (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Developing confidence within organization members can be one of the more challenging endeavors for leaders. Without the knowledge, skills, and information to do a job efficiently, team members can become overwhelmed and discouraged. Nurturing competence and developing confidence are vital to maintaining leadership credibility. Providing proper training, coaching individuals through challenging tasks, and communicating belief to team members are valuable tools to help develop confidence (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Kouzes and Posner (2012) introduced the idea of being "in the flow" (p. 256) when performance is effortless despite the difficult nature of a task or experience. Essentially, the confidence level matches the difficulty level of a challenge or obstacle. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) suggested that when high challenges are matched with high skills, then flow is likely to occur. Flow is effortless performance despite the difficulty of the task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Although flow is not possible in every challenge or

obstacle, exemplary leaders strive to create the environments that allow flow to exist. A common practice that can allow flow to exist is the continuous assessment of an individual's capacity to perform in challenging environments (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). This assessment requires a thorough analysis of specific skills and mental toughness of each team member in certain situations.

In order to develop competence and confidence in student-athletes, collegiate athletics coaches must teach student-athletes the proper mechanics, strategies, and tactics to be successful within their particular sport. Beaumont, Maynard, and Butt (2014) identified ten strategies to create and maintain confidence in athletics. The first six strategies revolve around the ability to develop confidence. First, it is important to develop an understanding and awareness for confidence, log evidence, manipulate the coaching environment, tailor for the individual, use psychological skills, and develop the student-athlete's signature strengths. The next four strategies relate to maintaining confidence: a continuation of the development process, influence the student-athlete's environment, stable beliefs, and reinforce abilities. In college football, coaches will spend a great deal of time teaching specific plays, offensive and defensive strategies, and tactics that the opposing team may use in competition. It is very important that student-athletes feel comfortable executing the information their coaches have taught them. For example, if the coaching staff has not properly taught a student-athlete how to block the defense on a specific play, the opposing team may become aware of that weakness and exploit it for their benefit.

Collegiate baseball coaches are no different from football coaches when it comes to teaching student-athletes. Whether the coaching staff is teaching pitching mechanics,

team defenses, or tendencies of the opposing team, each student-athlete must feel competent to execute his job or assignment during competition. A valuable tool that is used to create competence among college baseball players is video analysis. Video analysis serves a wide range of purposes within college baseball. Video analysis can be used to study a pitcher's throwing mechanics to identify and correct inaccuracies in the pitching delivery. Additionally, hitters can use video analysis to study the intricate positions of a baseball swing. The entire team can use video analysis to study specific team defensive plays. Because team defensive plays are often used in the most important parts of a game, it is very important that each player thoroughly understands the specific responsibilities that go along with each position. Video analysis is very valuable because certain software programs allow the video to be in slow motion, graphic drawings can be used on the screen, and players can clearly see the entire field. Lastly, video analysis is valuable for creating scouting reports. Scouting reports allow a coaching staff to create a specific game-plan for an opposing team. Using video analysis to show student-athletes specific tendencies from opposing players allows them to prepare more thoroughly. Giving student-athletes a strong competence level is vital to increasing competence and putting the team in the best position to be successful.

Developing and nurturing confidence is a challenging obstacle for a college baseball coach. Numerous statistics, talented players, and the highly-skilled nature of the sport are a few components that can lead to a student-athlete losing confidence. Coaches must create a culture that supports failure, enabling student-athletes to understand that failing is a vital part of the learning process. A specific example involves a player-coach interaction in a baseball game. After a batter strikes out, a coach could use that

opportunity to teach the player that he should not have swung at a particular pitch. Rather than yelling at that player, the coach uses that opportunity to teach him and now that player should be more comfortable knowing what pitches he can and cannot hit. In that interaction, the player's failure was turned into a positive. If student-athletes can embrace a mindset of learning, rather than failing, they will maintain the confidence needed to be successful within the game of baseball.

In addition to building competence and confidence, a coach must build trust with the players. Building trust is important in any relationship but is particularly important in intercollegiate athletics (Dirks, 2000). Trust involves the predictability and reliability of the leader, as well as trust and identity within an organization (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007; Mineo, 2014). In an increasingly complex, connected world, winning strategies will be based on a "We not I" philosophy (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 219). A sense of we cannot happen without trust. If individual team members do not trust that their teammates will sacrifice for them, they will be reluctant to sacrifice for others (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Trust is an important component within human relationships. Without trust leaders find it challenging to motivate team members, mobilize action, and accomplish extraordinary goals. Leaders who are unable to trust cannot bear to be dependent on the work of others (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). They either end up doing all the work themselves or micromanaging team members to the point where they become over-controlling. To build and strengthen leadership credibility, leaders must be able to trust others to execute their particular responsibilities.

Building trust is a process that begins when someone is willing to be the first to open up, show vulnerability, and give up control of the situation (Kouzes & Posner,

2012). If leaders want the high-level performance based on trust, they must be willing to trust others first; this trust must be apparent and visible to the organization.

Another important component of enabling others to act is enhancing self-determination. Exemplary leaders must embrace the “paradox of power”: they become more powerful when they give their power away (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 244). Leadership involves understanding the importance of empowering organization or team members. Team members who feel incompetent, insecure, and insignificant constantly underperform and lack the motivation to endure challenging obstacles. Kouzes and Posner (2012) argued, “People who are not confident about their power, regardless of their organizational position or place, tend to hoard whatever shreds of influence they have. Powerless managers tend to adopt petty and dictatorial styles” (p. 244). Additionally, this can lead to passing blame on to team members rather than accepting responsibility for certain decisions. Both outcomes result in a drop in leadership credibility.

Designing job responsibilities that allow latitude is a strategy for maximizing performance levels and fostering initiative. Within this context, latitude and choice are very similar concepts. Kouzes and Posner (2012) articulated, “To feel in control of their own work lives, people need to be able to take non-routine action, exercise independent judgment, and make decisions that affect how they do their work, without having to check with someone else” (p. 250). When given the appropriate rules, procedures, and systems, team members can experience a level of creativity and flexibility. Leaders must support individual discretion to meet the changing demands of a particular environment. With increased discretion comes an increased ability to use specific talents and training.

## **Encourage the Heart**

The fifth practice in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model is encourage the heart. Leaders inspire others by visibly acknowledging team members' contributions to the organization. They make proactive efforts to communicate the various accomplishments of specific teams, and recognize collaborative efforts that align with the vision of the organization. Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggested that exemplary leaders must, "Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence, and celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community" (p. 272). Recognizing the various contributions of team members is the foundation of encouraging the heart. In addition, celebrating the values and victories is an important part of this practice.

In order to encourage the heart, a leader must expect the best of those in the organization and sometimes needs to get personally involved. Leaders must determine appropriate expectations for the organization and individuals. Exemplary leaders create high performance levels because they believe in the abilities of team members. Positive expectations have a profound influence on team members' aspirations and the overall evolution of the organization. It is quite challenging to elicit high performance levels unless team members trust that a leader believes in them.

Exemplary leaders improve the performance of others by deeply caring for them and trusting their abilities. Team members are able to respond positively to high expectations because the leaders are more nurturing, supportive, and encouraging (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

If the potential to accomplish great things exists within a team member, an exemplary leader finds a way to motivate it. Kouzes and Posner (2012) argued, “The emerging field of positive organizational psychology provides solid evidence that leaders who create an affirmative orientation in organizations, foster virtuousness among people, and focus on achieving outcomes beyond the norm are significantly more successful” (p. 277).

Collegiate athletics coaches must expect the best of student-athletes and continuously motivate and inspire them through the turbulent landscape of a competitive season. No student-athlete is perfect and should not be expected to be. Successful coaches understand that mistakes and failure are inevitable within a competitive environment. These coaches believe in the ability of student-athletes to persevere through adversity to accomplish their particular responsibility. Essentially, student-athletes can perform within a supportive and positive environment that maximizes their potential to develop and succeed.

Another important component of encouraging the heart is getting personally involved. If a leader wants team members to believe in a certain value or behave in a specific manner, the leader needs to set the personal example. In order to create and develop a culture of excellence, leaders must recognize, reward, reinforce, celebrate and discipline desired efforts and personal successes (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Essentially, exemplary leaders personally celebrate the actions that contribute to and strengthen the organizational culture. If a leader desires to have team members with the courage to endure through adversity, they must constantly be the one doing the encouraging.

When it comes to sending a message throughout an organization, actions speak louder than words. By visibly showing team members proper encouragement, a leader sends a positive message to the organization. As Kouzes and Posner (2012) argue, “The organization will develop a culture of celebration and recognition. Everyone becomes a leader, everyone sets the example, and everyone takes the time to celebrate the values and victories” (p. 316). If a leader’s words and actions do not align, the celebration will seem insincere and fake. “The celebration must be an honest expression of commitment to key values and to the hard work and dedication of the people who have lived the values. Elaborate productions that lack sincerity are more entertainment than encouragement” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 316). Authenticity is the key to creating a celebration that team members will remember.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter included a summary of five leadership theories including trait theory, path-goal theory, contingency theory, style theory, and transformational theory. In addition, particular attention was given to Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. In Chapter 3, the researcher will describe in detail the methodology used in this study.

### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to identify how successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context. A qualitative research design, using a semi-structured interview, was followed. The question that guided the research is: How do successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their various roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context? This chapter, which is divided into six sections, details the methods and rationales that were used to complete this study. This is followed by a description of the participants that were recruited for the study. Data collection is detailed, followed by a description of the data analysis. Finally, the chapter is summarized.

#### **Research Design**

Constructivist grounded theory guided this study. The essence of constructivist grounded theory is to explore how people construct meaning of their activities or a particular situation (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz suggested a constructivist approach, “places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (p. 130). Charmaz continued, “constructivist grounded theorists take a reflexive stance toward the research process and products and consider how their theories evolve... The theory depends on the researchers view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it” (pp. 130-131). This study examined how successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches constructed meaning of their professional roles and responsibilities. Specifically, relationships and interactions with the coaching staff and student-athletes were examined,

followed by an exploration of how they balanced these roles against the professional responsibilities of coaching a successful baseball program.

Since one of this study's goals was to examine complex characteristics, specifically thought processes, leadership qualities, values, and culture, a qualitative methodology had a greater potential of conceptualizing this detailed information. In addition, a qualitative research design was used because it is more conducive to the investigative nature of this study. Finally, a constructivist grounded theory design, utilizing a semi-structured interview format, was the most appropriate way to analyze characteristics associated with each coach's individual experiences. The intent of the design was to allow the researcher to examine the nature of the experience from the perspective of the coaches involved.

### **Participants**

Eight NCAA Division I baseball coaches were purposively recruited for this study. Neuman (1997) recommended that in certain circumstances the use of a purposive sample is appropriate. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) added the importance of criterion sampling. For this study, the criteria for inclusion were the following: NCAA Division I baseball coach who had lead his team to the Division I NCAA regional playoffs at least three times over an eleven year span from 2005-2015. To reduce the possibility of regional cultural differences regarding relationships among coaches and team members, only those in colleges and universities in the western United States were recruited. The style of play in the western United States focuses more on mechanics and fundamentals, as opposed to other regions that focus more on power and strength.

At the time of the study, there were nineteen NCAA Division I baseball coaches who met these criteria. It must be noted, however, that only fifteen of the coaches were potentially available for this research. Two of the coaches were currently coaching in professional baseball; one head coach had retired from coaching; and one head coach had passed away. Of the 15 coaches available for this study, eight coaches agreed to participate. Within the sample of coaches that participated, head coach experience ranged from five years at the low end, to twenty-nine years at the high end, with an average of twenty years. Additionally, three head coaches are at large schools, five are at small schools, and half of the coaches have head coach experience at both large and small schools.

### **Data Source**

Data for this study was derived from semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are more conversational than structured interviews and allow questions to be more contextually driven (Bjornholt & Farstad, 2012). The interviews focused on four areas. Participants were asked about their professional background. This was followed by a discussion about their coaching staff and student-athletes. Finally, how they balanced the various responsibilities to the university, community, coaching staff, and student-athletes was explored. The interview guide is found in Appendix B. Although specific questions were created, the interview itself was intended to be conversational in nature. This format allowed each participant to expand upon relevant areas as well as allowed for probing to clarify statements made by the coaches.

To gain a general familiarity with the coaches and their teams, appropriate media outlets, university websites, and other publicly available sources were reviewed. This

information was not considered data for the purpose of analysis; rather, it was reviewed to provide a richer and more expedient interview.

### **Data Collection**

This study was conducted under the auspices of the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval to conduct the study was granted, the fifteen coaches who met the criteria were contacted via e-mail. Contact information for the coaches is public information. The e-mail briefly explained the purpose of the study and conditions for participation (see Appendix B). Because NCAA Division I baseball coaches have notable time constraints, additional informal contact (e.g., text messages) was made to ascertain the possibility of participation in the study. Upon agreement to participate in the study, a mutually agreed upon time for the interview was determined. Due to time constraints, all interviews were conducted over the telephone.

Prior to the interview, an information sheet was sent to each participant as an attachment to an e-mail confirming the day and time of the interview (see Appendix A). At the beginning of each interview, a review of the information sheet was conducted, including time for any questions the participant may have had. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interview script is in Appendix C. Interviews were audio-recorded for later verbatim transcription. Following each interview, memos were written to capture emotional tones and other non-verbal cues. Memos also included reflections about the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Consistent with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), a five step data analysis process was used. All transcripts and memos were read holistically to identify

potential themes. Transcripts and memos subsequently were read line by line; and relevant statements were coded in the appropriate theme. All data coded was examined for the purpose of refining and clarifying the theme. Patterns were sought within each theme. Finally, the themes were filtered through the research question.

The first step in the data analysis process was to read the transcripts several times to gain familiarity with the data. This was done in conjunction with replaying each participant's audio recording while reading the transcript to ensure that the transcript was accurate. Broad themes were noted.

The next step was to conduct a line-by-line analysis for the purpose of coding the data. Each transcript was read word for word and line by line. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in order to use a piece of information, or 'unit' of information, from the actual raw data source, it has to meet two established criteria. First, the unit of information has to reflect the theme in some manner. Second, it must be about something that can stand by itself. More specifically, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These units of information were extracted from the raw data, ranging from a few words in a sentence to an extended paragraph.

Once all the relevant data was transferred into units, the next step was categorizing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, portions of the transcripts were coded or categorized to the appropriate themes identified in the first step. This process involved comparing and contrasting information within the theme. At this point, themes were clarified and subthemes were identified. Finally, the themes and subthemes were filtered through the research question.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explained the methods that were used to complete this study.

Several elements of the methodology were discussed, including the research question, research design, participants, data source, data collection, and data analysis.

## **Chapter 4 - Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches' understandings of their roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context. This chapter reports the results generated from the semi-structured interviews conducted with each of the coaches. Two major themes and one minor theme emerged from the overall data: the two major themes were Winning and Coach as CEO, and the minor theme was Need for Personal Life. Under each theme, a number of sub-themes emerged and were fit systematically into the appropriate theme. Comments taken directly from the coaches' interviews are used to support the themes and sub-themes. Most of the designated themes and sub-themes are closely related and should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. This chapter describes the results for each of the overarching themes and sub-themes using the direct quotations of the coaches.

### **Winning**

Nearly all of the coaches in this study communicated the importance of winning baseball games. One coach from a small school provided an image of how he approaches winning, "It starts with communication by the head coach, we are here to win games, so that is at the top of the pyramid, but this is Division I baseball and this is why we are here, it is the world that we live in". All coaches discussed one of the harsh realities of NCAA Division I baseball: without consistently winning games, a head coach will not have job security. Some coaches presented a simpler view of winning, such as this veteran coach, "At this level, well, if you do not win, you are going to get fired... There comes a certain period of time where people, you know, they want a winner", or this coach from a large school, "There is nothing, in my view, more important than winning,

because I can promise you this, if you are not winning, you are going to get fired...I cannot lose and enjoy the job, I am a bad loser, I do not like to lose". Another veteran coach went into much more detail:

Well, I cannot feel like I am successful if we are not winning...I think I am supposed to say what we say to our players: if you do two things, if you try to play the game the way we have asked you to play it, taught you to play it, told you to play it, you are trying to execute the plays, make the pitches, or whatever it is in the game, the way we have attempted to prepare you to do it, and if you are competing every pitch, then you have done what we could ask of you. The fact that we lose, well, you have done all you could do...I cannot call that a success, you know? I really cannot. I mean, we look good in a uniform, we play hard, we run on, we run off, we get beat, that is not good enough. So for me, sorry, in the end, it is about winning.

One coach from a large school shared two brief thoughts regarding how winning influences other facets of his program, "So it is more of a process that we teach the fundamentals, but the process is always based on what is best for the team and winning", and, "And of course, nobody is going to be knocking your door down to hire your assistants if you are not winning, so it all goes together." At its core, this is quite simple: according to all of the coaches interviewed, winning baseball games is essentially the primary responsibility for a head baseball coach at the NCAA Division I level.

### **Winning Culture**

Although winning baseball games was identified as their primary responsibility, one of the most important components these coaches discussed was their role in creating

a winning culture throughout their program. A majority of the head coaches interviewed suggested that in order to create a winning culture, both the team and individuals must win. Specifically, if the head coach, assistant coaches, and student-athletes felt they were winning in their specific daily responsibilities that would help the collective team win on the field. One coach who has head coach experience at a large and small school shared his thoughts on creating a winning culture,

I think that goes along with the standard you are trying to set...being able to adjust and not make the same mistakes again, being on time, and all the little things that make athletes great...I think those are the keys you have to foster in your organization, in the rest of your team, in the coaches, and once they understand the standard, then you do not deviate from that standard...the way the wins take care of themselves is talent and people who are able to execute the plan that is in the standard of the organization.

Another coach from a large school commented,

I think you have to establish that everybody is important, it is very key that everybody knows their roles, as a player, as a coach, let's make this program, regardless of what we have or do not have, the best possible program we can be, and it can be pretty powerful, when you take the ego out and they are focusing on the team...and that culture is so relentless that you are a tough team to beat day in and day out.

Beyond individual winning, building a culture of winning seemed to involve instilling in players the idea that they were winning for a larger purpose – the team. A veteran coach discussed his philosophy,

We are going to really work to establish chemistry to the point where everyone is playing for each other...it breeds a real bond between the players and coaches, there is a real emotional bond that we build in our culture that is as important, or more important, than being able to drag bunt or hit the cut-off man.

Some of the coaches reflected on the importance of the history of the program and past players in creating a winning culture. This veteran coach shared,

I really look at the history. I am a big history guy. What is the history of the program? What have we done in the 2000's? What have we done in the last 10 years? What have we done in the last five years? The blueprint has been built, but we are always tweaking it and adjusting it.

Another veteran coach shared,

The culture, it breeds a real bond between players and coaches. I think even the recruits can see it. You see the former players one night at the game and when they come back, it is always hugs. And you point to a lot of players in the past who were all-everything and put the team first. You show them that it is ok to be that kind of guy. That is a real emotional bond that we build in our culture.

One coach who has head coach experience at a large and small school, explained how a winning culture can extend well beyond when a player finishes his baseball career.

Relationships were identified as a key component to success,

To be honest, as a coach and as a person, this is going to sound really funny, but I measure success as a coach based on the relationships I have with our kids after they have been gone for five years. Because if they are gone for five years, and I

still have a relationship and communication with them, and I am still getting invited to weddings, I think I am doing a good job.

A majority of the coaches clearly reflected that creating a winning culture throughout the program is one of their most important responsibilities. This culture is developed when everyone does his best as an individual in order to make the team successful as a whole. Additionally, by reflecting on the history of the program, and the role of former players, this winning culture can extend well beyond his time at school.

**Challenges to winning.** Creating a winning culture is not as simple as it sounds. These coaches face many challenges that can inhibit the overall progress of the winning culture. These challenges include the recruitment process, travel baseball culture, and players' sense of entitlement.

**Recruitment process.** The first challenge these coaches must manage is the overall uncertainty that revolves around the NCAA recruiting process. A majority of the coaches spoke very candidly about the uncertainty associated with recruiting student-athletes and how that uncertainty can affect their pursuit of creating a winning culture. Coaches from smaller schools, with less national recognition, discussed how they generally do not get the most talented student-athletes and must rely heavily on selling the coaching staff's ability to develop players or the future direction of the program. One veteran coach suggested,

If he is throwing 95, he is going to go to Stanford or UCLA, or he was going to get drafted in the first ten rounds and sign...because if we were recruiting against guys from bigger schools, we had to be realistic.

A coach from a small school added,

What I have found is, we are not going to get the hot-shots, we are not going to get Johnny Rifle...the only way we are going to get a guy over UCLA is if they do not want him or if we beat them to the punch, which is unusual, almost nonexistent.

Coaches from larger schools, with more national recognition, discussed how they have to convince the talented student-athletes they are recruiting why NCAA Division I college baseball is a better route than professional baseball. The Major League Baseball draft is different from the professional drafts of football and basketball. In the National Football League, players can only be drafted after their junior season in college. In the National Basketball Association, players can be drafted after their freshman season in college. In Major League Baseball, a player can be drafted out of high school, junior college, or after their junior year in college. One coach from a large school stated,

You have to stay away, as much as you can, from Major League Baseball...we deal with the draft year in and year out, so we have to be very careful about who values education...I just think those three years are invaluable to a player, and you have to make sure you emphasize that they are going to be better off having a chance to get their degree and they are going to be prepared to fight the fight that is professional baseball.

A veteran coach commented,

The problem is, college baseball is unlike any collegiate sport, it is the number one most difficult sport to recruit for because of the draft, so the same guys that we like, Major League Baseball likes, they have millions and millions and

millions of dollars to throw at these kids...I think you just have to do your due diligence.

Two veteran coaches reflected on additional uncertainty once these players make it to school. Specifically, baseball is a team sport that requires talent. A young person can have talent, but might not fit well on a team. Another young person seems shy and reserved, so there is hesitancy to put him in a leadership role. The uncertainty is immense. The first coach shared,

Just because he does not talk, that does not mean that he is not a good baseball player. It just means he does not talk...And sometimes you are going to find some freshmen who have a personality that they can lead as well and I think you encourage them to do that...And you really empower some of these kids to blossom, some of them will freak out a little bit, but when you empower some of the one that you think are going to be good leaders, it actually make them a whole lot better.

The second veteran coach reflected,

We have a thing called Marine Day. Guys have to carry each other to help them make it through. We do a lot of group dynamic drills. We give them a set of rules and they figure it out together. So the team leadership comes out of those drills. We see guys who try and lead, then we see guys who try and lead and people actually follow which is the most important part. Some guys stand up and nobody responds. Well, you know he is not going to be a captain. Then you find somebody who has been quiet the whole time and says this is how we are going to do it, the team responds, then there is your captain.

The initial discussion of the NCAA recruiting process focused on the baseball specific dynamics. It was clear that there were some noticeable differences in recruiting philosophies between head coaches from smaller and larger schools. However, it became clear that competition from more prestigious programs or the Major League Baseball draft was not the biggest challenge these coaches face. The greater uncertainty comes from the reality that these coaches cannot hand-pick winners.

According to a majority of the coaches, one of the biggest challenges in creating a winning culture was attempting to properly predict and determine a future student-athlete's physical development, mental fortitude, and character. Essentially, the recruiting process is not as simple as being able to hand-pick winners. A coach from a large school mentioned,

I think tools obviously are somewhat easy to see, at times, power and throw and field and run, velocity and breaking ball and projection with the body, you know I think there are a lot of guys that can see that. It is really you never know what you are getting until you get it, so I think recruiting now is more than ever with all these showcases and all these one-look, two-looks, you can get fooled, so you have to be really very careful on I think the recruitment of players other than just tools.

A veteran coach commented,

I could answer the question and tell you we get it right and we always get the right guy but I would be lying. In my experience, we are wrong about as often as we are right...and in my view, you can never see a guy enough, because in my experience, you never know what you are going to get until you are with him day

after day after day, sometimes it takes two years for a guy to show what they really are.

Another veteran coach discussed the disposition of the recruits. His concerns related to more intangible characteristics than the athlete's physical abilities,

Now, the recruiting though, that is different, because I find that it is insane, it is just not realistic to think that you know what a player is in terms of intangibles, makeup, you know, personality, those kinds of things, the discipline, the work ethic, to think that you would know those things because you have him in and you have met his parents, you are going to their home, or you have only seen him play eight times, I find that there are always surprises, and so you do not know a guy until you get him here and get him here on-time".

A similar topic associated with this uncertainty in the recruiting process was how student-athletes are "committing" to schools as early as the ninth and tenth grade.

Phrases such as, "sometimes the recruiting process is going so fast now that you don't get to have that true evaluation of kids", "you get fooled a lot, I mean you get fooled, I think now-a-days it is difficult with what everybody is doing, I cannot tell you what a kid in the ninth grades personality is going to be like when he is a freshman in college", and "these days you have to do all this bologna about recruiting kids as a tenth grader or even a ninth grader, it is ridiculous, but we are doing it".

The consensus amongst the coaches was that there is a great deal of uncertainty regarding the way a student-athlete will develop physically and the personality traits he will develop over the span of a few years. This can make planning for the future quite difficult. If one of these coaches recruits a student-athlete expecting him to be one type

of player, and he arrives on campus and turns out to be another type of player, that turns into a challenging situation. It became clear that these coaches face a major additional challenge when these student-athletes arrive on campus.

***Travel baseball culture.*** A second challenge to developing a winning culture is travel baseball culture. Nearly all of the coaches discussed the evolution of youth/travel baseball and how it had become a unique challenge for NCAA Division I baseball coaches. Travel baseball is considered the highest level of competition in youth baseball. There are generally competitive try-outs and costly, individual expenses associated with joining a travel baseball team. The players are generally chosen based on their ability and skill level and play in competitive tournaments across the country. This veteran coach shared a detailed overview of the current landscape of travel baseball and how it influences NCAA Division I coaches,

I think the coaching environment right now is very challenging...there is a pay for play culture and environment, this is making it hard for a lot of coaches because parents feel that because they spent all this payment, and have done all this for their kids, they should be rewarded for it...Because they feel like everything is supposed to be great with their kids because they have done everything they are supposed to do, the fact that they are playing at a D1 program at a high level on a team and actually have an opportunity to compete is not enough, and I think that is kind of alarming because you set kids up for failure when you are dealing with that...And that is where it comes from, and so these parents have certain expectations when they get to your school and they do not know how to react when little Johnny doesn't play.

This coach from a large school shared,

I think the culture of the players has changed a little bit over the last couple of years, so you have to adapt to the travel ball, guys getting their lessons and not listening to coaches they maybe should have been listening to, you know, the culture has changed...and it has always been the spotlight has been on them so much that you have to redirect their mindset into team, more than individual accomplishments.

One veteran coach commented on travel baseball websites publishing player rankings, generally the top one-thousand prospects in the country, by recruiting class,

So they (parents) are looking at websites, and they are not looking at how the teams are doing. They are looking at how my kid did, and is he rated in the top 10, and who was at that environment that might recruit my son and offer him a scholarship.

The coaches suggested this can lead to false perceptions of reality and perceived miscommunication between the coaches and players. Additionally, certain travel ball organizations have notorious reputations for selling their services, and in return, promise to get a student-athlete a scholarship to play Division I baseball. One veteran coach shared his thoughts on travel ball organizations, “The travel ball coaches are a little scary, those guys are like brokers, when they get a kid to UCLA or USD or Nevada, it is a notch on their belt and they will put it up at their facility, it is a business”. Another coach who has head coach experience at a large and small school discussed the inherent conflict of interest when recruiting players from travel ball organizations,

The problem is, you talk to travel ball coaches and they are not going to say a whole lot regarding the negative because they are getting paid by these players to help them out...where I am paying somebody, it is like getting a recommendation from somebody, it is always going to be a good recommendation. So I think that is one of the hardest things right now is trying to get and find those people who are going to be honest about a player, about a personality, about his work ethic, about the parents, about all the other things that can cause problems once you get him here on campus.

***Entitlement.*** A third challenge to a winning culture is a sense of entitlement. A majority of the coaches, from both large and small schools, discussed player entitlement and how it has become a new challenge. Two veteran coaches shared how different recruiting is in college baseball today, compared to ten or twenty years ago. The first coach shared how different the draft and athletic scholarship percentages are,

Again, this was during my early/middle years, I think it has changed drastically, and I began to see that change a few years ago. In those days, the draft was different, the money was different, we could still get by with giving tuition, books, and two hundred a month, which was thirty-percent. Whereas today you have to give every guy twenty-five percent, so it is a different dynamic in today's coaching.

The other veteran coach reflected,

I mean, I am so old. I came from a time in the game where we did not do anything...Because I cannot even describe how different it is from when I started.

These days, you have to deal with recruiting kids so early, it is ridiculous, but we have to do it.

One coach who is still new to the position shared a simple thought: “That is the hardest thing about the game now-a-days because every kid is entitled now”. Certain youth baseball internet websites publish player and team rankings within the travel baseball community. These player-rankings are often carried from high school to college, as one coach who has head coach experience at a large and small school commented,

It is the instant era, everybody wants instant success, it is the entitlement, that is a big word, you know parents invest time and resources and they go to all these showcases and they are all in that entitlement area and they come in entitled to playing time.

A coach from a large school commented,

Well it is the entitlement era, let’s start with that. And it is not getting better, it is getting worse...Everything is financial based now, so the entitlement part of it is, it is a rat race, parents putting out a bunch of money to get lessons, and travel teams, and of course in return they want a scholarship...and one of the things we need to coach out of them right away when they come here is that entitlement and that showcase personality...in the old days guys had to wait their turn to play, and it is immediate feedback, and if they do not get immediate feedback, they want to transfer and go someplace else. I do not like it, but it is something you have to deal with nowadays.

A veteran coach had a different opinion,

I have gotten a lot of experience here and I do not think that the kids have changed. If they have, it has been for the better. The entitlement thing, you know, I do not really see it. We get great kids here, and we recruit great character kids.

The consequence of the sense of entitlement is that these coaches must teach a player to embrace his role within the team even though the position may not be the role that player wants. Additionally, a few coaches discussed having certain levels of tolerance for extremely talented student-athletes, even though they may not be the best team players. This reality is inconsistent with creating a winning culture but contributes to a winning team. The coaches in this study described working tirelessly to get each student-athlete to embrace his specific role within the team, and at times, manage the individualistic motivations of extremely talented players. It was apparent that these coaches believed that the entitled beliefs of student-athletes played a major role in their ability to create a winning culture.

It was clear that the coaches in this study had a complex image of what winning looks like. Scoring more runs than their opponent is only one part of the equation. In order to create and sustain a winning culture, everyone in their program must win. Essentially, in order for the team to win collectively, each person must win individually and the players must play for the team. The recruiting process provides some unique challenges that these coaches must manage. First, these coaches acknowledged the level of uncertainty that accompanies attempting to predict physical and mental development patterns of future student-athletes. In very simple terms: these coaches cannot just pick “winners”. Second, these coaches understand that they must manage, and sometimes

tolerate, entitled or individualistic beliefs from student-athletes when they arrive on campus. Overcoming these challenges illustrates that winning, and creating a winning culture, is not as simple as scoring more runs than their opponent.

### **Coach as CEO**

How these coaches started their coaching careers appeared to influence their thinking on how to lead their organizations. A majority of the coaches discussed their personal self-awareness towards their playing careers and how that self-awareness influenced their decision to get into coaching. The coaches suggested that at some point, making a career out of playing professional baseball was not going to work for them. Playing professional baseball was the goal, but when that goal eluded them, they seemed to go through a deliberate thought process about going into coaching. One veteran coach suggested, "After I got done playing, I had a short playing career and I just knew I wanted to be connected". Another coach who has head coach experience at a large and small school shared,

And when I finished playing, I had a lot of professional teams ask me to be a coach in their organization...So when I decided to do that, I knew I did not want to go into professional baseball because I realized how little coaching there actually was. I wanted to be able to actually have an effect on kids and show them proper work ethic.

Another coach who has head coach experience at a large and small school shared,

It was probably when I was playing pro ball and I was towards the end of my career. I would sit there and talk to the managers or the coaches and at that point they all had kind of mentioned to me if I ever thought about coaching in the

organization after I was done playing...but at some point, I actually looked at it and maybe the writing was on the wall.

A veteran coach shared,

I started coaching after professional baseball. I worked for a guy who was a scout who signed me, because I could not get a teaching job. It was after spring training, I got released, went home, and I thought well, I will try and get a teaching job in September, this was March, and that is when I started coaching.

A coach from a large school commented,

I think everybody dreams of being in baseball as either a player or as a coach. I had a pretty short career as a pro player. I had the opportunity to get into Division I college coaching rather quickly. It was very important to me that I got into it as soon as I got done playing. I was very fortunate to get into Division I right away and be able to help a program.

These coaches had to reconcile their desire to play professional baseball with the realities they faced. The reality of not being able to play professional baseball led to the beginning of their coaching careers. Playing professional baseball provided these coaches with valuable experience of the skill level required to make it to the major leagues.

### **Role as Leader**

It was apparent that the coaches in this study understood their leadership role as much beyond the technical aspect of the game. Their perspectives of their teams resembled an automobile with a lot of moving parts that must fit together like a well-oiled machine. The coaches understood that their responsibility was to shape the

individual members of the team into a single unit. Two coaches from smaller schools provided examples of how they view their role as the leader of the organization. The first coach discussed,

First of all, as the leader, you have to set standards of behavior. That being said, guys know that there is a right way and a wrong way to do things, like any relationship you are going to have disagreements, and I do not want people around me who are like ‘yes that is awesome, good decision, etc.’. I want people around me who are going to pound their fists on the desk for a kid we are recruiting, and I hold them accountable to.

Another coach from a small school commented,

I had to, as the leader, be able to explain ‘hey, we only got 11.7 scholarships’. The big picture here is what I had to kind of come back with, see here is the big picture as the boss, I’m the CEO of this company, and here is the money, here is the budget, here is how I foresee our depth issue...again it is just the communication but also understanding, and letting the guys know, ‘hey, I understand, and I respect your decision, and the way you are coming, but hey, I’m the boss’, so that’s the way it goes.

One veteran coach shared,

I think they have to be shown. And I do think they hear this from the teammates that have been there: this is how we do it here...But I think the ones who survive and figure it out, along with the direction of me and the staff telling them, but I think their teammates also show that, so I think it takes care of itself in a way

through talking about it every day. And then I think the team and teammates can take care of it together.

A coach from a large school discussed, “Your job is to make sure they understand what the standard is or what the expectation is. Then, you help the younger guys who may not have been there to witness it, to help them along with some of the now upperclassmen to do it properly”. Another veteran coach discussed, “Regardless of who they are, you let them know in advance what the rules are, and this is the way it is, we do not want anyone to be surprised. There are certain things we are not flexible on”. A veteran coach from a small school shared, “It takes time. You have to build the culture. Once the older guys take over and look a freshman in the eye and say this is how we do it. That is when the magic dust happens”.

Essentially, these coaches described routinely taking a step back from each situation to contemplate how it affects the big picture and the culture. Additionally, these coaches realized their role in setting the standards of behavior within the organization, as well as encouraging the older players to teach younger players about the culture. Both of these leadership responsibilities were described as vital in their position as CEO of their organization. Another important component of being the leader involves balancing and managing the intense time demands associated with the position.

### **Time Management**

The coaches in this study communicated that like any leader of an organization, a major part of creating their winning culture is their ability to balance and manage their time demands. Each coach provided unique insight into their intense time demands. One coach who does not have as much head coach experience as some of the other coaches in

this sample gave some context for what a typical day in his life looks like, “It has taken a while to get used to...but at first it was difficult, you are running fourteen, sixteen hour days you know, a twelve hour day is a good day, I mean if it is just eight to eight, that is a normal day”. A veteran coach shared his method of navigating a day in his life,

The separation of coach on the field, winning, producing the process, had to be separated by the day, that is how I did it, so from eight to twelve, that was the office guy, that was calls, alumni breakfast meetings, golf tournaments, all that. And then from twelve on it was baseball, and a lot of pre-planning the night before practice...there are always things you are going to have to change, but that is kind of how I did it, I separated the day.

A coach from a large school shared his thoughts on managing the demands of each day, I think you just have to be present...you really cannot be in two places at one time. You try and do the best possible job that you can do wherever you are at, and I think everybody wants to be on the field, but you have to be a good office coach, you have to be a good field coach, you have to be a good recruiting coach...making sure that you are not somewhere else mentally, and you are doing the best possible job that you can in terms of whatever you are doing...you do not want to do things over.

Separating the day into segments and being present to focus on each task were two specific strategies these coaches used to help manage their time demands.

Coaches discussed the many responsibilities they have as the head of the organization. Many of these responsibilities have little to do with actually coaching

baseball. One responsibility of a NCAA Division I baseball coach is marketing his team.

One coach from a large school commented,

For me, I always tell people I am the best marketing tool there is for our program, and my job is to make sure I go out into the community and go out into our university and get people excited about our team and what we are doing.

A related responsibility of a head coach was identified as fundraising. However, fundraising responsibilities differed between coaches in this sample. A coach at a small program suggested,

I think a lot of that depends on the coach himself, I am more personal, I do not mind going to community things, meeting a booster...I think it depends on the personality of the coach, and how much he feels the school should just supply things, the boosters, some guys should just go out and get money from them because my job is only to coach, so I think it is an individual thing here that each guy has to figure out what he thinks is important, and not every coach has to do those responsibilities, if you are at a mid-major, I felt like I had to do that, if I was at UCLA, I do not think I would do those things.

Another coach from a small program shared,

I am sure they want me to raise money but there was no discussion about raising money when they interviewed me. I cannot. Other coaches may have been fine going to the owner of the Mirage hotel in Reno and asking for money but I cannot do that, and I know people that have that gift and they have no shame, that is not me...Boosters are a necessary evil, I do not think spending time with boosters is necessarily the same thing as asking them for money...At this place there is only

about three guys that have given generously, these three guys are really good guys, they are ex-baseball players, they like to just talk about the game, they are not stabbing you in the back, now if it is a guy with a fork tongue and he is talking behind your back, I am going to find a way out of dealing with that guy, you just have to understand that is part of the deal.

According to all the coaches in the study, time is a very valuable commodity. These coaches have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. The coaches from smaller schools reported having the luxury of not having to spend so much time fundraising, whereas coaches from larger schools were often required to get out into the community more frequently and interact with boosters, donors, alumni, and fans.

### **Assistant Coaches**

A majority of the coaches in this study discussed the role of a mentor, or outside influence, on their decision to get into coaching. This mentor, or outside influence, provided a foundation and past experiences that allowed for an almost seamless transition from playing into coaching. One coach from a large school shared, “He got to me at a very critical time in my career. I was a young coach and he just helped me go to a different level of teaching and development of communication of how to handle situations with players”. A veteran coach from a small school discussed, “I love teaching. You know, I come from a background in my family of teachers and so I think that lead me into the profession”. A veteran coach shared,

When I was in high school, I thought I knew a lot about baseball. I got some awards for being the best and I thought I knew a lot...and then I went to play for probably the guy that was the biggest influence in my career and realized that I

did not really know much about baseball, and that was a blessing because I felt like I had to know every little thing to even make the team.

A veteran coach from a small school shared,

And then I found out what playing the game was all about. I always played and somewhat excelled. I would say not until my freshman year in college did I understand what it really meant to be a coach under him. So I had a great mentor. I had a great coach and a great experience. He was very tough on us but he really taught the game of baseball in a way that I had never seen before. He was ahead of his time.

A coach from a large school reflected,

So I tried out for the baseball team and I can honestly say it was the best decision I have ever made. Playing for him, it created a different level of passion and interest and knowledge about the game. And I bought into it. I did not have a great skillset. I could hit a little bit, but running, throwing, and power were not strengths of mine. The value of getting with him and being able to use my mind and being able to compete at that level and beyond was a critical thing.

To the sample of coaches interviewed, mentors assisted in their development as both a player and coach. Mentors provided the coaches with a clear behavioral standard for personal and professional development. The influence of the mentors was a constant reminder of the head coach responsibility these coaches currently have to mentor their assistant coaches.

Coaches in this study spoke about the importance of assistant coaches in providing support in order for them to carry out their responsibilities. In addition, they

spoke of the high expectations they set for their assistant coaches. The intense off the field time demands of each head coach, and the big-picture program development for which they are responsible, does not leave a lot of time to prepare for the on the field aspect of being a NCAA Division I head baseball coach. The coaches shared one of the most effective ways to address this is to provide clear expectations to the assistant coaches. Three coaches shared their contrasting ideas regarding their specific expectations for their assistant coaches. One coach from a small program reflected,

As far as assistant coaches, the blueprint is they are going to coach, they are not going to have a lot of responsibilities of getting the vans, ordering them sack lunches, doing the budget stuff, doing the expense reports, it is A) recruit and B) develop. If you are not doing one of those things, you know, recruit and develop, then you are not being productive, so the head coach will step back and take care of all the compliance, administrative duties, scheduling summer ball, and those kinds of things, and the assistant coaches are going to be in the bunker with the players, developing relationships, developing trust.

In contrast, a coach from a large program communicated,

I think being very specific with your assistants on their responsibilities on and off the field is critical, you know housing, parking, summer placement, evaluation, I think you have to be very specific on responsibilities, and I think a lot of times when guys know what is expected, they are going to be better coaches...and you let them know what your expectations are and I think that can go a long ways in regarding to building a team and building a strong team, when everybody is doing their job, everybody is helping each other.

A coach who has experience at both a large and small program did not identify the tasks associated with being an assistant coach; rather, he discussed the expectations for his assistant coaches to reflect his values and priorities,

That is part of the reason why I like having assistant coaches that have played for me, because they know what I am, what I believe in. I expect them to fall into line without much conversation about it. But that is naïve in some respects.

Sometimes you have to sit down and have a pow-wow and say ‘this is how I want to see it done’, the thing that I find difficult is as soon as I am seen correcting a coach, that gets in the way with the relationship, and I do not want that, but if you have to you have to.

Having specific expectations of assistant coaches was identified as the means for the head coach to continue to keep a big-picture perspective, even on the field. The head coaches described that during a practice or game, they expect each assistant coach to focus on his specific responsibilities, so they can keep the collective team interests or strategies in mind. While there were certain instances when the head coach worked with a specific position within the team, such as calling pitches or coordinating the offense, they still allowed their assistant coaches to have autonomy over the remaining responsibilities. The ability to provide clear expectations of their assistant coaches was another example of these head coaches serving in their role as CEO.

A majority of the coaches described the importance of delegation in the process of empowering assistant coaches. According to the coaches in the study, delegating involved passing down specific responsibilities to their assistant coaches. These

responsibilities can involve both on and off the field demands. Some coaches had simple views regarding delegation, such as a coach from a small school,

I learned early on that you needed to delegate, to let guys coach, because that also helps them progress in their careers. So I needed for them to be able to, on their own, let me delegate to them in their area and let them go. Because they needed to grow as a coach also. I think nurturing your assistants is your responsibility. I think you want a coaching tree of some sort where you want your guys to learn the game.

A veteran coach discussed, “I think that is one of the things that you take a step back if you are an old guy like me, and you are proud of the fact that a lot of your ex-colleagues and players are now running their own programs, that means that together we educated ourselves and we are doing a lot of things correctly”. A coach from a large school commented,

It almost is a necessity to delegate at our level because the more you are in the most important environments, the regionals, the super regionals, and of course the promise land: the college world-series, the more you are taken away by media demands and interviews, so you cannot be everywhere at the same time.

Finally, a coach from a large school shared,

I think it is the only way you can do it at our level. For somebody to be a dictator is pretty difficult with all the other demands and distractions, so it goes back to hiring good people, trusting them. When you delegate, try not to micromanage them and hopefully I do a good job of letting them work so to speak.

These coaches described that it was important for the assistant coaches to have the autonomy to complete the task in their own way. Delegating responsibility was described as the most efficient method to ensure that tasks are being completed, trust is being built between the coaching staff, and the winning culture continues to grow stronger.

### **Player Development**

The coaches in this study described player development as one of the most important responsibilities in determining if they will have a winning culture. A majority of the responses regarding player development began with the coaching staff's role in recruiting and developing the student-athletes who will ultimately have the most direct influence on winning baseball games. One coach from a large school suggested,

Really the most important thing is the development of the players. We listen to our players. We want to make sure they are retaining information; the information is being installed so there has to be a lot of aptitude in our program. And we have to make sure that we recruit the best players, the best learners, the guys that can have a legitimate chance of getting better.

A veteran coach commented, "If you want to be a head coach in Division I, then we need to go to Omaha, and you need to recruit the type of players that are going to get us there, and you need to develop those players once they get here".

Two coaches from smaller schools discussed how player development has been built into the culture of their programs,

The development part is what our program has been built upon from day one...As it went along, you got better athletes and you got guys, but you still have to develop them. They cannot go straight out of high school into college baseball

and play. It is a difficult transition, and I am sitting here looking at our roster right now and it is like, we got some guys that still need to develop, and if they develop, they are going to be good.

And another said,

I do not think you can win unless you are developing the players, I find that they go hand in hand, it is very unusual that you have a player who steps on the field from day one and is so advanced that you can just leave him alone, so I do think you have to pay high, high attention to developing guys.

Given that a player's decisions, actions, and mentality play a large role in winning and losing a baseball game, these coaches described placing their development as a top priority. A veteran coach shared,

I think it starts with an intense desire to see your players reach peak performance...So, a heavy emphasis on development...This thing is all about getting the most out of your players at the right time, and not about you, I think early on in my career I used to talk to my teams for an hour after the game and blame them for losses instead of really pointing the finger at myself instead of at my players. So much more accountability that it is my responsibility to teach these guys and get them to perform.

### **Need for Personal Life**

In addition to the two major themes of Winning and Coach as CEO, one minor theme emerged from the interviews. The successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches in this study communicated the importance of having a personal life outside of baseball. One veteran coach shared,

The hardest part is just figuring out the balance, family, pain of losing, the absolute torture that you go through during a season. You have to really learn to take the time off, the down time when the foot gets off the accelerator, you really need to decompress.

A coach from a small school also commented, “Family is the most important thing in your life and coaching is really the second most important thing in your life, and I really think you need to keep those priorities straight, and make sure that you do not get distracted from outside influences that will get you off those two things”. A coach who has head coach experience at a large and small school commented,

I want to be successful being a husband, being a father, being a leader, being an example for my players, motivating them to be successful in every area of their lives...if you are not holding up your end of the bargain to other things, you are sacrificing your relationship with your wife, and your family, your kids, your grandkids, and it is a win at all costs thing, I do not think that is being successful, I think being successful is being consistent, and having an impact in somebody's life, because this job that I have been blessed enough to have for 37 years is making a difference in somebody's life both as a baseball player and a human being.

Balancing familial relationships is an important part of creating and sustaining a winning culture.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches' understandings of their roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education

context. This chapter reported the results generated from the interviews conducted with each of the coaches. Two major themes and one minor theme emerged. The major themes were Winning and Coach as CEO, and the minor theme was Need for Personal Life. Under each theme, a number of sub-themes emerged and were fit systematically into the appropriate section.

## Chapter 5 - Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify how successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context. A qualitative research design, using a semi-structured interview, was followed in this study. The question that guided the research was: How do successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their various roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context? Specifically, relationships and interactions with the coaching staff and student-athletes were examined, followed by an exploration of how they balance these roles against their professional responsibilities of coaching a successful baseball program. This chapter will begin with a short overview of this study, followed by a discussion of the results. In addition, implications of the study, recommendations for future research considerations and a conclusion will be discussed.

Two major themes and one minor theme were found in the data. The two major themes were Winning and Coach as CEO, and the minor theme was Need for Personal Life. The first theme, Winning, revolved around how in order for the team to win, each individual member of the team had to win. The second theme, Coach as CEO, focused on the details of how the head coach carries out various responsibilities in order to create a winning culture. The final theme, Need for a Personal Life, revealed that in order to win these head coaches must not neglect their familial responsibilities.

The various theories of leadership that might apply to baseball coaches were reviewed in Chapter 2. In this study the actual practices, as perceived by the coaches, were explored to determine the coaches' understandings of their roles and responsibilities in a higher education context. Because the model of exemplary practices, described by

Kouzes and Posner (2012), focuses on leadership practices, it was used to guide the final interpretation of the data. The coaches who participated in this study were all considered exemplary given they had lead their teams to the Division I NCAA regional playoffs at least three times over an eleven year span. With this in mind, the results of this study were filtered through the five practices of Kouzes and Posner (2012) including model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.

### **Discussion**

This study sought to identify how successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context. The overarching theme of this study was that winning games is the primary responsibility of the head coach. A noteworthy point was that winning was understood to be experienced both individually and collectively. Furthermore, in order to win, coaches must develop a winning culture, and must overcome several challenges to winning, such as dealing with the recruitment process, the travel baseball culture, and student-athlete entitlement.

The second theme identified in this study was that in order to win coaches must act in the role of CEO of the organization. Their role as leader was described as much greater than simply teaching players the on-field, technical aspects of baseball. Coaches indicated that they are expected to serve as marketers and fundraisers, and must spend time with boosters and community members. In order for head coaches to carry out these responsibilities, they depend on the assistant coaches to provide support. Head coaches described the need to articulate clear expectations to the assistant coaches, as well as be

willing to delegate responsibilities. Of equal importance head coaches relayed that they have the overall responsibility of player development.

The third and final theme identified was the need for a personal life. The life of a head coach was portrayed as very stressful; extensive travel and practice time takes away from family and personal life. Balancing the responsibilities of being head coach, with those of being a family man, caused extreme stress for the coaches in this study.

However, all coaches indicated that balancing the professional and personal parts of their lives was important for sustaining a winning culture.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) indicated that leadership is not about personality, but instead about behavior. Their research over the last three decades revealed that leaders who achieve the extraordinary carry out five practices that make them successful: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Only three of the five practices were revealed in the findings of this study; the most evident practice found among these successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches was inspiring a shared vision. According to Kouzes and Posner (2012), vision is inspired in two ways: envisioning the future of the organization and enlisting others to join in the cause. One way that coaches in this study described creating a vision for their players was to incorporate Omaha into the team's vision. The College World Series is played in Omaha, Nebraska each year and it is the *dream* of every college baseball team to reach this event. The coaches in this study described having their sights set on going to the College World Series, with one calling it the “promised-land”, and another indicating that the road to Omaha starts well before the season starts. In fact, this dream

was described as so important that these coaches conveyed the vision of reaching Omaha to the prospective student-athletes they were recruiting.

Enlisting others in sharing the vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) was revealed as motivating both the assistant coaches and the student-athletes. Head coaches found that the best way to motivate assistant coaches was to give them clear coaching expectations and then allow them to fulfill these expectations in the most appropriate manner.

Whereas some head coaches primarily expected their assistants to recruit and develop student-athletes as opposed to carrying out duties such as making travel arrangements and other administrative duties, others expected assistants to fulfill specific administrative responsibilities. The important element of the coaches' descriptions was to be clear about their expectations. The sentiment expressed was that when expectations were clearly stated and understood, the assistant coach would have a better chance of performing the duty, thus helping in fulfilling the vision of the organization.

Another aspect of enlisting others is appealing to common values (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). It appeared to be important to the head coaches in this study that the values of the assistant coaches were in alignment with their own. In fact, one coach indicated that he prefers to hire assistant coaches who have played for him because they know his values. When the head coach and assistant coaches have similar values, the head coaches portrayed that it is easier to create a winning culture because things run more smoothly. If the head coach disagrees with his assistant, and has to discipline him, it can negatively affect the coach/assistant coach relationship which impacts winning.

The findings of this study strongly suggested that these head coaches believe that they play a significant role in creating the vision for the team that must be carried out by

the assistant coaches and student-athletes. This study indicated that a shared vision, illustrated by a winning culture, involved empowering members of the program to win individually, so the team can win collectively. This is supported by other research demonstrating the role individual victories play in team victories (Rogers & Meehan, 2007; Giglio, Michalcova, & Yates, 2007; Stevens & Swogger, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

The coaches in this study indicated that it is sometimes easier to inspire a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) with assistant coaches than with student-athletes. The Millennial generation of students on campuses today are characterized as having a sense of entitlement (Ciani, Summers, & Easter, 2008; Greenberge, Lessard, Chen & Farruggia, 2008; Levine & Dean, 2012). Coaches in this study described entitlement as a characteristic in many collegiate baseball players that impacts the development of a common vision for the team. This study suggested that a majority of these entitled behaviors have stemmed from players being part of the travel baseball culture prior to arriving to the college campus. Travel baseball players have been in the spotlight from a very young age and think they should continue to be the star player. This situation was complicated as all of the coaches in this study indicated that every incoming freshman on the team needed some sort of player development. A sense of entitlement was not simply reserved for descriptions of the student-athletes; parents were also described as feeling that because they have spent a substantial amount of money and time getting their son on the best travel team, their son should be in the starting lineup as soon as he arrives on a college campus. This attitude of the players and their parents appeared to impact building a shared vision. The coaching staff may have a team strategy developed for

winning, but some players may not share in the vision the coaches have developed because they are not given the opportunity to play immediately. Consistent with Sorenson (2015), who argued that college baseball coaches are currently in the “Age of Entitlement” (p. 1), coaches in this study felt a need to minimize the effects of this entitlement behavior. It is difficult for coaches to develop a winning culture if they are always struggling with this entitlement of players. This supports other notions that entitlement is a serious issue at all levels of amateur sports, such as football and basketball (Abrams, 2011; Atkins & Davis, 2014; Kowalski, 2016).

Another of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) practices that was found in the data was enabling others to act. This practice involves fostering collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships and strengthening others by increasing self-determination and developing competence. Head coaches described enabling both assistant coaches and student-athletes to perform in such a way that a winning culture is maintained. Head coaches in this study indicated that they allow assistant coaches to have autonomy over their specific positions, which in turn builds confidence and competence. In addition, head coaches described delegating specific responsibilities to their assistants in order to help them grow as coaches. Following the assumption that most assistant coaches someday want to become a head coach, they cannot learn the business if the head coach does not delegate responsibilities to them. Trust is an important part of enabling others to act (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). By trusting assistant coaches to carry out significant responsibilities, the head coach appeared to demonstrate confidence in their abilities to perform.

In addition to developing confidence and competence in the coaching staff, head coaches described being involved in player development. Even a star recruit needs to be developed after he arrives on campus. It is rare to have a new player so advanced that he does not need additional coaching. A significant component of enabling others to act is making people feel capable and powerful (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). This can only be achieved with student-athletes through player development. The coaches in this study realized that in order to win, the coach must place a great emphasis on developing the talents of his players.

Although the coaches in the study understood the importance of player development, what was lacking in the data was the same understanding of development of players as students. Of interest, throughout the interviews the coaches referred to their team members as players, rather than student-athletes. This suggests that the coaches think of student-athletes as players first, rather than students first. Only one coach discussed the role of the athlete as a student; however, his statement was that the player would be better off getting his degree rather than going into professional baseball

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) practice of model the way was found in the data but not to the same extent that inspire a shared vision and enable others to act were found. Coaches realized that they set the standard of behavior for the organization and must be a good example for their players. However, this issue was only briefly mentioned by coaches in this study.

In Kouzes and Posner's (2012) practice of challenging the process, leaders look for innovative ways to improve the organization which oftentimes involves experimenting and taking risks. Coaches of intercollegiate teams do not have much

leeway in risk taking because of the serious consequences if their actions are not successful. For example, they may want to give a new player who has worked hard the opportunity to start a game, but because winning was reported as the ultimate goal, and their jobs on the line if they do not win, they appeared to be less likely to take risks. Kouzes and Posner (2012) found that leaders who challenge the process and fail must be willing to accept the disappointments as learning opportunities. This did not appear to be the situation with these coaches who indicated that in the world of college sports, there is no room for losing and thus learning. Members of the institution (e.g. administrators, students, and faculty) and community members expect coaches to win. If they do not win, they are fired, as clearly stated by the coaches in this study. Another barrier head coaches face to challenging the process is the NCAA. By their very nature, head coaches might challenge the process (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) but the NCAA has very clear guidelines related to governance. Thus, behavior that attempts to challenge this governance usually ends unfavorably.

Just as head coaches may by their very nature challenge the process, they are not generally seen as people who encourage the heart. This was found to be the case for the coaches in this study. Encouraging the heart was not found as a priority of head coaches.

### **Implications for Practice**

There is substantial literature that suggests the importance of leadership on the success of an organization (Garrett, 2009; Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, & Cogliser, 2010; Mann, 2003; Amey, 2006; Bryman, 2007; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). This study revealed that leadership is broader than just knowing the technical skills of a position. In fact, based on this study's findings, one implication for

practice is that all those who aspire to be head collegiate baseball coaches must realize that possessing a technical understanding of the specific sport is insufficient. This study demonstrated that successful head coaches possess a leadership skillset that transcends their technical expertise. Aspiring head coaches should strive to strengthen their leadership knowledge and skills.

The results of this study further suggest that when athletic directors search for head coaches, they should look beyond their technical understanding and consider a broader range of characteristics. Division I athletics is riddled with examples of head coaches who lacked adequate leadership skills, often resulting in NCAA compliance investigations and sanctions. Based on the findings of this study, athletic directors, general managers, or others involved in hiring candidates for leadership positions, should look well beyond a candidate's technical expertise and thoroughly evaluate his leadership knowledge and skills.

Lastly, this study's participants believed that in order to be successful, coaches must have a personal life away from baseball. For this reason, aspiring coaches need to focus on balancing a personal life with their professional responsibilities. Division I athletics has numerous head coaches who lack strong leadership skills. Part of this skillset involves being able to balance professional and familial responsibilities. This notion can be directly applied to a CEO of a fortune 500 company, the general manager of a professional baseball team, or the president of a university. In order to be a truly successful leader, findings from this study suggest that balancing personal and professional responsibilities is a requirement.

### **Future Research Considerations**

This study was a qualitative study with a minimal number of participants. Insight could be gained by doing a larger research project which investigates successful coaching practices, specifically at the NCAA Division I level. There is a gap in the literature related to coaches at the NCAA Division I level. Division I coaches face unique challenges that differ from coaches at other levels. The recruitment process of future student-athletes is such a challenge that has not been adequately researched. The uncertainty that accompanies the recruiting process and how Division I coaches handle that uncertainty is a topic in need of further research. Additionally, the emergence of player rankings within the recruiting process has created a culture of entitlement amongst future student-athletes. The impact of an entitlement culture on NCAA Division I coaches is unknown at this point, hence the need for more thorough research on this topic. In addition to further research on Division I coaches, it would be important to know if coaches at all NCAA division levels, as well as professional levels, have the same issues related to leadership and their roles and responsibilities within the larger organization.

The need for a balanced personal and professional life has been researched in other fields such as health and physical education. However, the manner in which NCAA Division I coaches balance the intense time demands associated with their positions is still rather new. The off the field behaviors of coaches is just as important as their on the field coaching. This topic of off the field behavior and finding balance could provide a great deal of information to help strengthen academic research related to successful coaches.

The results of this study offer a unique lens for viewing coaching success presented by a number of the most successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches. However, this by no means suggests that these specific findings are the only path to coaching success. One of the underlying goals of this study was to provide new information to assist in the personal and professional development of coaches in all sports. It is vital that other researchers conduct more thorough research for the benefit of coaching development and building a more substantial body of coaching literature.

### **Conclusion**

Two major themes and one minor theme emerged in this study of successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches. The two major themes were Winning and Coach as CEO; the minor theme was Need for Personal Life. An important part of winning is that in order to develop and maintain a winning culture every member of the team and the coaching staff must win individually. If all involved are not doing the best job possible in their respective positions, the team cannot function at its highest level. A coach's role is far greater than just what he does on the field; he serves as the CEO of the organization which involves managing his time, setting high standards for assistant coaches and managing player development. In developing a winning culture and serving as CEO of the organization, the coach must remember the importance of balancing his personal life.

## Appendix A

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

#### University of Nevada, Reno Institutional Review Board Information Sheet

**Title of Study:** Successful NCAA Division I Baseball Coaches' Understanding of Their Roles and Responsibilities as Leaders in a Higher Education Institution.

**Principal Investigator:** Rita M. Laden, Ed.D., 775-682-9082

**Co-Investigator:** Cameron McMullen, M.A. 775-682-6980

**Protocol #:**

We are conducting a research study to explore how successful NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education institution.

If you volunteer to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that should take about an hour. You will be asked questions about how your professional background, general questions about the qualities that make a successful college baseball team, and how you balance your various coaching roles and responsibilities.

This study is considered to be minimal risk of harm. This means the risk level is typical to those encountered during your daily activities. The questions asked will be professional in nature; none of the questions asked will be personal; nor will the interview include questions that could reveal competitive strategies.

Benefits of doing research are not definite; but we hope to learn about how successful baseball coaches think about their various roles and responsibilities as leaders in a higher education context. There are no direct benefits to you in this study activity.

The researchers and the University of Nevada will treat your identity with professional standards. We cannot offer confidentiality because of the limited number of individuals involved in this study. However, you will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study. The researchers, the Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), and the University of Nevada, Reno Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board may look at your study records.

You may ask questions of the researcher at any time. The contact email address: [cameronm@unr.edu](mailto:cameronm@unr.edu) or you may also call us at 775-682-6900. There is an office that provides oversight called the Office of Human Research Protection. If you have any concerns on the conduct of the study, call the office at 775-327-2367.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop at any time.

**Thank you for your participation in this study!**

## **Appendix B**

### PARTICIPATION E-MAIL

My name is Cam McMullen and I am the Director of Baseball Operations at the University of Nevada. In addition to my responsibilities with the baseball team, I am finishing my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. The goal of my dissertation is to investigate how NCAA Division I baseball coaches understand their roles as leaders. I am writing to see if you would be willing to participate in a phone interview that should take about an hour. The questions will revolve around such topics as professional development, the qualities that make a successful Division I college baseball program, and balancing coaching roles/responsibilities. The interview questions are all professional in nature and will not include topics that could reveal competitive strategies. In order to adhere to professional standards, neither you nor your program will be identified in this research. I am fully aware of your time constraints so I am flexible as far as availability to conduct the interview. My goal is to become a Division I head baseball coach and the information gained from this interview will be very valuable in my professional development. Additionally, I am hoping this information can help other baseball coaches understand their roles as leaders. Attached is the official information sheet from the University of Nevada. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. All of my contact information is listed below. Thank you very much for taking the time to read this and I hope to hear back from you soon.

## Appendix C

### INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Let's begin by your telling me your professional journey to where you find yourself today. When did you first have an interest in baseball? When did you first have an interest in coaching?

Could you please describe your coaching staff? When you have a coaching vacancy, what do you look for in someone you want to hire? Where is your favorite place to recruit new staff?

When there are disagreements or problems among your staff, how do you handle that? How do you think about it/what strategies do you use?

When you, or your coaching staff, are recruiting new student athletes, what are the most important qualities you look for? How do you assess personality?

Let's say you have a successful team that has won largely because of experienced players; but your key players have either graduated or been drafted. Now you have an untested/young team. How do you deal with that? How do you deal with university/community expectations?

How do you get highly-touted/highly-ranked high school players to play within a team system? How do you guide your coaching staff to deal with it?

How do you balance winning with developing both your staff and your student athletes?

How do you balance your on-field coaching responsibilities with your role as the face of a Division 1 baseball team?

Do you have any final thoughts?

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