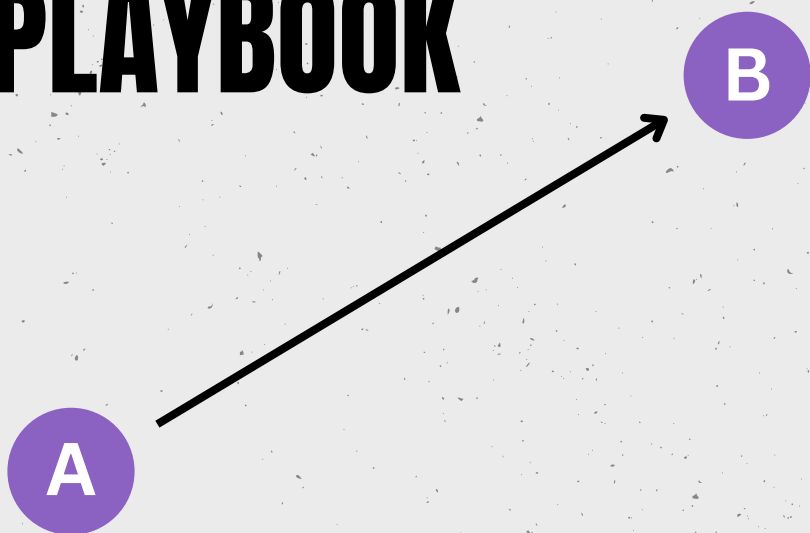


# BEYOND THE PLAYBOOK



**5 KEYS TO BUILD A  
WINNING BASKETBALL  
PROGRAM**

**REID OUSE**

# **INTRODUCTION**

Basketball is beautiful chaos. Ten players move, improvise, and react in real time. The game rewards creativity and punishes predictability.

As coaches, our challenge is to **shape that chaos without killing it**—to teach our players how to think, communicate, and compete while building a culture they're proud to represent.

This guide shares **five practical, high-impact strategies** I've seen transform programs at every level. They come from years of coaching, studying, and observing some of the best basketball minds in the game.

Whether you lead a youth travel team or a varsity powerhouse, these ideas will help you **develop better players and a stronger culture**.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Reid Ouse". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.



# STOP THE COACH SPEAK

Players are smart. They recognize empty clichés and motivational one-liners. What they crave is **authenticity and honesty.**

One of my mentors said something that has stuck with me for years:

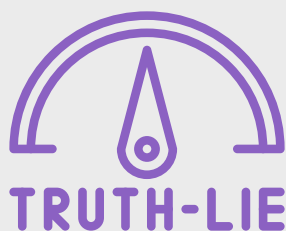
*“I hate the phrase **brutally honest**. It’s not **brutal**. It’s just **honest**.”*

When people aren’t used to direct conversations, honesty can feel harsh. But honesty isn’t cruelty—it’s clarity.

And in my opinion, it’s the *best way that we can love our players.*

## Build a Culture of Honesty

- **Set the tone early.** Make your very first team meeting about clarity and expectations.
- **Hold yourself to the standard.** Players will mimic what they see. If a coach delivers half-truths, players will too.



### Half-Truths = Whole Problems

A half-truth might seem harmless in the moment, but eventually it surfaces. If players sense that you leave things unsaid, they'll do the same. Over time that erodes trust and accountability—the foundation of every great team.

## Practical Steps

- Start and end practices with honest, specific feedback (“You moved the ball great today,” not “Good job, guys”).
- Create a space for player-coach check-ins where honesty is rewarded, not punished.

**Be careful!** If you tell your players that you want them to be honest, you have to let them be honest, even if what they say makes you uncomfortable.

If you ask them to be honest, and then you don’t respond well, they will never be honest with you again.

Authenticity builds **trust**. Trust builds **accountability**. And accountability **wins games**.



# SEARCH FOR TEACHING MOMENTS NOT CONTROL

Basketball is organized chaos: hand signals, code words, defenders flying everywhere. That chaos is part of the game.

Yet when practices feel messy, coaches often panic. The internal monologue goes something like this:

*“That was **bad**. If it’s bad, it **can’t be good**. If it’s not good, **we aren’t improving**.”*

That mindset feeds the need to **control every detail**. But the truth is, the game is never as neat as we picture it to be in your mind.

## Embrace Chaos as a Learning Tool

- **Precision has a place.** Walking through a set play or installing a press break demands order.
- **But real growth comes when players wrestle with unpredictability.**



***Players learn fastest by failing first—*** discovering what doesn't work and adjusting. If we sanitize practices to remove chaos, we rob them of game-speed learning.

## **Practice for Reality**

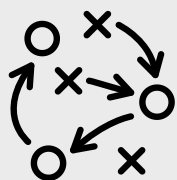
Design drills where players must solve problems on the fly:

- 3-on-3 or 4-on-4 disadvantage games.
- Time-and-score scrimmages with surprise rule changes.
- Scenarios where coaches deliberately “miss” a call to force player leadership.

## **Connection is Key**

Debrief after each session: What did we see?  
How can we respond better next time?

**Key takeaway:** Don't chase ***control***. Chase ***understanding***.



## GET RID OF YOUR PLAYBOOK

This section might surprise you. I've spent **seven years as a college coach at four different programs**, and I've seen every offensive style imaginable—from free-flowing motion to tightly scripted sets.

At my **last college stop**, we won a conference title while having **over 75 set plays installed**. We were extremely detailed and called plays constantly.

It worked because our players had a deep conceptual understanding of spacing, timing, and how to create advantages even when the initial action failed.

Over the last two years, I've also spent **considerable time around the Auburn men's basketball program**. Auburn is consistently one of the most efficient offenses in the country and calls plays frequently.



But—just like my conference-title team—their success comes from something deeper: players who know how to play when the set breaks down.

## **The Common Trap**

A high school coach once told me his team could only run scripted plays because they didn't understand motion concepts.

I asked him:

*“What happens when your set requires a ball reversal and the defense denies the reversal?”*

He didn't have an answer.

This is where most teams struggle. When a set fails, players freeze—because they've learned *plays*, not basketball.

## Teach Concepts Before Plays

- **Spacing is non-negotiable.** Players should know how to create gaps and attack closeouts.
- **Two-Man Game Mastery.** Ball screens, dribble hand-offs (DHO), and off-ball screens are the building blocks.
- **Backside Intelligence.** Cutting, screening away, and holding space keep help defenders occupied.

## Simplify to Create Options

Instead of stacking 30 new plays every season, run a handful of core actions that:

- Create mismatches.
- Force rotations that open multiple scoring options.

I'm not anti-set plays. I love good design. But without concept-driven teaching, sets become crutches.

***Great offenses are built on principles, not paper.***



# BE STRICT ON SHOT SELECTION

***“Shot selection is hard to teach? Yeah, if you’re a \*\*\*\*\*.”***

That quote—blunt as it is—from a successful college coach is unforgettable because it’s true.

Elite teams clearly define ***what a good shot is and hold everyone to it.***

## **The Core Philosophy**

We want two shots more than any others:

1. **Rim 2’s** – layups, finishes, and paint shots.
2. **Inside-Outside 3’s** – catch-and-shoot threes created after a paint touch.

## To get those shots:

- Space well beyond the three-point line to create driving lanes.
- Attack closeouts, forcing help and rotations.
- Track and celebrate paint touches, because paint touches create both of our target shots.

## Special Cases

Players like **Caitlin Clark** are different. Her willingness to shoot from 40 feet forces defenders to pick up at half court, making every ball screen harder to guard.

Even if she misses, the threat creates advantages in early ball screens that lead to—once again—rim 2's and inside-outside 3's.

## Midrange: *In Case of Emergency - Break Glass*

*I'm not anti-midrange.*

St. Thomas men's basketball once led the country in points per possession on long 2's by carefully selecting the right midrange shots.

The key is proof: *if a player can't show consistent efficiency, it isn't a good shot.*

## Practical Implementation

- Build individual **shot charts** to define where each player is green, yellow, or red.
- Design drills that reward only the shots you want and penalize the rest.

Great shot selection isn't restrictive. It's liberating—because players know exactly what excellence looks like



Albert Mehrabian's research changed how I coach.

**He found that only 7% of communication is the actual words.**

- 38% is **tone of voice**.
- 55% is **body language**.

Think about that:

You could tell a player, "Great work today," but if your posture is slouched and your voice flat, the message lands as indifference.

## Model What You Expect

- Stand tall.
- Use your hands to emphasize key points.
- Infuse your voice with energy when you praise or correct.

## Teach Players to Read Their Own Signals

A player might insist, “I didn’t say anything,” but if they shuffle in, avoid eye contact, and lazily tie their shoes for ten minutes, their body language has already shouted, *I’m not ready*.

By helping players see how their **nonverbal cues speak louder than words**, we elevate not just communication but accountability.

## Practical Steps

Start practice with a one-minute “energy check.” Players must greet teammates and coaches with eye contact and clear body language.

Communication is a skill, just like shooting or defense. Train it.

# Conclusion

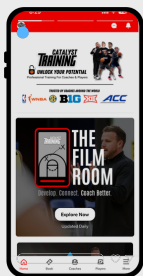
Building a strong program isn't about how many plays you run or how many banners you hang. It's about **authentic leadership, purposeful practice, concept-driven teaching, disciplined shot selection, and crystal-clear communication.**

Pick one idea this week:

- Be more honest in post-practice feedback.
- Add a chaos drill.
- Trim your playbook.
- Tighten shot selection rules.
- Practice better body language.

Small, consistent actions create big culture shifts.





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