

BUILDING **LEADERS** WHO AFFECT **CHANGE**.



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Pre-Survey

Thank you for beginning your journey with the Varsity Leadership Academy. Before starting these 10 values, please scan the QR Code below to complete the Varsity Leadership Pre-Survey.



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Dear Leader,

Welcome to the Varsity Leadership Academy! Whether you know it or not yet, YOU ARE A LEADER! You are leading yourself every day and others around you. Leadership is about influence, and we all have influence, hopefully for the better of others. Our goal is for you to take your leadership to the next level and become a Varsity Leader who positively influences yourself and others around you.

Whether you are on a varsity team or not, we believe everyone can become a Varsity Leader. That is why we are excited that you are choosing to join this Varsity Leadership Academy that will help you grow in leadership values that we believe can transform you and those around you.

We all belong to a team or organization with the primary goal of making a lasting impact on the field, in the classroom, on the stage, at home, and in our neighborhoods. Beyond wins and losses, what you value is what will define you long after you graduate.

It starts with you, but it doesn't stop there. That is why we have paired you with a Varsity Leader that will work with your team to facilitate not only your leadership journey through these values, but also in the community. Your peers outside of this group need examples of Varsity Leaders. When leaders live out the values infused into this curriculum, communities are strengthened.

So how do you become a Varsity Leader? It starts with values. What you value determines what you do, which will determine the impact of your influence.

What you hold in your hand can be just another book of words, or it can be the catalyst that unlocks your leadership for the good of yourself, your team, your school, and the world around you.

Here's to Becoming a Varsity Leader.



Lesson 1: Influence

Did You Know?

Whenever the word *leader is spoken*, someone with significant influence, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa, comes to mind. These are great people who have done amazing things, but what is a leader? One definition simply says a leader is a person who leads a group of people. It doesn't say they led a thousand or more people and accomplished a Guinness World Record. That's good, but that's not the true definition of a leader.

The point is simple. We are all leaders; we just may not have recognized it. You are leading people daily, even if you don't have the official title of leader. Do you have at least one follower on social media, or could you? The answer is yes.

Someone is always watching, be it friends, family, teachers, coaches, or someone on social media; people are "following" you, and that makes you a *leader*. Who we lead or the number of people may differ, but by definition, we are leaders. Maybe you're a leader in your home, in the classroom, on the field, or when you stop to help someone you don't know, not realizing that someone else is watching *because someone is always watching*. And this means you have influence.

Influence is one of the most powerful tools a leader has. It is that "thing" that allows a leader to lead. What comes with it is power and responsibility.

The Power of Influence

Influence is the power to lead another person in a specific direction. This can be intentional or accidental because every action you take influences someone. The question is, what are you influencing them to do?

Do your words and actions point your team towards the goals you want to accomplish, or are they actually leading them in the opposite direction? Every person on a team has influence, and if even one person doesn't take that seriously, it can bring down the whole team. However, the same is true in reverse; a team with everyone operating as a leader, understanding the impact of their actions, can accomplish unparalleled results.

The Responsibility of Influence

As a leader, we must hold ourselves to a higher standard. We must think before we act. What we do should be done on purpose and to *influence* those around us in a positive direction. When we realize we are influencing those around us, we begin to understand the responsibility of influence. Give an encouraging word for the teammate who just "can't seem to get it right" instead of losing faith in them. Do what your coach or leader asks with a positive attitude instead of talking behind their back. Choose to work harder instead of complaining. These are all the responsibilities of a leader, which you are!



We act with others in mind when we consider our influence a responsibility. We understand that our actions may impact who they become or what they believe they can achieve.

A great example of this is being a big brother or sister. Siblings watch every move we make, whether we realize it or not. The way you respond to your parents, the things you watch on tv, and what you say are all observed by them and will be repeated. You are either giving them permission to do good or bad. And it's not just with siblings; it's with everyone we come into contact with.

You are a leader, and you have more influence than you realize. Choose to use it for good.

The Payoff

- A leader who uses their influence for good will find purpose in their actions, which leads to a sense of fulfillment knowing they made an impact in others' lives.
- A leader who uses their influence for good will find those around them will "want" to follow their lead.
- A leader who uses their influence for good helps the team reach its goals while also reaching their own.

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

Self-Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully you are operating in the area of influence.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poorly Moderately Excellently

Team Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully your team is operating in the area of influence.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poorly Moderately Excellently

Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to become more intentional with your influence?

Group Discussion:



Notes: <i>Influence</i>		



Lesson 2: Personal Growth

Never Stop Learning?

The legendary college football coach Lou Holtz once said in a graduation speech, "There's a rule of life: you're either growing, or you're dying." Think about this for a second. What professional athlete, musician, or actor stops practicing? The best in the world get up every day and work to become better. This principle applies to relationships, academics, business, and just about every area of life. And it most definitely applies to you.

Have you made a commitment to never stop learning? If not, you should.

A great example of someone who practiced this principle was Abraham Lincoln. Evidently, after Lincoln was elected president, he appointed his three presidential rivals to cabinet positions. This was unheard of and, frankly, a risky move. While there were several reasons he did it, most notable was his belief that he would be better off having the insight of other great leaders, even if it meant challenging his own.

What a show of humility! But what an even deeper example of Lincoln's commitment to never stop learning. After all, he was the president of the United States. He was supposed to be the guy with all of the answers. He was the one who beat his opponents. What did he have to learn from them? Well, he believed there was still quite a bit to learn, and he was humble enough to admit it through his actions.

Here are three ways you can apply this principle in your life:

Learn from People

The people you choose to surround yourself with will directly impact your personal growth, so be intentional about who they are.

Let's break this down into two categories. The first category includes the people who have the same goal as you. Think about the friends or peers moving towards similar goals, then start spending more time with them. Talk about your goals and keep each other accountable to your plans for achieving them.

Second, find someone who has already been where you want to go, maybe a coach, teacher, or pastor. Ask that person for advice or even mentorship. They've already walked the road ahead of you and can help guide you.

The common thread is finding people who will challenge you and help you grow in the direction you want to go.



Listen

Often, we don't stop long enough to listen to the feedback of those around us (especially when we don't like what's being said). When we do this, we lose a critical perspective: the perspective of those who see our blind spots. We all have blind spots and areas where we need to grow. However, it can be hard to see them on our own. This doesn't mean everything someone else says is correct, but everything is worth running through the filter, "What should I learn from this?"

Feedback from a teammate, coach, parent, or anyone for that matter, can be valuable and critical to your personal growth. A growing person learns by listening to everything happening around them and then uses what they learn to make well informed decisions. When we learn to listen, we will learn how to grow.

Have a Plan

A personal development plan simply means having an intentional plan to grow oneself. Personal development plans will look different from one person to the next, and that's fine. At the end of the day, they are *personal* plans. These plans include reading books, regularly scheduled meetings with mentors, formal education, weight training, and practicing our plays.

The point is simple. We must be intentional about our personal development. Leaders never stop learning, and they do that on purpose, not by accident. So choose to learn by who you surround yourself with, listening to feedback, and creating a plan.

The Payoff

- A leader who never stops learning increases their likelihood of success on and off the field.
- A leader who never stops learning gains influence because they are teachable.
- A leader who never stops learning inspires others to achieve results through intentionality and preparation.

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

Self-Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully you are operating in the area of influence.

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Team Assessment:

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Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to improve in the area of personal growth?

Group Discussion:



Notes: Personal Growth					



Lesson 3: *Humility*

Who Matters Most?

Who is the most important person on a team? Take a moment to think about this.

Maybe it's you, or it could be the person who scores the most points. Some would argue it may be the "starters." However, it's easy to think we know who the "best" players on the team are and forget the question wasn't about the best players but the most important.

The answer is simple; on a team, everyone is the "most important" – from the manager to the coach, to the all-star, to the teammate who cheers from the sidelines. Now, let's consider another question, does everyone on the team feel that way? Great leaders seek to make everyone around them matter regardless of who they lead. And when everyone feels like they matter, everyone can give their best, allowing the team to perform at its best.

The opposite is also true; the moment one person puts themselves above others on the team is the moment the "team" will start to accomplish less than their potential. A great leader chooses to place more importance on others than themselves. They seek to learn, understand, and serve with humility.

Learn

A great leader will learn to think about others more than themselves. They focus on helping those they lead grow because they've learned their success is based on the success of others. This is leadership, and if you haven't been doing it this way, it could feel a little foreign. For most, our natural inclination is to think about ourselves more than others. That's why we must learn a different approach. As leaders, we should be focused on the team's goals, and thinking only about ourselves will distract from that focus.

Leaders realize that accomplishing personal goals would be impossible without others. There is no team without others, and for the team to win, everyone needs to win. Learning to shift our focus from ourselves to others helps ensure we stay focused on the "right" actions.

Learning to think of our teammates more than we think of ourselves doesn't mean abandoning our goals. Quite the opposite, it's one of the best strategies to help ensure their success.

Understand

A great leader seeks to understand those they wish to lead. If they don't, how will they truly be able to lead their team to success? You can't walk into a room and tell your team they have to get better and then walk out without first showing them you care. Well, you can, but don't expect to have their respect and don't expect to get their best.

You need to understand the goals, challenges, and motivations of each person you lead. Taking time to understand shows you value those around you, and when everyone feels valued, they are



more likely to work together for a common goal. Arrogance (or thinking you are better than others) limits your success. Humility and acknowledging the importance of everyone else will create an environment where each person is willing to do whatever it takes for the good of the team and its goal(s).

Serve

"If you want to be great, you must first serve." This is a paraphrased idea from one of the greatest leaders of all time, yet serving is often not highly valued when in leadership. After all, we all want to be served; we don't want to be the ones serving. The act of serving when you don't have to is laying down your interest for another. And it's one of the most powerful gifts you could ever give.

It's a choice to intentionally value someone else over ourselves, and it often flies in the face of what may be popular. When your teammate, the one you are competing against for a starting spot, gets hurt during practice, do you help them or start plotting your path to success in light of their injury? Are you the leader who focuses on helping everyone else on the team get better? For example: showing lower classmen how to better throw, shoot, swing, lift, etc. Or are you so focused on yourself that you expect those lower classmen to serve your "upperclassman greatness"?

Be different; be great; choose to serve.

The Payoff

- A leader who learns the importance of elevating others will accomplish more.
- A leader who seeks to understand those they lead will gain greater influence.
- A leader who serves creates a culture of inclusion, which fuels the team's success.

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

Self-Assessment:

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 Poorly
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 Excellently

Team Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully your team is operating in the area of influence.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poorly Moderately Excellently

Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to grow in the area of humility?

Group Discussion:



Notes: Humility		



Lesson 4: Integrity

Trusted

Trusted leaders are lasting leaders, whereas the distrusted leader will soon find they aren't leading anyone... at least not voluntarily. Over the years, there have been numerous occasions where a person, organization, or corporation that was once highly respected lost the public's trust: athletes, various political and religious leaders, celebrities, and many more, who, in a moment, became villains instead of heroes.

Trust is rooted in being a person of integrity. People with integrity choose to be honest and adhere to a set of moral principles, no matter the consequences. We follow those we trust, but trust isn't built overnight. Trust is built and tested with every honest action we take, and it is quickly lost with every dishonest action.

Brady Boyd, a leader of a large non-profit in Colorado Springs, says it this way, "Trust is built in drips and drops. It is lost by bucketfuls." He's right. Though regaining trust when completely lost is possible in some situations, it might be one of the hardest things to achieve. Although trust may have taken years to build, it can be lost instantly, and there is no guaranteed timeline for getting it back.

If you desire to be an effective leader, you must build and maintain trust by being a person of integrity. Once you have built it, you must contend for it at all costs. You cannot put a dollar value on it, but you can bet it is one of the most valuable assets of a leader. Let's talk about three ways we can either build or lose trust.

Character

When it comes to trust, character is the one thing that cannot waiver. Do we do what we say we will do? Do we hold ourselves to the standards and morals we teach or are expected to uphold based on our team standards? When a person walks in character, they are a candidate to be trusted. So, how's your character? How do you act when no one is looking?

Often people believe their actions behind closed doors will not affect their public influence. But at some point, the truth will be revealed, and that truth will either promote or demote them as a leader. A leader with integrity does the right thing when no one else is looking. A leader with integrity tells the truth even if it means experiencing consequences.

Ability

Let's take a great athlete like Tom Brady, for example. No matter where your team allegiances lie, there is no doubt that Tom Brady is one of the greatest quarterbacks of all time. He has proven his ability to win time and time again.

When it comes to making the right decision or throwing the ball to the correct receiver, every person on his team has complete trust in him because he's proven through his ability that he can be trusted. And similarly to Tom, we can gain the trust of our team by proving we can be trusted



through our ability. Now, this isn't to say he's been perfect. Even Tom Brady has made bad decisions. However, when talking about ability, unlike character, people are often more forgiving of mistakes, especially if those mistakes are what we call "honest mistakes."

It's okay for a leader to admit when they don't perform their best. In fact, trust is actually built with those around them when they do this and then share their improvement plan. If you are any type of sports fan, you see this in the post-game press conference. If they are smart, the star player will say something like, "We just didn't play like we should have. We will go back this week, look at the tape, and figure out how to adjust our game plan." Though the fans still hate the loss, they respect honesty and a plan of action moving forward to ensure the team's ability to win.

Relationships

Often leaders think they have to be superhuman and never show any weakness. However, since they know they are not, they hold themselves at a distance from those they lead and can become miserable trying to keep up a façade of perfection. Relationships allow a leader to be human and still be trusted as long as they walk with integrity. We should seek relationships with those we lead and look at those we are lead as people we truly care about and act accordingly. This will build a relationship of trust.

When you lose your ability to care, you start to lose your relationships, and without relationships, people will not be as loyal. Without loyalty, you will find that you have to be perfect, and that's not sustainable! When you have taken the time to build strong relationships, trust and freedom are there when you need to be vulnerable.

If you want to be a leader, you must be trusted. Your character, ability, and relationships allow that trust to be built and maintained.

The Payoff

- A leader with integrity works hard to earn the respect and trust of those around them.
- A leader with integrity recognizes their private decisions affect those under their public influence
- A leader with integrity values compassion and relatability over perfection.

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

Self-Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully you are operating in the area of influence.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poorly Moderately Excellently

Team Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully your team is operating in the area of influence.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poorly Moderately Excellently

Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to become a more integrous leader?

Group Discussion:



Notes: <i>Integrity</i>		



Lesson 5: Attitude

Choose Your Perspective

Is your past shaping your future, or are you?

Often our experiences, failures, successes, other people's words, and everything in between are secretly shaping how we approach today, which will ultimately shape our thoughts, actions, and future reality. However, you have the ability to stop this pattern and choose a perspective that aligns with the future you desire instead of the past you've experienced.

Choosing a different perspective starts with understanding the perspective we want to create. We set the destination first, then back into the actions, or in this case, the perspective we'll need to maintain to achieve the end result. It's similar to determining the level of effort we'll need to give for our team goal. Maybe that goal is winning conference, state, or nationals.

Once the goal is set, we can determine the practice cadence, workout routine, or other means needed in preparing to "win" to make that goal a reality. More often than not, the perspective we need is one that looks at the challenge in front of us as an opportunity instead of a wall.

A winning team chooses to face a loss as an opportunity to improve or poor performance as a reason to practice harder. Contrast this to a team that chooses to "pout" about a loss, dwell on defeat, and focus on the negative instead of the opportunity the negative created. There's always an opportunity in every defeat. Choose to find it, and you'll be choosing a perspective that will take you far.

Here are a few practical ways to shape an opportunity-focused perspective.

Beliefs

Do you believe it's possible? As mentioned earlier, our experiences, failures, successes, other people's words, and everything in between shape how we approach today because all of that has discreetly shaped our beliefs. When you understand this principle, you can be free to choose a different set of beliefs; a set of beliefs that points to the future you desire instead of the past you've experienced. Once you've consciously decided to change what you believe about yourself, you start reinforcing that belief change using thoughts.

Thoughts

Can you actually control them?

We have thousands of thoughts every day, and they come and go quickly, most of the time without us even thinking about what kind of power they may have. However, our thoughts shape what we believe about ourselves, so we should be proactive about controlling them. The key to taking control of your thoughts is to create counter-thoughts.



Here's the formula for creating a counter-thought: take the thought that doesn't align with your new chosen perspective and change it to a positive statement. Then establish the corresponding "why." It's not just saying "I will" or "I won't" because that alone does not stop you from continuing to think it.

Let's use a simple example: making ten free throws in a row. When the thought, "I can't make ten free throws in a row comes, it usually tells us *why*: "because you're not good at shooting free throws." We have to change the statement, "I am a good free-throw shooter." *Why*: "I am a good shooter because I'm going to practice shooting 100 free throws 2x a day." When you can defend the thought in your mind and practice using your counter-thoughts, you leave negative thoughts defenseless. They have now been replaced with a counter-thought. On to action.

Actions

We cement our beliefs and thoughts through the actions we take. It's not enough to just think about it; we must act on it. Often this action follows our counter-thought. For example, we need to shoot 100 free throws 2x a day. If well chosen, your actions will start reinforcing your thoughts and ultimately shape a new set of beliefs. A new perspective – one that you choose!

The Payoff

- A leader who chooses their perspective determines their own path in life.
- A leader who chooses their perspective can change what they believe and affect the attitudes of others around them.
- A leader who chooses their perspective dictates their response to challenging situations instead of letting those situations determine their response.

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

Self-Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully you are operating in the area of influence.

 1
 2
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 Poorly
 Moderately
 Excellently

Team Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully your team is operating in the area of influence.

 1
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 Poorly
 Moderately
 Excellently

Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to improve your attitude?

Group Discussion:



Notes: Attitude		



Lesson 6: Self-Discipline

Great leaders lead themselves.

The desire to lead can be alluring, and the potential to lead is everywhere. However, to successfully lead other people, you must first be *willing* to lead yourself—*willing being the key.* One of the definitions of the word *willing* is being "prepared to do something," and that's exactly what it means to lead yourself. To be a self-led leader, you have to be prepared to do something that others won't, and you have to be prepared to find your own motivation(s).

You must become your biggest cheerleader. You have to convince yourself, encourage yourself, and hold strong to your own commitments in order to see your vision take shape. You have to lead yourself. Often self-leadership comes in the form of sacrifice. It could require reducing your time on social media, getting up earlier, or spending less time hanging out with friends. As a self-disciplined leader, you must be willing to step into an unknown place and risk doing something different than others around you to accomplish what you want to achieve.

Those who lead themselves take responsibility for staying motivated and also remain accountable to the vision they have laid out for themselves. They don't need anyone to say, "Get up and go!" They find it within themselves to move and move consistently toward what they believe to be worthy of action. So, what does it actually mean to be self-motivated? It simply means that you will choose to motivate yourself instead of waiting on someone else to do it. There are several areas a self-disciplined leader takes responsibility for their own success.

Mentally

Our mind is the first battlefield and, quite possibly, the most important. If we don't win the battle in our minds, our vision will never become a reality anywhere else. For example, if you want to improve your grades, you have to believe you are capable of progress. You must choose to align your thoughts toward the outcome you desire. If you doubt you will have a positive outcome, you likely will not reach your goal. And if *you* don't believe you can accomplish your goal, why would those you lead believe they can accomplish theirs?

This doesn't mean the thought of failure never crosses your mind. That thought likely crosses everyone's mind, sometimes daily. A self-disciplined person just doesn't allow those thoughts to change their mind about what they believe is possible. We *must* mentally lead ourselves because if we don't, someone else will, and our mentality is directly tied to our ability to achieve our goals and lead others in a positive way.

Physically

Physical leadership is action-based; action and leadership are synonymous. A leader should act with intention and consistency. Action is an important key in our ability to become self-disciplined, but maybe even more important is the action of preparation.



Accomplishing great feats almost always takes great physical preparation. If you want to run a marathon, you have to train. If you want to receive a college scholarship, you have to study, practice, and perfect your skills when others won't. Preparation causes you to look at the destination and figure out what it will take to reach it. What tools will you need? How long will it take? What are the non-negotiables that will lead to success? Then, take action to make that "great feat" a reality.

Emotionally

Those who lead themselves must learn to navigate emotional highs and lows

One day we feel on top of the world, and the next, we want to quit everything. Maybe someone posts harsh things about you on social media, or you have a major setback toward an academic or athletic goal. No matter the situation, a leader must learn to navigate the lows by staying grounded and focused on where they want to go instead of where they find themselves in the moment. Otherwise, they will be blown back and forth by the opinions of others, small failures, and random acts of life, which are just about as predictable as the wind.

The same is true for the highs. When you are doing everything right, and everyone is praising you for your "greatness," you have to learn to ground yourself emotionally and stay true to the course that brought you to where you are currently. It's not time to relax during a high. It's time to continue mentally, physically, and emotionally leading yourself.

The Payoff

Being a self-disciplined leader comes with benefits:

- A self-disciplined leader is more likely to achieve their desired goals because they create a plan and hold themselves accountable to it.
- A self-disciplined leader values action over emotion to foster a culture of winning within the team.
- A self-disciplined leader's preparation will give them confidence for the journey toward their goal(s).

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

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Circle the number that best represents how successfully you are operating in the area of influence.

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Poorly Moderately Excellently

Team Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully your team is operating in the area of influence.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poorly Moderately Excellently

Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to become more self-disciplined?

Crown Discussions

Group Discussion:



Notes: Self-Discipline					



Lesson 7: Forgiveness

Let it Go

"Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies." - Nelson Mandela

To truly live free, we must learn to forgive others and ourselves. Forgiveness is a choice. A choice to let go of anger, resentment, bitterness, and other negative feelings of offense toward someone who has wronged you. That might be a parent, teacher, coach, teammate, or friend. Most likely, all of the above at one time or another.

You will be wronged by others, and it will happen often. What you do with that offense could determine your level of success. Harboring resentment towards someone will drag you down, and it can drag those around you down as well. It has the power to destroy your health, relationships, and future. So we have to "let it go!"

Let's be extremely clear; this doesn't mean condoning the actions of others, staying in an unsafe environment, or continuing to pursue relationships with those who hurt you. It does mean rising above those who have hurt you by choosing a better way. When we hold on, we allow the hurt to continue, but when we choose to let the hurt go, we let the hurt heal.

As a leader, you have the opportunity to model this for your team. You also have the opportunity to ask for forgiveness when you hurt someone. Perfection is a myth, so don't pretend to be perfect. Even the best leaders make mistakes, so forgive yourself and ask those you may have hurt to forgive you.

Health

In the book titled "Forgiveness and Health," the authors describe how research has shown that forgiveness can be linked to mental health outcomes such as reduced anxiety and depression and other physical symptoms and psychiatric disorders. Choosing to forgive can positively impact your mental and physical health while choosing not to forgive could be the very thing that's causing you increased stress. How crazy is that?

Forgiveness frees your mind from being stuck in a holding pattern, replaying an offense, and reliving the hurt endlessly. Negative cycles of thinking are detrimental to your mental and physical health, but you can stop the pattern.

Choosing forgiveness can positively impact your health, reduce your stress, and help you recapture needed energy toward your true goals.



Relationships

Forgiveness is a prerequisite for healthy relationships. No one is perfect, which means people will intentionally or unintentionally hurt us. Letting it go brings freedom and health to your relationships.

When forgiveness is the default within your relationships, trust and safety grow between you and others. Your ability to communicate your intended purpose (not what may come through when you're holding onto a grudge) is greater, and trust is developed. Clear communication and trust are a requirement for great relationships and are crucial when it comes to leadership. Without these, there won't be anyone to lead.

When you regularly choose forgiveness, you choose to believe the best in others and show them you are not above them when you ask for their forgiveness. Modeling forgiveness improves your relationships and influences others to exercise forgiveness in theirs, creating an overall healthier team and environment.

Future

Holding on will leave you stuck in the past. Don't get stuck in the past!

When you are focused on the rear-view mirror of life, you aren't able to focus on your desired future. You'll be spending so much effort and time holding on to the weight of unforgiveness that you'll have no time or energy to move forward in the direction you desire. Time will continue to move forward, but will you? It's your choice, not the person's who hurt you.

Forgiveness frees you to move into your future without past failures or offenses holding you back from what you are capable of accomplishing. So forgive others, forgive yourself, and move forward without the stress and hurt of the past.

The Payoff

- A leader who learns to "let it go" has freedom from their past hurts and mistakes.
- A leader who learns to "let it go" lives with less stress and promotes physical health in their minds and bodies.
- A leader who learns to "let it go" can positively impact their relationships.

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

Self-Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully you are operating in the area of influence.

 1
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 Poorly
 Moderately
 Excellently

Team Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully your team is operating in the area of influence.

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 Poorly
 Moderately
 Excellently

Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to practice forgiveness?

Group Discussion:



Notes: Forgiveness						



Lesson 8: Teamwork

Build the Team

A healthy leader builds *people*. They realize the growth of those who follow them is required if they want to accomplish their goals as a leader. This type of leader learns to recognize undiscovered abilities and intentionally draws them out; they find ways to remove the limits others have placed on themselves.

We all have likely experienced a leader who didn't place value on helping those they led but only cared about furthering themselves. Now obviously, a leader gets the credit for the success of their team, but a healthy leader learns to quickly give credit away by acknowledging those who helped make it possible. When leaders get focused on "I," they tend to lose sight of the team's goals, as well as their ability to successfully lead the people following them.

Let's explore three ways a healthy leader builds people.

Empowers

Empowerment means "giving power, control, and/or decision-making ability to those we lead." This doesn't mean *blindly* giving control or power away and hoping for the best. Instead, it means that we prepare those around us to be empowered and allow them the opportunity to exercise their new ability.

Sometimes leaders are intimidated by empowering those around them because they think they may lose some of their influence. That is limited thinking. A leader who does not empower those around them is a leader whose impact will be limited to only what they can do on their own or control others to do. That's not real leadership. Find ways to empower those around you, and you'll be choosing to multiply your impact.

Believes

As leaders, we believe in the ability of those we lead before anyone else and intentionally look for ways to cultivate it. We encourage and challenge those around us to develop what we see in them. A great leader will see potential in the people they lead and will be intentional about drawing out that potential. It's a bit like mining for gold. Everyone has potential that needs to be mined, and it's a leader's job to pull it. This is one of the most rewarding activities of being a leader.

Think about how thrilling it must be to pull a gold nugget out of the mine after days of hard work. An opportunity to show the world what those hours of hard work produced. This same feeling happens when we successfully help those around us grow. The reward is more valuable than any gold nugget. Not to mention the positive impact it will have on your team!



Promotes

As leaders, we have influence, and we can use that influence to promote and give opportunity to those we lead at the right time. A great example of this is an endorsement. Almost every product has one, and there is a reason for it... It can radically increase sales if done the right way! When someone with influence endorses another, they lend their credibility to build that person's influence. As leaders, we should look for opportunities to use our influence to help those around us move up.

When was the last time you used your reputation or popularity to help someone else move up? If you are honest, there's a good chance someone or multiple people did something that helped get you where you are today. A healthy leader chooses to pass along positive recognition. When we build people, we gain influence in return. As we help others grow, our influence grows. Furthermore, when we build people around us, their loyalty also increases.

You can only reach true leadership success if you choose to build people. One person is only one person, and to accomplish significance, you need a team of very capable people—people you empower and people who are loyal.

A short-sighted leader tries to control everything, but when we let go and allow our team to grow, we find their growth increases ours and empowers the team's success.

The Payoff

- A leader who promotes others eliminates division and brings unity.
- A leader who builds people empowers their team to accomplish their goals.
- A leader who believes in others can change the course of that person's life.

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

Self-Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully you are operating in the area of influence.

 1
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 Poorly
 Moderately
 Excellently

Team Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully your team is operating in the area of influence.

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 Poorly
 Moderately
 Excellently

Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to promote teamwork?

Group Discussion:



Notes: <i>Teamwork</i>		



Lesson 9: Perseverance

Keep Going

What do road trips and your goals have in common?

Distance.

The best part of a road trip is always the pit stops we make along the way—that and reaching the destination, of course. But pit stops are the best! You get to stretch your legs and eat a ton of greasy food from a gas station or hole-in-the-wall café. And if you haven't eaten in one of those places where you wonder what exactly is happening in the kitchen and if the health department has visited lately... Well, you haven't really lived!

Now, there are two types of people on road trips. Those who love to take long pit stops and those who want to arrive at the destination as fast as possible and take the shortest pit stops imaginable. Either way, whether we like it or not, we need pit stops on long journeys to refuel and regain our bearings.

The miles that make up a road trip and the distance between who we are and who we want to be are exactly the same. They are typically long. Some feel like a cross-country road trip, while others may feel like a cross-country drive. However, significant goals will have significant distance attached to them.

We should approach our goals and the miles that lay between like a long road trip. We should allow margin for pit stops. And those breaks along the way to your goal should not be looked at as hassles that prevent you from moving forward. Instead, they should be treated just like stopping for gas or food... They are critical. Pit stops are our time to refuel, rest, and recalibrate for the journey ahead.

Refueling

Depending on your vehicle, you'll have to refuel (or recharge) every few hundred miles. Your car will literally stop in the middle of the road if you don't. However, we don't often think about ourselves the same way, but we are just like cars in this sense. Eating is one of our ways to refuel. But when it comes to goals, refueling can look like a lot of things depending on your journey.

What is the *fuel* to your goal? Often it's taking the time to look up and see the progress we've made and celebrate that progress. The phrase, "Progress is our fuel to keep going," definitely applies here. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you can run on empty forever. If you do, you might find yourself burned out or giving up on your goal altogether. Stop to look at your progress, celebrate, and get back on the road.



Rest

Rest is a necessary part of a successful journey. It is different from refueling. Refueling is about doing something to put energy back in. Rest is simply about repairing. We need rest. Even the best and most physically fit athletes have rest days to let their bodies heal and recover.

Rest heals. When we are exhausted, our decisions aren't as well thought out, our emotions aren't as checked, and we are not as productive. A day off is often the best way to keep going! Again, rest will be different for each person and their journey, but it's important to give yourself a break.

Rest is important. The break doesn't have to be long; it just needs to be consistent and allow you to take a deep breath. Plan for a break!

Recalibrate

After you have refueled and rested at your pit stop, you'll find it's time to get back on the road. However, before you pull out of the gas station, you'll want to look at the GPS and recalibrate your expectations and goals for the next leg of the trip.

Think about this time like an app on your phone, "recalculating the fastest route" to your destination. Things change, and they change quickly. When we don't take the time to recalibrate, we might be forcing ourselves to take the longer or more difficult path. Ask yourself, *What did I learn from the last leg of the trip that should inform the next?* This could be related to daily actions, a change in our ultimate destination, or simply a better way of doing what we've been doing all along. It's important to recalibrate often in order to efficiently achieve our desired outcomes.

Significant goals take time and commitment, so don't give up; refuel, rest, and recalibrate. Then, get back on the road and keep moving forward.

The Payoff

- A leader who perseveres inspires others to keep going during their own "4th quarter" moments in life.
- A leader who refuels has more energy to achieve their goals and avoid burnout.
- A leader who recalibrates is more likely to stay on track and avoid mistakes that could cost them their goals.

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

Self-Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully you are operating in the area of influence.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poorly Moderately Excellently

Team Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully your team is operating in the area of influence.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poorly Moderately Excellently

Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to be perseverant?

Group Discussion:



Notes: Perseverance		



Lesson 10: Guardrails

Protect What's Valuable

Google defines a guardrail as "a strong fence at the side of a road or the middle of an expressway, intended to reduce the risk of serious accidents." Guardrails are meant to save our lives, and that's why we need them.

You've probably participated in one or more goal-setting exercises, but have you ever taken the time to create a guardrail or, as some might call it, a boundary? ...Okay, let's address the fact that you probably don't want boundaries. Most people don't want boundaries, but everyone wants what boundaries provide; an insurance policy that we'll end up where we aim to be.

Let's talk specifics. Relationships are more important than championships. Whether you believe this to be true now or not, the fact remains that those who've achieved "greatness in their field" without meaningful relationships are lonely. Would it be worth getting the scholarship but losing all your friends? Would it be worth it to "win" but have no one to celebrate with? This is just one example of why we need guardrails in our lives.

As we pursue our goals in athletics, academics, or the arts, we must keep in focus what really matters to us and create guardrails to ensure that, in our pursuit of those worthy goals, we don't lose sight of the other important areas of our lives.

Here are three principles for creating and maintaining healthy guardrails:

Priorities

Prioritize what matters. Take a moment to create a list of all of the priorities in your life. This may include areas like family, faith, health, sports, arts, relationships, academics, finances, or work. There's no right or wrong number of priorities, but on average, five or fewer are pretty common. If you need a jumpstart on creating the list, think about the actions you took every day over the last week. Then for each action, determine what type of category it would fit into (family, academics, sports, health, etc.) and write that down.

You can use that list to determine what your priorities are. It is, however, important to keep in mind that your actions over the past week may not fully reveal all of your priorities.

In fact, when doing this exercise, most people find many of their actions over the past week don't fit into any of the priorities they want for their lives. This could be a great start to creating a guardrail. "If I spend more than X amount of time in the previous week on something that's not on my priority list, I should re-evaluate where I'm spending my time."

Boundaries

Create a boundary (guardrail) for each of your top priorities. One of the best ways to think about creating a guardrail is to determine how many hours a week, on average, you're willing



or must (in the case of a job, school, etc.) give to that area of your life. This is similar to the guardrail idea shared in the last section but more proactive in nature. Do this for each priority area of your life, and then add the hours you've committed toward each area.

Often the result can be more hours committed than there are in a day. This means you have to go back through the list and determine how to re-order your time commitment to be realistic while also giving yourself enough time to do the things that truly matter.

This exercise allows you to create a time guardrail for each priority of your life. As with everything, you won't always be perfect with this, but if you have guardrails, you can adjust your course quickly before you've gone too far and lose something that you never wanted to sacrifice.

Time guardrails are great, but there are also many other types of guardrails. You could have a screen guardrail by looking at your phone, gaming device, or tv screen each day only once you've finished your homework. You could have a "don't put yourself in a bad situation" guardrail. Have someone you trust to help you make good decisions, like whether or not you should go to the party, be with that person alone, etc. You may have a food-based guardrail, like limiting the intake of certain types of foods to achieve your fitness or health goals. The list could go on and on.

Accountability

Find a trusted friend, teacher, parent, or coach in your life and share your guardrails with them. Then, set a time to check in each week. It could be a simple text or a few minutes at lunch but do this regularly. This is your chance to tell them honestly how you are doing with your guardrails and let them challenge you in the process. And having accountability just might be the most important step you take.

The Payoff

- A leader who lives with guardrails will increase their ability to protect what's valuable.
- A leader who lives with guardrails and stays accountable to them will decrease the risk of making negative life-altering decisions.
- A leader who lives with guardrails will protect themselves and others from veering off course.

Discussion Question:



(Take 2-3 minutes to fill out the assessments and action step below.)

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Circle the number that best represents how successfully you are operating in the area of influence.

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 Poorly
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 Excellently

Team Assessment:

Circle the number that best represents how successfully your team is operating in the area of influence.

 1
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 Poorly
 Moderately
 Excellently

Take Action:

What is one thing you can do this week, in your personal life or as a part of your team, to create guardrails?

Group Discussion:



Notes: Guardrails				



Congratulations on Completing Varsity Leadership Academy!

We hope you feel more equipped not just to lead yourself through life, but to use your influence to impact others as well.

Post-Survey

Thank you for joining us on your leadership journey! We'd love to see how you progressed and value your feedback. Please scan the QR Code to complete the Post-Survey at the end of your Academy term.







Varsity Leadership Academy is an educational non-profit organization that was designed to empower high school students to lead with unity, empathy, and hope through their sphere of influence. The program utilizes a leadership curriculum that focuses on values that challenge students to grow in their level of leadership. Students learn to self-evaluate, grow through the context of community, and put a growth action step into practice every week. These meetings are facilitated by community varsity leaders who lend their influence to serve as a model and resource.









@Varsity Leadership Academy

Learn What It Takes to Become a Varsity Leader.

