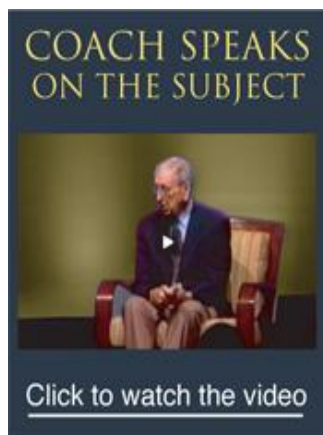


## ALERTNESS

The second block in the second tier of the Pyramid of Success is Alertness.

Coach Wooden defined this trait in the Pyramid as: “Be observing constantly. Stay open-minded. Be eager to learn and improve.”

He considered alertness essential to growing as a person; often pointing out that Abraham Lincoln once remarked: "I never met a person from whom I did not learn something; of course most of the time it was



## COACH'S FAVORITE POETRY AND PROSE

AFTER YOU KNOW IT ALL

*Beyond the festive caps and gowns,  
Beyond the PhDs,*

something not to do.” Coach would then add:  
“But that’s learning just the same.”

“We must be alert and alive and be observing constantly, seeing the things that are going on around us,” Coach said. “Otherwise, we are going to miss so many things from which we could improve ourselves. We must not get lost in our own narrow tunnel vision and selfish ways.”

Beyond observing all the time, however, is the important detail of staying open-minded. Coach Wooden always stressed the importance of being open-minded in everything in order to take advantage of every opportunity to learn something new. “The assistants were free to disagree,” Coach said about his coaching team at UCLA. “Some wouldn’t disagree that much while others frequently disagreed. I wanted them free to make suggestions. I think a yes-man as an assistant is absolutely no good at all. You need someone who is going to take issue. I wanted them to have ideas of their own and yet, at the same time, know that only one can make the final decision . . . If the decision that I made was contrary to what they believed, they had to accept it as if it were their own, even though they disagreed. That’s something I learned in coaching, whether it be with assistants or players; when you disagree, don’t be disagreeable about it.”

In fact, it’s rather interesting to see just how open-minded Coach really was in terms of welcoming suggestions, and how he encouraged his assistants to be open-minded, too. A number of former assistant coaches offered comments about Coach Wooden’s

*Beyond the books that filled the  
minds*

*Of those who earned degrees,*

*A greater knowledge will commence,  
For those who heed the call –  
What counts most is what you learn  
After you know it all.*

*All graduated pedagogues,  
When teaching, find in turn,  
Those books on what to teach had  
failed  
To show how children learn.*

*And they will soon discover that  
Each child who owns a name,  
Is different and unique, and so,  
They all don’t learn the same.*

*The classroom coach who learned,  
the boys  
Are Xs and are Os,  
Becomes adept at leadership  
The moment that he knows,*

*Those boys need teachers –  
shepherds who  
Will guide their little lambs  
To execute the truths of life  
Beyond the diagrams.*

*Oh decorated graduate,  
Once past that college wall,  
What counts the most is what you  
learn,  
After you know it all.*

*Swen Nater*

willingness to listen to their ideas and to learn from them if they might help the team improve:

Eddie Powell: “Yes I was free to disagree; in fact, he encouraged me to speak my mind.”

William Putnam: “He was always looking for help, comments, and any kind of disagreement.”

Doug Sale: “Oh yes, I was very free to disagree. He encouraged it.”

Gary Cunningham: “We were free to disagree. He did not want yes-men. He wanted people who would express their ideas.”

Jerry Norman: “Coach was a great person to work with in that respect because he was very open-minded. He'd challenge you on a lot of these things - he was very challenging - but not on whether he liked it or not, but on how much you're sold on it.”

Denny Crum: “He was always open-minded and willing to try something if I could justify it in our meetings.”

The third part of Coach Wooden’s definition of Alertness in the Pyramid of Success is “Be eager to learn and improve.” Examples of Coach Wooden's commitment to this particular mantra were discussed in detail in issue 6, but it never hurts to revisit the topic, since enthusiasm for learning and improving was so important to his overall philosophy. He felt that a person must be ready and willing to embrace whatever lessons -

positive or negative - that life threw in their way. It is the surest way to grow.

No matter how knowledgeable or experienced we believe we are on a subject, there is always something more to learn. Coach Wooden believed this firmly, dedicating himself to learning something new every single day. As he was so fond of saying, "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."

Yours in coaching,

Craig Impelman

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