

THE BIG IDEAS

Be Quick!

But don't hurry.

Focus on Effort

Not winning.

Keep It Simple

Like really simple.

Peaks and Valleys

Avoid them.

Fail to Prepare

And prepare to fail.

Teaching and Being

What you want to see.

Be Quick—But Don't Hurry

Finding Success in the Teachings of a Lifetime

BY ANDREW HILL WITH JOHN WOODEN · SIMON & SCHUSTER © 2001 · 192 PAGES

“So now that I’ve briefly described my journey of discovery and rediscovery, it is time for me to share my ‘findings’ with you. These principles of coaching that were so unique to John Wooden are all ideas you can incorporate into your own life. I will try to share some examples of how these guidelines applied to the development of the amazing UCLA dynasty, as well as how I used these strategies (albeit unconsciously) to build a hugely successful business myself...”

Coach’s philosophy is based on simplicity. Just like Coach Wooden, these secrets are understandable, accessible, and filled with simple truths. It is no coincidence that the secrets interconnect and overlap in a million different ways. They ultimately form a tight and potent system that has proven its success over long periods of time.”

~ Andrew Hill from *Be Quick—But Don't Hurry*

Andy Hill was a high school basketball star who went to UCLA during their glory years hoping to make a big splash on Coach Wooden’s championship teams. Instead, he wound up sitting on the bench while becoming one of only a dozen or so people to ever win three NCAA Championships.

This book is part autobiography and part management book as Andy walks us through the lessons he learned playing for, arguably, the greatest coach in history.

Andy shares how, unbeknownst to him at the time as he rose in the business world (all the way to the head of CBS), the lessons he learned from Coach were guiding his leadership and management styles.

It’s a fun read packed with wisdom and, of course, great basketball + Wooden stories. I enjoyed it and think you will as well if you’re into sports and leadership. (Get a copy [here](#).)

For now, I’m excited to share some of my favorite Big Ideas so let’s jump straight in!

BE QUICK—BUT DON'T HURRY!

“Be quick—but don’t hurry! is a phrase that every Bruin player heard constantly. Over and over, day after day, Coach would briefly stop practice, and in sharp staccato tones, with just a hint of an Indiana twang, snap out, ‘Be quick—but don’t hurry!’ It was Coach’s mantra. Oftentimes, Coach would crouch down in a defensive stance and move his hands like a lightning-fast magician as he repeated this saying. At times it almost became a joke, but after a while, you began to understand exactly what he meant. Life, like basketball, must be played fast—but *never* out of control. Coach says, ‘If you hurry, you’re more likely to make mistakes; but if you’re not quick you won’t get things done. It’s like a surgeon who comes upon things that are unexpected. If he isn’t capable of responding quickly he may lose a patient. If an attorney isn’t a quick thinker, he could lose a case.’ It’s hard to argue with that statement.”

*“Be quick, but don't hurry .
.. and always be in balance.”*

~ Andrew Hill

"It is ludicrous to expect quickness and no mistakes, and Coach always wanted quickness."

~ Andrew Hill

"Be quick—but don't hurry!"

Coach's mantra. Love it.

Wooden's championship teams were all known for their quickness. As Andy tells us, they learned to walk that razor's edge between being QUICK (!) but not hurrying—moving right at the edge of their abilities WITHOUT losing their centeredness.

Reminds me of a phrase Todd Henry used often in *Die Empty* ([see Notes](#)). He referred to working with "urgency and diligence" but *not* becoming frantic.

Even Coach couldn't articulate the precise meaning of his phrase but you can *feel* it.

You're engaged. You're stretching yourself. You're intensely focused and moving at a quick pace.

Yet, you're not pushing or rushing or losing your balance and getting frantic and burned out.

Can you *feel* it?

Which way do you tend to fall off the razor's edge?

Too slow or too fast?

What's 1 thing you can do to optimize?

P.S. As a sidenote, the championship Bruins teams loved the full-court press. Wooden said he didn't run it to try to steal the ball though. His intention was to SPEED up the other team—knowing that young players already tend to go a little too fast and that, while *his* team could go quickly while maintaining balance, his opponents hadn't honed that ability and would fall into hurrying and make a ton of mistakes.

FOCUS ON EFFORT, NOT WINNING

"Winning was a by-product of effort, not an end product."

~ Andrew Hill

"I know it's hard to believe, but Coach never emphasized winning. What he talked about was the commitment to playing your hardest. *Don't permit fear of failure to prevent effort. We are all imperfect and will fail on occasion, but fear of failure is the greatest failure of all.* If you gave it your best and lost, that was fine. In fact, that was better than winning with a mediocre effort.

It's not that Coach didn't care about winning. I don't think I've ever met a more competitive man in my life. But he was smart enough to know that people focus too much on the score and tighten up. Of course, when you're the top-rated team in the country and Coach gives you the locker room speech about how all he cares about is a good effort, it's hard not to chuckle just a little. After all, the only time the Bruins ever seemed to lose (which was rare) was when the effort just wasn't quite there. On the other hand, Coach gets genuinely annoyed when people talk about giving 110 percent effort, because the goal is ridiculous. Even giving a full 100 percent effort is only approachable, and probably never attainable. But any individual or team that gets close to full effort will win far more than they lose."

Coach Wooden is perhaps the best example of letting results (in his case, NCAA championships) be the by-products of effort.

Here's how he describes it in *Wooden* ([see Notes](#)): *"When I was teaching basketball, I urged my players to try their hardest to improve on that very day, to make that practice a masterpiece.*

Too often we get distracted by what is outside our control. You can't do anything about yesterday. The door to the past has been shut and the key thrown away. You can do nothing about tomorrow. It is yet to come. However, tomorrow is in large part determined by what you do today. So make today a masterpiece. You have control over that.

"Concentrate on the things that are under your control, and strive for the peace of mind that comes not from victory, but from knowing that you've done your very best."

~ Andrew Hill

This rule is even more important in life than basketball. You have to apply yourself each day to become a little better. By applying yourself to the task of becoming a little better each and every day over a period of time, you will become a lot better. Only then will you will be able to approach being the best you can be. It begins by trying to make each day count and knowing you can never make up for a lost day."

Masterpiece days.

Getting a little better day in and day out.

THAT's what we want to focus on.

Then we get to experience Wooden's version of success: *"Success is peace of mind that is the direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.*

Furthermore, only one person can ultimately judge the level of your success—you. Think about that for a moment.

I believe that is what true success is. Anything stemming from that success is simply a by-product, whether it be the score, the trophy, a national championship, fame, or fortune. They are all by-products of success rather than success itself, indicators that you perhaps succeeded in the more important contest.

The real contest, of course, is striving to reach your personal best, and that is totally under your control. When you achieve that, you have achieved success. Period! You are a winner and only you fully know if you won."

Full effort = full success.

How's YOUR effort?

KEEP IT SIMPLE

"There was no simpler program in America than UCLA in its heyday. We had one defense (man-to-man), one out-of-bounds play, a simple high-post offense, and the firm belief that a fifteen-foot bank shot at the end of a fast break was a fine result. Scouting UCLA was a waste of time; our opponents knew what we were going to do—they just couldn't stop it. Coach ran the exact same offense his entire coaching career, which spanned forty years, except for the six years in which he had the two greatest centers of all time. But without Kareem or Bill, the Bruins plays were so familiar that they were run by high school teams all over America. One clear by-product of the simplicity of the system is that it could be run to absolute perfection. In Coach's words, 'The more you make things complicated, the more there is to learn. Keep things as simple as you can and you have a chance to do them better. I'd always rather do a few things well.' We learned our lessons so well that when I played in an alumni game nearly fifteen years after I graduated, the plays were still completely fresh in my memory!"

"Truly gifted executives end their sentences with question marks, not exclamation points."

~ Andrew Hill

That's awesome.

One defense. One out-of-bounds play. Simple offense.

Practiced over and over and over again to near-perfection.

Reminds me of Georges St-Pierre in *The Way of the Fight* ([see Notes](#)). He tells us: *"This is how I get better. I pick small things and I practice them until they're perfect. I have no choice, because there are two kinds of people who do martial arts: those who practice a thousand different kicks one time each, and those who practice one kick a thousand times minimum. You can guess which group I belong to."*

Which echoes Bruce Lee's wisdom ([see Notes](#) on *Striking Thoughts*): "I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who had practiced one kick 10,000 times."

And then there's Leonardo da Vinci's gem: "Simplicity is the ultimate form of sophistication."

So, back to you.

Simple question: How have you complicated your life?

And, how can you simplify it?

What ONE thing could you do to simplify your life TODAY?

P.S. Speaking of ONE Things... Gary Keller's great book *The ONE Thing* ([see Notes](#)) captures the essence of simplicity. Here's how he puts it: "When you want the absolute best chance to succeed at anything you want, your approach should always be the same. Go small.

'Going small' is ignoring all the things you could do and doing what you should do. It's recognizing that not all things matter equally and finding the things that matter most. It's a tighter way to connect what you do with what you want. It's realizing that extraordinary results are directly determined by how narrow you can make your focus.

The way to get the most out of your work and your life is to go as small as possible...

When you go as small as possible, you'll be staring at one thing. And that's the point."

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

"Focus implies calm, intelligent, laserlike attention, and those who marveled at the precision of the well-oiled UCLA basketball teams could tell that focus, and not emotion, was our driving force. Coach was not manic; he was always calm and measured."

~ Andrew Hill

"Peaks and valleys are an intrinsic part of the human condition. It's up to the group leader to stay calm, emphasize focus and continuous effort, and never lose sight of long-term goals. The manager who accepts the reality of emotional cycles and creates a framework within it will do much better in the long run than the hard-driving emotional autocrat who expects his workers to maintain and even build on their fever pitch. It is also important to integrate another one of Coach's peaks and valleys, and that is his saying, 'If we magnified our blessings as much as we magnify disappointments, we would all be much happier.' It's all too easy to allow yourself to brood about bad news; it is equally important to feel good about triumphs. The key is to keep all moods from swinging to extremes—good advice for life as well as business."

Lots of goodness in there.

First, peaks and valleys are inherently part of the human experience.

We will never (!) get to a place where we're *always* happy. Period.

Our highs may (and hopefully will) get higher and our lows may (and hopefully will!) get higher, but there will still be highs and lows.

The trick is to not let those moods swing to extremes.

The trick to *that*? (Well, at least ONE of the tricks?)

Fundamentals. Which is why [THIS Micro Class](#) may be the most important one I ever do.

When I read this Idea I had a flashback to 15 years ago when I was running my first business, [eteamz](#). We had recently won the Anderson School at UCLA (go Bruins!!) business plan competition and hired a recent JD/MBA former Westpoint grad + Army Ranger/Military Intelligence Officer named Kelly Perdew who became our head of business development and my right-hand guy.

We shared an office in our Westwood HQ (yes, we had a ping-pong table and dart board in there—hah!). As with any start-up, some days things were going really well and other days they weren't. In fact, some HOURS would seem to oscillate between the two. (Laughing.)

"The philosophy of avoiding peaks and valleys is also an outgrowth of Coach's extremely long-range view of life... Winning a championship was a worthy accomplishment, but it did not signal an end of something, but rather a part of a much longer continuum."

~ Andrew Hill

We got to the point where after a phone call discussing a potential deal or investment lead one of us would just walk up to the white board and write a happy face or a sad face. Then an up arrow or a down arrow. Too funny.

I vividly remember Kelly reminding me (and both us) that *"Nothing is ever as good as it seems or bad as it seems."*

So true. And a key idea to have in mind if we want to enjoy the process of managing the peaks and valleys.

P.S. A few years later (after we'd raised \$4m+ of venture capital together and sold the biz to a company that went public), it was fun to watch Kelly win Season 2 of The Apprentice. :)

FAIL TO PREPARE AND PREPARE TO FAIL

"Failing to prepare is preparing to fail is another one of Coach's favorite sayings. Coach is a great believer in the value of repetition, and there was little chance of playing ball at UCLA without remembering this expression. Coach himself was the embodiment of this saying, because he was so thoroughly prepared for every practice he conducted. Coach spent literally hours every day deciding on the drills and sequence for each practice. When practice started and he reached into his pocket for that day's 3-by-5 card, we knew that his 'lesson plan' was already committed to paper. Coach always arrived early for everything, since he knew that to be on time you had to give yourself a cushion. Besides, that way he could check to make sure the balls were in place, the floor was clean, and there would be no unanticipated problems. From how to put on your socks, to how to tie your shoes, to what to wear on the road, Coach made sure that we were fully prepared for everything. In fact, we were so well prepared that Coach made it is his goal *never* to call a timeout during the game."

Coach spent HOURS preparing for *practices.*

How's *your* preparation?

Again, what's *one thing* you could do to dial that in?

If you haven't already, spend some time (hours?) mapping out your masterpiece days—with a special emphasis on how to make sure you integrate your fundamentals with a special emphasis on how you integrate your #1 non-negotiable self-care habit. :)

TEACHING AND BEING

"Coach often talked about his days as a high school English teacher. He always had a somewhat scholarly approach to basketball, and he wanted his players to understand *why* they were executing an assignment. He also believed strongly that coaches must set an example and be a role model. One of Coach's favorite expressions is, 'No written word, no spoken plea, can teach our youth what they should be. Nor all the books on all the shelves: It's what the teachers are themselves.' But being a teacher also meant breaking things down to their basic fundamental components, and then making them second nature by repetition. From tying your shoelaces, to proper technique on a bounce pass, to pointing 'man and ball' on defense, Coach was always teaching."

—> 'No written word, no spoken plea, can teach our youth what they should be. Nor all the books on all the shelves: It's what the teachers are themselves.'

Reminds me of Emerson ([see Notes](#)) who told us: "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say."

We talk about this a lot and it's kinda obvious but let's pause and actually think about it for a moment. We can tell our kids or our students/colleagues/team/spouse/etc. what we'd like to see

"Coach Wooden knew that he had to demonstrate the behavior he expected his players to exhibit."

~ Andrew Hill

*" Sometimes untalented teams can overcome much more talented opponents as a result of outstanding preparation and execution. And the truly talented *and* prepared team is virtually impossible to beat."*

~ Andrew Hill

from them but we must DEMONSTRATE the qualities. That's, of course, where the power is.

This is especially obvious to me these days as our son is a couple weeks away from three years old. He does EVERYTHING we do. It's almost surreal. And exciting as a reminder of this powerful truth.

What change do you want to see in the (+ your) world? Are you being that change?

—> *"But being a teacher also meant breaking things down to their basic fundamental components, and then making them second nature by repetition."*

Back to the fundamentals. (AGAIN! :)

John Wooden is THE embodiment of the need to focus here. He tells us: *"I believe in the basics: attention to, and perfection of, tiny details that might be commonly overlooked. They may seem trivial, perhaps even laughable to those who don't understand, but they aren't. They are fundamental to your progress in basketball, business, and life. They are the difference between champions and near champions."*

For example, at the first squad meeting each season, held two weeks before our first actual practice, I personally demonstrated how I wanted players to put on their socks each and every time: Carefully roll the socks down over the toes, ball of the foot, arch and around the heel, then pull the sock up snug so there will be no wrinkles of any kind."

So... How are YOUR fundamentals?! As philosopher Tom Morris recently described to me in an interview: Are you putting up a tent or a tower? If a tent, you don't need a foundation. If a tower, you better have a strong one. Same with our lives.

Here's to being quick—but not hurrying as we dig deep foundations and give ourselves most fully to the world!

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.