

LEAD LIKE DABO

5 Ways to Be a Positive Leader

As I write this the Clemson University Football team is about to play in its third national championship game in four years. Since becoming the head coach in 2008 Dabo Swinney has built Clemson into one of the best programs in college football and he's done it through positive leadership. I've shared several stories and examples about Dabo in [*The Power of Positive Leadership*](#) and today I've been thinking about additional ways Dabo puts the power of positive leadership into practice... and how you can too. In this spirit here are 5 ways to lead like Dabo and be a positive leader.

1. Be Honest and Clear with your Expectations - When Dabo recruits a high school player he tells them that he will not promise him playing time. He says, "If you want to play at Clemson you will have to earn it. You will have to compete and work hard for it. We won't promise you playing time but if you come here no one will love you like we do." Dabo clearly and honestly shares what he expects from the player and what the player can expect from him and his staff. As a positive leader you want to meet with your current and future team members and share what you expect from them and what they can expect from you.

2. Be an Over Believer - When Dabo became the head coach in 2008 he knew Clemson had talent but lacked belief. So the man whose father left when he was young, was homeless for a time growing up, made the Alabama football team as a walk-on, and had come to believe anything was possible, knew his number one priority was to inspire his team to believe. He brought in two signs on his first day as head coach to share with his team. One sign said "Believe." The other sign said "I can't" with the "t" crossed out. Since that moment Dabo has believed in his team more than they believed in themselves. I've seen how his belief raises the level of belief in his coaches and players. When asked if he was an overachiever he said, "No. I'm an over believer." It's amazing what your team will accomplish when you believe in them.

3. Be a Better You - What makes Dabo so great goes beyond the coach he is and has much more to do with the man he is. Authentic, faithful, appreciative, giving, caring, loving, full of integrity and tough. He loves his players and they know it. He wants them to be their best so he gives them his best. He's the real deal. *The truth is to be a better leader you need to be a better you. Who you are determines how you lead and how you lead determines the culture and team you create.* [[Tweet That](#)]

4. Be Demanding but not Demeaning - Dabo is known as a fun coach who likes to have a good time but he is very demanding. If his players are not giving their best effort or doing the right thing they will hear his voice. He demands that his players strive for excellence but he does not demean them in the process. He may call one of his players out but he's doing it to call them up to greatness. As a leader it's okay to demand excellence. But then it's your job to lead in a positive way to help your team achieve it.

5. Be a Leader Wherever you Are - After giving a speech where I mentioned Dabo, a gentleman came up to me and said he had worked with Dabo the few years he left coaching and worked in real estate. He said Dabo was the same leader in the real estate office that he is as a football coach. He showed up every day with a positive attitude, worked really hard and believed they were going to conquer the world. He said not surprisingly Dabo quickly enhanced the performance and success of the company while he was there. I loved hearing this because people think they have to wait for a certain position before becoming a leader. But Dabo was a leader in real estate and as an assistant coach and that lead to his current prestigious leadership position. Wherever you are decide to be a positive leader. Don't wait for the title or position to do it. Lead where you are in a positive way and your influence will grow and so will your opportunity to lead more people.

I don't know if Clemson will win the championship game tomorrow night but I do know Dabo's leadership is the reason why they will be playing in it. Positive leadership doesn't just make you better. It makes everyone around you better. It doesn't mean you will win championships. But it means you will develop champions who work harder, reach higher, love deeper, serve greater and care more.

- Jon Gordon

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