

The

# CULTURE COORDINATOR

Presents



3 Mindset Shifts  
Every Coach Must  
Make



In 2016 Tim Ferriss sent out a simple [tweet](#) that got me thinking.

**“As much as I dislike vague talk of "company culture," I like this definition: What happens when people are left to their own devices.”**  
Tim Ferriss

A few weeks after Ferriss’ tweet I was named the new head football coach at Lincoln Christian School where I had served as an assistant for ten years. The tweet rang loudly in my head as I began to take my first steps as the new head coach. Our former head coach and I had built a solid culture over the years, but it was time for a serious refresh.

I was about to raise the standard, but would my players raise the standard with me?

After my first season as a head coach, I realized that as the Head Coach I'm the Culture Coordinator. Other coaches on my staff are tasked with coordinating the offense or defense or special teams. My task is to coordinate the culture.

But what is culture? What defines culture? Below is a summary of the response I got when I asked that question on Twitter:

- Culture is the current state of your program. Could be good or bad. It's the state of things as they are.
- Culture can be changed.
- Lots of coaches indicated that the best way to change culture was to reinforce desirable behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs.
- Culture was perceived to be the sum of many actions that shape decision making and the overall direction of an organization.
- Building a positive culture was seen as a long-term project that must constantly be maintained. Several coaches spoke about the need to fill the cracks and watch out for the slow fade away from the culture you want.

Those responses aligned well with [this](#) article from Forbes magazine by William Craig. According to Craig, there are four key areas that reveal your culture:

- Clarity of purpose
- Employee engagement
- An environment of trust
- Continued learning

“The purpose of culture is not to make people feel good and comfortable. The singular purpose of culture is to drive the behaviors called for by your strategy.” Brian Kight

As I pondered Ferriss' tweet, the feedback I received from Twitter, and read through Craig's article and others like it, my mind grew more and more confused

about how to define culture. All of this was too meta, too abstract, and far too intangible.

Enter Brian Kight and [Focus 3](#).

After my first season as head coach my team and I had the pleasure of doing a three-hour workshop with Kight. Our time together was full of pearls of wisdom, but perhaps the biggest pearl was the clarity he brought to the question “What is culture?” Ironically, he didn’t answer or even attempt to answer that question. He asked a better question:

What is the purpose of culture?

As soon as he asked the questions my mind began to realize I had been asking the wrong question and was, therefore, not finding answers that satisfied me. In asking, “What is culture?” I was asking the equivalent of, “What is football?” and hoping for the answer to be “West Coast Offense” or “4-2-5 Defense.”

So, what is the purpose of culture? According to Kight and the Focus 3 team, *the purpose of culture is to drive behaviors that win.*

This thought brought immediate clarity and excitement. It shifted my paradigm and focused my attention on what our program is trying to accomplish, instead of having my attention focused on what I should be doing. I had the proverbial cart in front of the horse problem, and I needed Kight’s question to help me see that.

Kight went on to say, “The purpose of culture is not to make people feel good and comfortable. The singular purpose of culture is to drive the behaviors called for by your strategy.”

Suddenly, the most obvious question was, “How do I define winning and what are my strategies for creating wins?” Notice the progress of my train of thought. I went from “What is culture?” to “What is winning and how do we make winning happen?” From the abstract to the concrete.

What is winning? Our current sports culture is more focused on individual stars than amazing teams. As a result, winning or success is defined a thousand different ways. A high school athlete might define success as getting a college scholarship or being all-conference or breaking a school scoring record. We’ve all known the player who could care less about the scoreboard as long as he gets his stats.

**If you’re going to create a culture that drives behaviors that win you first have to define winning and sell your players on that definition.**

This focus on self also manifests itself in a lack of loyalty to teams. For instance, growing up there was no doubt that I was going to be a mighty Trojan at Longmont High School. The odds of me becoming a

Falcon at cross-town rival Skyline were exactly zero. No chance. I’d rather die than suit up in their red and yellow. That type of loyalty to the school in your neighborhood is dying. More and more high school players see themselves as free agents choosing the school that best meets their needs.

What does all this have to do with defining winning/success? It means that your team is filled with players who are defining success differently. Some of them don’t care if you win or lose on the scoreboard as long as they get their stats. Others define success as being the starter at their favorite position and can’t imagine playing a different position for the sake of the team’s goals.

Here's my point: If you're going to create a culture that drives behaviors that win you first have to define winning and sell your players on that definition.

As you wrestle with defining success, it's important to remember that you are free to define it however you want. Winning might include beating the other team on the scoreboard, but your definition of success is probably bigger than that as well. The key, regardless of how you define success, is that it's well articulated to your players and the rest of your stakeholders and that you sell your definition to everyone. Everyone in the program, from your student-managers to your quarterback, to the parents and alums have to believe in your definition and make it their own.

The first step towards building unity in your program is clearly articulating your definition of success. The second step is creating buy-in. To do that, you must embrace the reality that to sell is coaching.



## Mindset Shift #2

Stop assuming trust  
Start selling your program

Being a head coach is more demanding than ever. As our society becomes increasingly connected on a 24-7-365 basis, the job description of the head coach is an ever-evolving document. The traditional tasks of managing equipment, communicating with coaches, players, parents, and administration, motivating players, etc. remain. But new responsibilities have emerged. In our modern context, great head coaches recognize they must be great marketers. They understand that a critical aspect of their job as the head coach, dare I say the most important part, is creating a brand for their program and selling that brand to all the program's stakeholders.

Every head coach must understand how information and opportunity symmetry impact their programs.

Whether they like it or not, a great head coach is in the business of marketing and sales.

If you are not convinced the previous statement is true, take the time to read a book written in 2013 by [Daniel Pink](#) titled, "[To Sell is Human](#)." In the book, Pink carefully outlines several reasons why all of us are now in sales. As a head coach, the reason that caught my attention and made me realize that selling is now a critical component of building a strong program was a concept Pink calls *information symmetry*.

Pink uses a classic scene at a used car lot to make his point. Twenty or thirty years ago a customer came to a used car lot looking for a car with no ability to obtain information on his own. The customer only knew what the salesman at the car lot told him and he had little ability to validate the claims of the salesman. Pink refers to this old reality as information asymmetry because one of the people in the interaction held the vast majority of the critical information.

In the age of the internet, this paradigm has changed drastically. Now customers come to the used car lot knowing everything about the car they are interested in buying. Thanks to companies like CarFax, the customer and the car salesman have roughly the same amount of information about the cars. This new paradigm, which Pink calls information symmetry, has completely changed the way in which a good salesman at a used car lot operates.

As a coach you have to sell your culture, your offense, defense, and special teams strategies, your techniques, your practice schedule, your offseason conditioning program, the list goes on and on. Love it or hate it, you can't ignore it.

What does this have to do with coaching? The same transition, from information asymmetry to information symmetry, has taken place in coaching. Take football for example. Twenty or thirty years ago the local high school

football coach knew all the critical information about what it took to build a great football player and a great football program. Parents and players had no choice but to

trust the coach in much the same way the person wanting to buy a car used to have no choice but to trust the used car salesman.

In a world where anyone, not just coaches, can gain instant access to some of the best resources for coaching, parents and players now have the opportunity to create the same amount of information symmetry the customer has at the used car lot. As a coach, you know from experience that your most ambitious players and parents have acquired just enough information to be dangerous. They need some help interpreting and applying what they know, but they know way more than you and your parents did when you were a player.

This reality, which Pink calls information symmetry, can't be ignored and it's part of why every great coach must be a salesman. As a coach you have to sell your culture, your offense, defense, and special teams strategies, your techniques, your practice schedule, your offseason conditioning program, the list goes on and on. Love it or hate it, you can't ignore it.

You might be thinking, "So what if information symmetry exists? How does that make sales a part of coaching?" Information symmetry means that we are all in sales because another type of symmetry has emerged as well. Twenty or thirty years ago players played for the school in their neighborhood. They were loyal to their local high school, in part, because there were no other options. They had one opportunity, and they chose to either make the most of it or not play at all.

These days, many, if not most, school districts allow students to attend schools outside of their neighborhood. Transfer rules by most state activities associations allow for some form of work around so that students can transfer and be eligible for varsity play. Players and parents now have choices and players are increasingly seeing themselves as free agents choosing the school that best meets their needs (By the way, I see this happening in academics as well). All of this leads to what I call *opportunity symmetry*.

But what I have described thus far is only the beginning of opportunity symmetry. With the rise of club teams, the reality that college coaches are far less dependent upon the high school coach in recruiting than they used to be, and the emergence of offseason camps where players can “be discovered” each player “needs” their high school coach to achieve his or her dreams far less than they did twenty or thirty years ago. Again, you can love it or hate it, but *you can't ignore it*.

To be clear, I'm not a huge fan of some of these realities, and I don't think players and parents know nearly as much as they think they do nor do I believe the high school coach is as unneeded as some players and parents may think. The merits of their perceptions aren't the point here. I'm not attempting to argue about the degree to which information and opportunity symmetry exist. The reality we must accept is that information and opportunity symmetry are perceived to exist to a significant degree, and this means that part of being a great coach is being a great salesperson.

Remember, despite the fact that information symmetry exists at the used car lot, there is still a need a for car salesmen. The car salesmen have been forced to tweak their game a bit, and we would be wise as coaches to recognize we need to tweak our game a bit too.

What does it look like to tweak our game a bit? Here are three things you can do to sell your program without coming off like a cheesy salesman.

## #1: Cast Vision

Humans are hardwired for epic adventures. We are all on a quest to discover meaning and purpose in the things that we do. As a coach who needs to sell his program, you must appeal to this hardwiring and cast a vision of what the program is all about. Here are two tips for casting vision:

- Cast a *unique* vision that plays to your program's strengths. For example, as the biggest Christian school in a 200 or 300-mile radius, the vision I cast for our program is uniquely Christian. No other school in the area is casting the same vision for their program that I am. There is something unique about you and your school too. Whatever it is, make that a distinct and prominent part of your vision casting.
- Go to great lengths to help everyone see how they play a *vital* role making the vision happen. Everyone from your last player off the bench to your managers to the parents to the administration needs to know your vision and need to understand how they can play a part in making it happen.

## #2: Always Teach the Why

Simon Sinek gave a great Ted Talk on his Why? How? What? framework in which he outlines the importance of always starting with your why and teaching your why. You can watch an edited, five-minute version of the talk [here](#). Sinek's main point is this: truly inspirational leaders teach their people the why behind every aspect of all that they ask their people to do.

For what it's worth, I believe the proper order of thinking is Why? What? How? In our program, we try our best to always teach why we do something, what we are doing, and how to do it. For example, we want our players to know why we run the flexbone triple option offense. They also need to know what we do, so we teach them formations and plays. Once they know why we do what we do and what we do they need to know how we do it. Teaching the How? means teaching the players how to execute the What? at their individual positions.

All of this is essentially common sense, but I bet if you asked your players to tell you why you do what you do many of them would have a hard time articulating your why. Most players have memorized a bunch of stuff and have little ability to articulate why

they are doing it. That's not authentic learning. We all know that having players who don't truly understand the game but have only memorized a series of do's and don't's will eventually impact the team during a big moment in the season.

Why does your program exist?

Is it merely to win games or is there a greater purpose?

Why do you run a particular offense and defense?

Why do you use a certain technique as opposed to another one?

Always teach the why behind every what and teach them over and over again.

### #3: Learn More About Marketing

If a big part of coaching is selling, then coaches need to understand some of the basics of marketing. Before you dive headlong into a marketing book, remember that as a coach you're selling your program, your strategies, your culture. What you are doing is creating buy-in from your players, coaches, parents, administration, alums, and all of the other stakeholders in your program. The goal of your marketing efforts is to create unity around a shared definition of success.

With that in mind, I'd like to recommend to you a company that is providing lots of great resources for people who want to become better at marketing. The company is called Story Brand, and you can check them out [here](#).

I recommend Story Brand because they teach you to market by telling a story. This form of marketing fits perfectly with marketing for football because every season is an epic journey. We love the story behind a great season. We enjoy watching HBO's Hard Knocks reality TV show because it tells the story of a season. I would encourage you to take the time to learn about Story Brands seven step framework and contemplate how you can use the framework and market your program by telling the story of the season.

Like it or not, you, as a head coach, are in sales. Information and opportunity symmetry, or at least the perception that they exist, have created a reality in which we must become good at marketing every aspect of our program. You can begin selling your program by casting vision, always teaching the why, and learning about marketing.

Teaching the why matters because of the society you are working in, but it also matters because of the generation you are coaching. A generation I call "Generation Why?"



What generation are you from? You know what I mean. Are you a Gen Xer? Are you an old Millennial, like me? Maybe you've been coaching for a few decades and you're a Baby Boomer.

Naming generations helps us to understand each other better. While prone to unfair stereotypes and bias, each generation name teaches us something unique and special about the people who make up the generation.

Virtually everyone playing youth, junior high, high school, and college sports today is part of Generation Z. I have no idea what "Z" means, so I made up a more useful name for Generation Z. I call them "Generation Why?"

Why?

Because they always ask “Why?” Not only do they always ask why, but most of them, in most situations, aren’t too inclined to do much of anything until they know exactly why they are doing it and they have decided that doing it is worthy of their time.

This characteristic is both frustrating and worth commending. It’s frustrating because even after you have established a great deal of trust with your players they still refuse to do much of anything if you haven’t clearly articulated why they should do it. They need to be constantly reminded of the why behind every aspect of the program. Not only that, but many of them aren’t going to remember the why or understand the why until you’ve clearly articulated it multiple times and in multiple ways. Doing so takes a lot of time and energy.

When you were playing, how often did you do something with no questions asked merely because Coach said to do it? Constantly, right? Generation Why? isn’t wired that way. They essentially demand that the why behind everything is constantly being explained to them. You can resist that reality or embrace it. It’s your choice.

As frustrating as Generation Why? can be, they’re also to be commended. Thinking this way means that Generation Why? will choose their actions intentionally. As their perspective on life and motivations mature they’re going to be purposeful people who carefully plot out their path and follow a plan. Doesn’t that sound like the type of person that would make a great player and teammate?

Our teams are full of players who are just waiting to work hard for a coach who will take the time to constantly and clearly articulate the why

When your program lacks purpose and deep relationships your players and coaches will lack loyalty and industriousness and your parents and fans will follow suit.

behind everything the program does. But it's important to recognize that merely teaching the why isn't enough for this generation of young people. They're also craving another characteristic from their coaches. Generation Why? demands that their coaches love them and care about them as people, not merely players.

There's an old cliché ringing more true every minute: They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

This has never been more true about athletes than it is today. Today's athletes are more relational than ever before. As a result, they value advice and instruction from someone they know well far more than they do from someone who knows well. In other words, they don't care if you're an expert if they don't know you care about them.

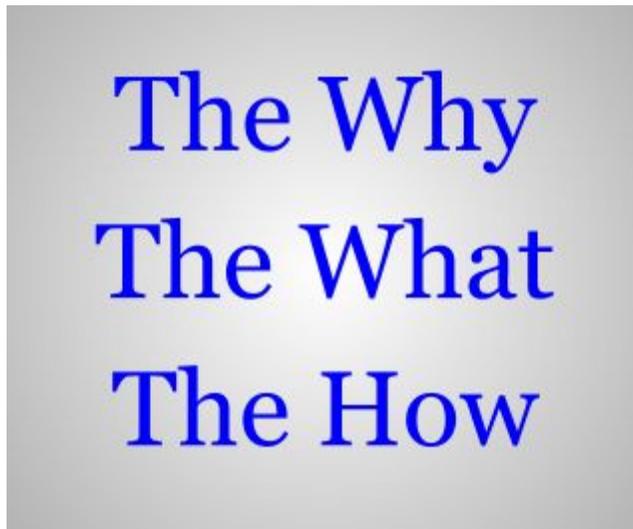
But this isn't news to you. As a coach you're experiencing this reality everyday. You know from experience that inspiring and motivating your players is a completely different ball game than it was when you were a player. This is true if you're a seasoned coach with decades of experience or a young gun just getting started. Things have changed rapidly.

These rapid changes can be summarized in two words: *relationships and purpose*. Study after study has shown that today's young people long for deep relationships and deep purpose in all that they do, especially something that demands as much commitment to the team as sports. The bottom line is that if your program doesn't offer the opportunity to forge deep relationships and a sense of deep purpose your team won't attract today's athletes.

What you need is a system for building a culture founded on relationships and purpose. You need a system that will help your program develop not just young men and women

who are great athletes, but young men and women who are great members of your school's community.

Cultures founded on relationships and purpose that develop young men and women who are great athletes and great members of your school's community use a simple 1-2-3 process for communicating. In everything that you do you must always communicate to your players...



You must teach your players, your staff, your parents, your administration, and yourself to use The Why, The What, and The How as the lens through which you observe all things pertaining to the building of your program.

When your players and coaches understand The Why, The What, and The How that drives every aspect of your program you will free your players and coaches from the chains of selfish motivators and unleash their potential as they serve the team with their unique gifts and abilities. Players and coaches who don't understand your Why, or your What, or your How will always be motivated by fear, shame, and pride. When your program lacks purpose and deep relationships your players and coaches will lack loyalty and industriousness and your parents and fans will follow suit.

Once players and coaches begin to understand your Why, What, and How, however, they are free to be motivated by love for self, love for the game, love for teammates, and ultimately a love for the team.

The [Culture Coordinator Motivation Assessment](#) will allow you to discover what is currently motivating your team and begin creating strategies for how to sell your program and create buy-in.



The assessment will reveal to you what motivators are working most powerfully in your team and comes with a [team summary](#) that includes personalized actionable steps for you to take as the coach based on the data gathered in the assessment.

The personalized actionable steps will help you begin the journey of selling your culture to your program's stakeholders which will build unity as you strive to develop people and win games. The Motivation Assessment is free for [members](#) and [\\$150 for non-members](#).

The [Culture Coordinator system](#) for building your culture will show you how to create a Why, What, and How that is unique to your program. The system also includes an [assessment](#) that allows you, as the head coach, to know exactly what is currently motivating your players and coaches and provides action steps for helping them move towards being motivated by a love for the team.

If you're interested in the Culture Coordinator Motivation Assessment click [here](#) to learn more.

**CULTURE**  
COORDINATOR

# PLAYERS WHO ARE MOTIVATED BY:

## A LOVE FOR THE TEAM

WORK HARD WITH TEAMMATES  
TO ACHIEVE THE TEAM GOALS.

## A LOVE FOR TEAMMATES

WORK WITH SOME TEAMMATES TO  
HELP THEM ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS.

## A LOVE FOR THE GAME

WORK HARD BECAUSE THEY ENJOY DOING  
WHAT IT TAKES TO BE GOOD AT THE GAME.

## A LOVE FOR SELF

WORK HARD TO ACHIEVE  
THEIR GOALS.

## PRIDE

WORK HARD IN ORDER TO BRING GLORY  
TO SELF OR THE TEAM.

## SHAME

WORK HARD TO AVOID  
BEING EMBARRASSED.

## FEAR

WORK HARD TO AVOID  
NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES.

Ready to join the movement of Culture Coordinators from around the country? Click [here](#) to learn about the benefits of becoming a member of the Culture Coordinator community. Or [subscribe](#) to our email list.