

Winning Ways by Lou Holtz

Discipline: Showing You Care

The one word most often used to describe me as a coach is "disciplinarian." Some people look at this as a derogatory comment, and perhaps I should as well. But I think it's a compliment.

I am not aware of how you can be a successful parent, teacher, coach or manager without understanding the importance of discipline.

Unfortunately, some people equate a disciplinarian to a person without love, understanding or a genuine concern for his children, students or players. Nothing could be further from the truth. It takes far more effort, organization and commitment to provide a disciplined environment where people can enjoy success and gain confidence.

Do not associate discipline with harassment. Discipline breeds success; harassment breeds contempt. We ask three questions: Will it make them a better person, a better student or a better athlete? If the answer is yes, then this is discipline. If the answer is no, then it is harassment. When you try to enforce certain actions to prove that you are in control, you have no chance for success and are doing a tremendous disservice to the individuals involved.

The important thing in developing people is to explain to them that life is a matter of choices. God gave us the power to think, love, create, dream, plan, imagine and choose. I believe the greatest power we have is the power to choose. Choices have consequences, and once they understand the consequences of certain choices, progress and success will surely follow with the same consistency that the sunrise will follow sunset.

If you choose to miss a class and not study, basically you are choosing to fail that class. When you receive an F, you blame it on the professor because he enforced the choices you made. This also applies to our children. If our children choose not to do their chores during the week, they also understand they are choosing to spend the weekend without access to the phone or their friends. It may hurt you to see them so unhappy when they are confined to their room, but it was their decision, not yours.

I really dislike suspending a football player, because you don't go into coaching to get rid of people but to save them. I will always tell them what choices they have to make to be reinstated. When you enforce their decisions, they will try to pressure you to overlook their actions and promise it won't happen again. While the compassion you have for the individual will tempt you to do so, my experience also tells me this would be a mistake.

This past year, I had reached the point of exasperation with an athlete to the extent that I told him he would have to make choices such as going to class, tutors, academic meetings, etc. If he failed to do these things, he would be choosing a suspension from our team. He gave me his word he would change, and I gave him my word that if he didn't, I would suspend him. He failed to honor his promise. When I told him he was suspended for one semester, he begged for another chance. I informed him that he didn't keep his word, but I would keep mine. It is unfair for a person to not keep his word and then ask me to not keep mine.

The difference between athletes now and 25 years ago is that today everybody wants to talk about his rights and privileges, whereas 25 years ago people talked about their obligations and responsibilities. We have an obligation as leaders to see that people realize that they don't have the right to jeopardize other people's chances for success.

In closing, let me cite an example of two young men, each of whom owned a new puppy. The first one loved the dog and showered it with love and affection. Anything the dog wanted to do was okay. There were no restrictions on the dog.

The other young man loved his puppy also, but he put a choke collar on the dog. Anytime the dog did something he wasn't supposed to, the choke collar took effect. It wasn't long before the dog realized there were limitations on his freedom. A year later, the man took the choke collar off the dog and gave it great freedom. The dog ran around the neighborhood and everyone loved it. The reason the dog was given freedom was because the owner knew it would respond to his commands. It would not bite, destroy or abuse its freedom because it understood what would and would not be tolerated.

The man who showered his dog with love could never allow the dog any freedom because it wouldn't respond to any commands, nor did it understand that there were always limitations on what could and could not be tolerated.

Do you want a choke collar for a year so that you can enjoy freedom for life, or be coddled and never be free?

The same example is true for our children and athletes as well. We are just trying to prepare them to live a life of success and happiness, and it starts with discipline.