

# HOW WIN

When Facing Life's Toughest Opponent - YOU

CHRIS CRUMPLER

TO: \_\_\_\_\_

FROM: \_\_\_\_\_

# **How II Win™**

When Facing Life's Toughest Opponent - YOU

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**Dedicated to**

***Clarence Crumpler, Jr.***



***The Greatest Influence of my Life***

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## **- Introduction -**

I was given up for adoption because I was black. I never knew or understood why until over 27 years later.

On November 22, 2010, I was in the final days of putting together the first ever International Thanksgiving Basketball Tournament in Bermuda. As I prepared to welcome teams from Bermuda, Canada, and America, I received a notification on my BlackBerry. It was a Facebook message from a 50-year-old white lady saying,

*"Sorry to bother you, but I am searching for my son who I put up for adoption. You have his birthdate, so I just wanted to ask if you were adopted... I know... Kinda weird if you are not, but I had to ask. Thanks for your reply."*

I was literally having an anxiety attack! What does this mean? I am not ready for this! What do I do? What do I say? I couldn't believe this was happening. I began to zone out and have

shortness of breath and I instantly felt weak. I asked a friend to quickly escort me outside in order to gather myself. Something that had been a secret burden for 27 years was finally coming out. It seemed like I was in a trance. In a quick second, I felt that neglected, abandoned baby inside of me and the trauma moved through my whole body. I instantly felt awkward, alone, and confused all at the same time.

I had been adopted at 3 months old. I love my adoptive parents to death. I called them to let them know what had happened. They told me that they knew this day was coming and that I would be OK. They advised me to take the DNA test and go from there. I had the DNA test fast-tracked and it came back with a 99.996% match that Joe Washington was my biological father.

Within a month of getting the DNA results, we made plans to meet for the first time during my Christmas break, 2010, in Orlando. On this initial meeting I decided to leave my wife and children with my parents back in my hometown. I wanted

to meet my biological parents on my own to determine if they should meet everyone else. As I drove into the restaurant parking lot, I saw a white woman and a black man standing outside the restaurant and thought, "This is really happening."

My mindset was one of gratitude. I was grateful that I was adopted and not aborted - that they had given me life. I had seen a few pictures on Facebook and had spoken briefly with my biological Mom on the phone, but I did not know anything else about my birth parents except that they were young, my mom was white, my dad was black, and they were in college when I was born. This was extremely awkward for a number of reasons: time, race, and the fact that this could blow up four different families.

As I came out of the car, I gave my biological mom a hug. I told her that I loved her and then I said, "Thank you." Instantly, I could feel the sense of relief that came from her. I gave my biological father a hug and said "Thank you." to him as well. Why, you



ask? Because despite it all, they gave me the greatest gift in this world - **life**. Their decision to pass me on to the orphanage was actually my first shot at life. I definitely could not have had this perspective early in life, but having gone through college and being married with children of my own, coupled with my age and personal experiences enabled me to be at peace with everything. I was more understanding of the challenges life presents and the choices we make along the way.

Life is a gift and an honor. Period. For some it doesn't feel like it and for others it feels like that a lot. You have heard the phrase that life is either a gift or a curse. I want to establish a new narrative that we will see played out throughout this book, that life is a gift *and a course*. I will simply be telling you about my journey, the decisions I made along the way, and outcomes of those decisions. I have to be honest; I had a good life and some great experiences. Sometimes by *divine* and sometimes by *design*.

The *divine* are those circumstances and situations that are out of our control that sometimes create adversity, challenges, and obstacles in our lives. We will identify this as our opponent. This will provide the context to understand the environment and season in which I am operating.

This is not an autobiography, but I will be sharing some of my life stories, throughout the book, in order to provide a premise for the lessons I want to convey.



## **- Purpose -**

This leads me to the purpose of this book. And that is...we are all born originals - from our hair, eyes, fingerprints, and even our saliva. The unfortunate reality for a lot of us is that we die having become a substitute of our original design. We use our lives up spending tremendous amounts of time, energy, education, and effort trying to please the masses by doing what we think is acceptable. This is different for all of us because we are all different.

I want to make you aware that nothing we do or face in life is done by ourselves. There is always something or someone who is there with us. "How I Win" highlights this throughout the book - that no man is an island unto himself. Even though you feel alone, you are not alone. As I look back over my life, I recognize that more and more. The reality is that for some people being adopted sucks, but it was the best thing that could have happened for me. My goal is to share the principles that I have

learned in my life and to give you tools, ideas, and strategies to enable you to refuse to lose in your life.

It's ironic that I have chosen to title the book 'How I Win". I have won in my relationships with my faith, my wife, my children, my parents, my career, and my sport . It all started from being a loser, in losing circumstances, all alone, from day one. What that built in me was not the joy of winning, because I don't enjoy winning. I don't have plans or celebrations for winning. I don't plan what I'm going to do when I get into the end zone, or when I win the slam dunk contest, or when I win a three point contest, or when I win the championship, or when I win MVP.. all of which I have done. I just hate losing and hating losing has driven me to those wins. Refusing to accept defeat has allowed me to continue to win.

I'm not qualified enough, smart enough, or even talented enough to be where I am. I just refused to be where I was, and that allowed me to continue to grow. That's how I know, that

every man can win in every area of his life, as long as he refuses to lose. That's what this book is about.



# - CHAPTER I -



## **Being a Son**

*Lesson: Attitude of Gratitude*



*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (NIV, Colossians 3:17)*

*“Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough.” - Oprah Winfrey*

**“I want him!”** Those three words started me on my current trajectory. If Clarence Crumpler, my “Daddy” hadn’t said those words, and meant them, then my story would be completely different.

My story started with complete rejection. My mother *didn’t* want me, that is how I was able to become a Crumpler. Here’s how my life as a “son” started.

My parents, Clarence and Earlene Crumpler, were going to a family celebration in Tampa, Florida, which was less than a two hour drive from Ocklawaha, where they lived. Clarence’s sister, Aunt B., was not able to make it to the celebration because she had to work.

Clarence and Earlene decided to stop in on Aunt B. on their way back for a short visit. Clarence

was a hardworking, blue-collar man who dropped out of school at the age of 11 to start working and help his parents. Clarence and his beautiful wife, Earlene, had been together for over twenty-five years. They were a strong, loving couple that came from humble beginnings and worked hard as sharecroppers.

Aunt B. was in charge of a small orphanage that housed several children of various ages, who for whatever reason, had been removed from their parents' custody. Most of them were older children, however, there was this one baby (Me) that was being kept in a crib in a room separate from the other children. After a short visit, Clarence and Earlene prepared to leave. Clarence walked to the bathroom. He heard me crying and went back to the room I was in. It was July in Florida and there was no air conditioning, so it was hot in there.

“Aunt B., what about that baby?” he asked. That’s when Aunt B. told him to “Leave that hollering ass baby back there so he can fall asleep. That half-breed baby is new to the

orphanage and he just has to get used to being alone.”

Clarence ignored the crying and came back to the front of the house before he hit the road heading back home. Earlene was in the restroom at this time and she heard me crying. It was like I was calling for her. She tried to play it off, but couldn't. She felt the need to come over to me. When I saw her face I stopped crying and began to smile. I was so happy. She was in shock. She had never seen a baby so young recognize a face and smile. She was so moved by the experience that she picked me up. Suddenly reality set in that I was a baby, alone, sweating in a back room needing to be changed.

Earlene came out holding the baby.

“Why did you pick him up?” Aunt B. exclaimed.

Earlene said, “I checked on him and when he saw me, he smiled. So I picked him up and noticed his clothes was wet from sweat from being in that hot room.”

Aunt B. then commented, “Put him back and let him fall asleep. He'll be alright.”

That's when, out of nowhere, Clarence loudly said, "***I want him!***"

Shortly after that, I officially became a Crumpler. I was Clarence and Earlene Crumpler's son. Now Clarence and Earlene had already successfully raised six children, all of whom were adults at this time in 1983, so taking in a newborn was not only an odd choice for them, it was practically unheard of. I can't even imagine the flak they caught, but then again, we are talking about Clarence Crumpler, and nobody gave Clarence any flak.

My father (AKA "Daddy") was and is, the "King of the Hill" in our family. It seemed like he was 8' tall and 400 pounds, but he was actually only 5'11" and 190 pounds. Still, he was the boss and every bit as big a presence physically as he was the family patriarch. With Daddy, there were no ifs, ands, or buts about his word. It was final. Everybody was scared of him, including me. I cannot recall a time in my life when anyone ever dared to challenge him. He spoke with a strong, aggressive tone that was occasionally misinterpreted, but it was just him. He was a

man's man: no emotion and all business each and every day. For the Crumpler Crew, he was our rock! But he was also very soft on the inside, which is the only logical explanation I can think of regarding how I ended up being a Crumpler. Clarence recruited me to his team because he cared; because he had a heart pure as gold.

My parents were naturally very influential on me in many ways. Mama was a woman with a heart as big as the ocean. She was my shelter and security regardless of what happened. She was always there for me, just as she is to this day. Mama was devoted to being a mother, wife, and woman of God. She was always respectful. I have never seen or heard her disrespect anyone in my life. She was *consistent*. Every morning the exact same thing: morning coffee, make up her bed and my daddy's, then cook breakfast and clean the kitchen, and finally sit and watch the news. She was dependable and caring. My fondest memories of growing up are sitting on my mama's bed while she was doing her puzzle book. I would tell her about my dreams of the NBA and she would tell me about her childhood.

We would get lost in time talking and telling stories. My mama seemed to always know what I needed. She didn't exactly encourage my dreams, but more importantly, she didn't tell me to stop dreaming.

The truth is, for as long as I can remember, I knew I didn't fit in. My hair was wavy, my skin was light, my head was long, but other than the physical differences, there were other things that just were different. My parents were in their fifties. Most of my peers' parents were in their twenties or thirties. I just knew I was different, and I wanted to belong so badly.

When I was told I was adopted, it wasn't so much that I wasn't wanted that was in the forefront of my mind. It wasn't hate, it was hurt. I just didn't want to grasp the thought that Earlene and Clarence weren't my parents. That to me was not acceptable. I know now that not being wanted and then being wanted played a major part in my development. I have come to understand that even though I can't remember it, I knew it and it factored in to nearly every decision I made. I was going to prove that I was

good enough to keep, or to have been chosen. I lived in a subconscious fear of being abandoned again, that factored into everything I did.

My father wanting me, really helped me to learn boundaries relating to personal responsibility and accountability. What I used to avoid the landmines of life as a child, was not the DARE school program or a preacher in a church or teacher in school. Those entities all provided me the information, but the reality is that I still was exposed to these elements every day in my community. I still had a choice regardless of the information presented to me, and the determining factor was the love, admiration, and respect I had for my dad. Earning his acceptance and appreciation was important to me. I loved the fact that my mom was there for me emotionally and would listen to my ideas and plans for my life while taking care of my basic day-to-day needs. With my father, it was more about raising my character to his standards.

That brings me to the true source of my strength, resolve, and ambition,...my heavenly father. Even if Clarence and Earlene had not made me

their son, I was already a Son of God. As an adult, the only father I worry about disappointing is my heavenly father. He is my reason, my support, and my refuge

The biggest answer of all my doings and beings is my spiritual walk and my commitment and dedication to that. My spiritual journey was the foundation of awareness of gratefulness. I was just existing. I was like everyone else trying to navigate my space and trying to find out who I am and why am I here. Now you may not accept it or agree, but I have to at least bring you to an awareness of the profound effect that has had in my current life. Even putting this book together is all due to that.

I struggle with secular conversations with people who don't want to have a spiritual one. For someone to try to really grasp what I'm doing and to implement it in their life on just a principle basis-without the spirit, they would just be going through some motions. They would feel like I was a fraud because they did what the book said or



they took a principle and applied it but their spirit wasn't right.

I am grateful for so many things, but for purposes of this chapter, I am grateful that I was given the gift of life. I am grateful for my parents, both biological and adopted. The gratefulness of me being a son and accepting all of me, the good, the bad and the confusing is that it puts me in a position to surrender and that has taught me so much about myself, about others, but more importantly about this life. I was so conditioned to be tough and to fight, to win at all costs, to show that you're cool or you're smart, that you got it right. The crazy thing is that as I get older, I'm not in the business of proving anything to anyone, that's number one, Number two, I have found some secret ingredient that has allowed me to win in life, by not trying to beat anybody. I'm really just trying to be a better me.

We all have these dynamics within our families that none of us asked for, but it is what it is. It wasn't until I got to a place where I could accept who I am and my situation; That it didn't happen *to* me but *for* me; that I began to

have a sense of purpose and direction. Whether my father was 100 years older than me or whether my mother was white or whether I was broke or whether I was light skinned. It doesn't matter. What matters is that I had life. I went from being at war about being adopted, to being grateful that I was adopted instead of aborted. I got a chance to live in this world and experience that beautiful thing we call life, to be a part of this group of family that we call humanity.

Only God can make a child come to fruition. Somebody has to be willing to sacrifice for that child to get here, which was my birth mother. She had to go through what she went through to allow me to even have life. Then God intervened in her situation to allow me to be raised by this incredible man, my father. My spiritual father was in control of it all and ultimately did it for my good. I do not have to worry about stuff, about people, and all of those things out of my control. Being a son allows me to remind myself, "Wow, Wow, Wow! I get to experience life and all its fullness, and for that, I'm grateful." Being a son, keeps me in a space

of being a child where I can be grateful that I have life, and that God is always in control.

I'm incredibly grateful because I have life. Being adopted allowed me to become who I am, Chris Crumpler, son of Clarence and Earlene Crumpler. I can now experience being a father myself, and reflect on how blessed I was, how blessed I am... to be a son.

## - CHAPTER II -



### **Being a Brother**

*Lesson: Necessity of a Support System*

*A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.  
(NKJV Proverbs, 17:17)*

*“ I don't believe an accident of birth makes people sisters or brothers. It makes them siblings, gives them mutuality of parentage. Sisterhood and brotherhood is a condition people have to work at. ” - Maya Angelo*

I can speak on brotherhood, because when it comes to being a brother, I have the great fortune of being a black brother, having a white brother, a blood brother, an adopted brother, a baby brother, a big brother, a hood brother, a frat brother, and of course, a brother from another mother.

I have five sisters and four brothers with an age difference of 40 years between the oldest and youngest. I only lived with one of them, Rose. I didn't know that my biological younger siblings Joshua, Chance, and Chelsea, existed until I was 27 years old, and by that time we were all adults - except for Chance, who was 17. My relationship with them is still new and awkward, but I am grateful that we are all open and trying. It's not easy mixing four families and two races in

two countries with no history. Now that we are all adults with children and careers, it's even more complicated.

By the time my dad adopted me, his other children, my brothers and sisters were all adults. I had respectful relationships with my brothers Chuck and Gene. They were more like my uncles. Once I became a man, it shifted to a brother relationship and I am grateful for them and respect them. Shirley, my oldest sister, lived in Sarasota my entire childhood and would visit sometimes on holidays. Because of this distance (both in age and location), our relationship was somewhat distant. Punkin and Faye were my older sisters, who were more like my aunts. They are both funny, and real, and mean the world to me. I am grateful that they are in my life. The reality is that I was only connected to Rose and she was connected to me.

Rose was about twenty years older than me, and when I was young, I called her "Second Mama". Once upon a time, she was close to becoming an Olympic athlete in gymnastics - at least from the stories she told me - but a major

injury sidelined her for life. Then, in her early twenties, she was diagnosed with lupus, which gave her a kidney disorder that would force her to endure dialysis for the remainder of her life. It also meant she could not have children, which I think was one of the reasons she was so dedicated to me. She would tell me that if Mama didn't adopt me that she would. Eventually, she did adopt babies Mario and Rosa who are my nephew and niece. Rose was so inspiring to me when I was young. She went through so many surgeries, would lose her hair at times, her skin would burn, crack, and peel. I even witnessed her weight dropping down to less than 100 pounds due to infections on several occasions. I loved her and it was hard to see her suffer. Those images of how she endured it all are powerful to me. I couldn't imagine ever seeing anyone braver. *Rose* is such an appropriate name for her, not because she was a delicate flower, beautiful to see, but because she "rose" to the challenges of her circumstances. From her adversities came wonderful memories for me. Rose was the only sibling that I could talk with about anything. We

were connected spiritually.

Due to her health, Rose couldn't work and had to live with us for a while. That just made our relationship richer. I remember when I was nine years old, I would set up her dialysis bags and give her shots in her arm because my mom was scared of needles. She bought me my first football cleats, was a volunteer for my basketball teams, and was a constant support system for me. She became sick again, in 2004, while I was in my senior year of college. My mom called to let me know she was in bad shape this time. I asked my school and coach if I could leave early for Christmas break because my sister was in the hospital. I came home and rushed to get to her side. I made up my mind that I would spend the whole day in the hospital with her. She didn't look good and had not eaten in two days. The nurse encouraged me to give her some Pediasure and I did. She didn't want to drink it. I asked her to do it for me, and she did. I let her know that I would get some lunch and come right back. On my way back, I saw 10 doctors and nurses rush into her room. I ran to Rose's room,



but a man stopped me and held me in a nearby waiting room. He was the hospital chaplain. He told me the devastating news that Rose was gone. She will be forever be missed. It was an honor to support her. It was an honor because she supported me so much.

Now, I understand everyone can't experience being a blood brother. If you have that, consider yourself blessed. A brother can be "blood or bred". I believe it's a necessity for boys to have something we will call a brotherhood. Boys need structure, mentors, and validation. Brotherhood for boys does this, not as an act, but a way of life. Being a brother is a longing in every man. We have an inborn ability to be a brother naturally. Even when you are a single child, you still have this longing for brotherhood. This is what makes sports teams, fraternities and clubs special for men. Being a brother is not about you. It's just about what's best for the family. People are people. People are going to make mistakes. It's all about being that support system.

There is a reason why so many men don't jump at the bit to get married, to raise their children and to give back to the community, which they are built to do. It's because a man wars with his identity and the challenges he has to deal with. He secretly keeps to himself, behind his pride and his ego. He's afraid that if he's vulnerable, or he lets somebody too close, they will take advantage of him, they would expose him, they would hurt him and his family, and a man's family means everything to him.

When I became a husband, when I became a father, I felt alone. I had experienced all those crowds, all of those trophies, all of those championships and all that type of stuff and I have a HUGE family, but when it came to being a man, I felt alone. I felt alone a lot, and it was scary. I didn't know what to do, and I was afraid to tell anybody. So when I speak of brothers, I'm speaking of a support system that makes you a bigger and better version of yourself as it relates to the roles and responsibilities of a man.

In 2009, Dwayne Caines from Bermuda approached me. His wife and I worked together at Cedarbridge Academy and he had heard about the work I was doing at the school. Dwayne wanted to introduce me to the possibility of joining his fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated. I asked him, “You mean like dudes in college making all that noise and partying? Not for me, King.”

“No, no,” he said. He continued talking, asked me to do my own research, and then invited me to an informational session. After doing my research, I was blown away to learn all the things that Alpha men had done for America and how they were trailblazers for civil rights and college scholarships. Once I learned that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an Alpha, the fraternity had instant credibility to me. I was curious.

It only took one informational meeting to realize that I had a sense of purpose and saw a place where I belonged. The conversations were rich and inspiring. Then, after all the information was presented, the men of Alpha Phi Alpha

introduced themselves and the last one, Wayne Caines, Dwayne's twin brother challenged us not to take the opportunity lightly.

The most impactful experience of being an Alpha is the process of becoming a member. It was so significant to me that I identify it as my rite of passage into manhood. I was taught and mentored on the history of my brothers, the value of being a brother, the responsibility to my God, my Family, and my brother. I was challenged to determine if this was my truth. I was trained to consider others and respect those before me. This all had a profound effect on my development as a man, and the biggest part was knowing and supporting the brothers that were in the process with me.

Alpha taught me so many things that I needed. First of all, I needed a true experience of rites of passage but more importantly I needed to believe that I could do it. A college graduation ceremony doesn't let you know that you're going to be a good husband, good father. You can have

a dream and have an idea, but are you going to make it?

To see men, who were just like me, but were successful. It was important that they looked like me, that they sounded like me, that they came from where I came from. I had never seen success in people who looked like me, outside of the TV, which was rapping, dancing, making somebody laugh, shooting a hoop or catching a ball. So, that was what I was striving for. The Alphas, these were just guys in the community who were successful, who knew they were successful, who knew their family was going to be successful just by making choices, just by having a value system. I had experienced this type of brotherhood on the basketball team, but I had never been in an environment where you're a lawyer, you're a district manager, you're a CEO, you're an investor and head of a law firm, but you're just my brother.

It's just sitting among them and realizing that I was good enough, that I was worthy enough for something bigger than what I had

been exposed to, or what I was taught. Actually, in a lot of ways, what I was taught was wrong. I wouldn't say it was a lie, I would just say it was wrong. It was enriching for the values to be servants of all, leaders of all, and good deeds to mankind. It was a real focus on: you are called to be a leader of everyone and it's a value system to serve others.

I had never been in a secular organization where the focus was to be servant of all, leaders of all, and do good deeds for mankind. I had heard that in church, but the church was so disconnected to real life and to what was going on in the community. Church was this isolated event on the weekend, but it did not transfer to what you were experiencing in your life. At the time, I was overwhelmed with the responsibilities of my day-to-day life. If you go to work, and you pay your bills, and you wash your clothes ... No one's giving you your award. You're not getting any points for that. They expect you

just to do that, and to like it, but that was something that I struggled with. I needed more help outside of people praying for me. I needed more help outside of just giving me a job.

I was still making decisions based on what I was taught, but I still struggled, internally. I'm very selfish and very prideful. I didn't realize that in order for you to make good decisions and be at peace with it, you can't just make good decisions. You have to have a value system that is your core belief for everybody. Then you have to have a culture that reinforces it because you always have relapses. The stresses of what finances and a new baby do to a relationship, I didn't go to school for that. No one broke that down to me, and no one ever broke down what you feel like on the inside. Everybody just showed me what you had to do on the outside. So, the brotherhood was just one of those pieces that I needed that could help me on the inside. It wasn't the external things that we were doing, whether it is a fellowship, or leading an activity, or community outreach. It was just that it was

feeding me on my inside, to allow me to get to the next stage that I needed to get to as a man.

I literally had a mind shift. I had a paradigm shift. I had this empowerment. Prior to that, I was just a man trying. After that, I'm just a man trying, but I know I have brothers that are there to support me. Brotherhood was big for me in that regard. It's just that their presence and their example, gives me enough fuel to make it through to the next stage. It taught me the power of environment. It taught me the power of exposure. It taught me the power of experience. I have access to brothers and resources and a network that keeps me going; Even when I make mistakes; Even when I don't believe in myself any more.

No man is an island and a brother is good for hard times. Brothers are good for transitions. Regardless of your aspirations and dreams you cannot do it alone. Brothers are not really there for the wins or the championships; brothers are there for when you have the challenges of getting back up. Just being there is a huge part of being



a brother. I am grateful for the brothers who have been there for me over the years, whether blood or bred. I try my best to be there for my brothers, as much as I possibly can.

Now I am very aware that my journey is unique, but life is what you make it as it relates to family. Whether your family is by blood, adopted, or chosen, you define it - don't let it define you. I could have played the victim mentality and made excuses about being adopted, or the age of my siblings, but whatever you focus on grows. I chose to focus on what I had and make the most of it.

I have had multiple losses in every category of life. The brotherhood let that not get to me though. It helped to not get convicted of that. It doesn't solve it. It's not the answer, but it's a huge help, like the other help in these chapters. I recognized that it was helping me. I recognized at that moment in my life, I needed that. I just stay true to my convictions, not to my qualifications, because I don't have any.

I am a man who has all this wisdom to give, to build people and places, but I am one choice away from destroying everything and everyone around me at any time. Imagine being a selfish, prideful, lazy, procrastinating person who's a poor communicator, poor administrator in every aspect of his life, while at the same time becoming successful in all these aspects of life. People not only want you, need you, but they depend on you everyday, and you're just a man. That's it. No more, no less. You're just a man. In order for me to execute that every single day of the year, I have to put myself in my strong brotherhood. To remind myself, this too shall pass. You will make it.

He's not heavy. He's my brother.



## - CHAPTER III -



### **Becoming a Friend**

*Lesson: The Value of Loyalty & Listening*

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry (NIV, James 1:19)*

*"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said" - **Peter Drucker***

When I was younger, I was just getting friends to get acceptance. Because I was a people pleaser, I was getting used and abused by a lot of people because I just wanted to be a friend, and usually at the cost of my own time, energy and values. When I was a child, I had a lot of school- aged friends, neighborhood friends, and cousins, but only two real friends: Lendell and CJ.

I attended kindergarten at Shores Christian Academy and then went on to “big school”, Stanton Weirsdale Elementary. This is where I met one of my best friends, Clever “CJ” Florence. CJ was not from my neighborhood, but our families knew each other so we would see each other often. CJ was soft-spoken and easy to get along with. I also started school with

another best friend, my cousin Lendell Welcome. Lendell and I lived on the same street, we went to the same church, and also enjoyed the same sports.

Since I was five years old, Lendell was a part of my life in every social circle. We were physically exact opposites. I was skinny, light skinned, and wavy-haired. He was chubby, dark-skinned, with “nappy” hair. We were inseparable, especially at church. Our church was Clearwater Missionary Baptist Church where Reverend Leonard Scott was the pastor. Both of our fathers were deacons and Lendell’s mom was the youth choir director. Church attendance was expected, along with participation in Sunday School and the choir. If you’ve ever been forced to do choir, you know how tough that can be when you don’t want to be there. We always played games instead of focusing; such as thumb wrestling, knuckle popping, and arm punching.

It wasn’t that being lively in church wasn’t expected; Lendell and I were just the wrong *type* of lively. We were part of a traditional, southern, black church with people falling out and dancing

because of the Holy Ghost. We had foot stomping, hand clapping, feel-good Gospel music and hymns. In a slow country town like Ocklawaha, the church was not only a place to serve and worship God and listen to Gospel music but also to be a part of the local drama. It was a soap opera in its own right. That's human nature when you are in an area with limited social outlets.

Thankfully, the church lessons would be learned for the week, and Lendell and I would continue on to the next adventure - which usually involved sports. Life was good and pretty normal for a six-year-old kid. Then one afternoon, something happened that lit me up like a firework. I had been outside playing when CJ came over to my house, which was a rare treat. CJ was one of my best friends, but since he didn't live in the Quarters we didn't get to play with each other as often as we would have liked. We both liked playing basketball a lot and were always ready to play. That day, some older boys were playing behind Aunt Faye's house. CJ and I were not allowed to play because of our size, but

we could watch. It was so exciting to watch. From the arguments, to the passing, to the shooting and the cutting, it was just captivating. The clincher came when one of the guys did a behind the back, rollaway layup. I had never seen anything like that. I didn't know it was even possible. That's when I started to understand the creative aspect of the game. Basketball offered an opportunity to be creative and react in the moment. You could literally be "poetry in motion". From that moment on, I knew that I wanted basketball to be in my life some way. That thought was sealed when I had the chance to watch Michael Jordan on TV, one of the greatest players of all time. It was a moment that defined what I wanted to do in life- make basketball my career. Of course, many kids have those dreams and few make it, but I was ready to defy the odds. I wanted to be a professional basketball player in the NBA.

Being with CJ and Lendell, I didn't have to put on or show off. I just had to be me and that felt so good. They always saw me and let me be myself. The attitudes and environments that they



helped create were safe, supportive, and productive. When I graduated and went to middle school, things began to change because I began to change. Our world began to grow and distractions began to increase.

In elementary school, everyone was from our neighborhood and Weirsdale, but in middle school, people were from everywhere, and that was exciting and scary all at the same time. My social life was changing quickly. I was getting interested in girls and girls were interested in me. There were a lot of cliques because a lot of us didn't know each other. This was a challenge for me because I craved acceptance from people; that made me desperate at times and also made me dangerous. In middle school it's all about who is influencing whom. Middle school is when you first get to experience your peers and learn the difference between friends and associates. By my definition, a *friend* is someone who accepts you for who you are and protects you from known danger.

During my middle school days, Lendell and CJ were still my best friends, but our worlds were

growing bigger and faster. Influences from other people hit me from everywhere. I started stealing, smoking weed, fighting, etc. The issue was that I was a follower and the people I was following didn't care about my well-being, and neither did I. I wanted to be accepted for being tough, "hard", and cool, and was compromising my family values to do it. Once again, this comes from being in the box of feeling "less than". I would struggle with this all the way into my adulthood.

In my training I reference the "Anatomy of Peace" to help people to identify with their way of being and why. The diagram below is a great example of this. At some point in time in my life I was in each of these boxes.

Being a follower made my life complicated. I was a follower all the way to the jailhouse. At fifteen, I got arrested for shoplifting as a juvenile and was given the maximum penalty for a first time offender. The reason the jury gave me the max was not because of what I did, but *why* I did it. They said I was a follower and that was more dangerous than a thief. Socially, among my peers

**THE BETTER-THAN BOX**

<b>View of Myself</b> Superior Important Virtuous/Right	<b>View of Others</b> Inferior Incapable/Irrelevant False/Wrong
<b>Feelings</b> Impatient Disdainful Indifferent	<b>View of World</b> Competitive Troubled Needs me

**THE I-DESERVE BOX**

<b>View of Myself</b> Meritorious Mistreated/Victim Unappreciated	<b>View of Others</b> Mistaken Mistreating Ungrateful
<b>Feelings</b> Entitled Deprived Resentful	<b>View of World</b> Unfair Unjust Owes me

**THE MUST-BE-SEEN-AS BOX**

<b>View of Myself</b> Need to be well thought of Fake	<b>View of Others</b> Judgmental Threatening My audience
<b>Feelings</b> Anxious/Afraid Needy/Stressed Overwhelmed	<b>View of World</b> Dangerous Watching Judging me

**THE WORSE-THAN BOX**

<b>View of Myself</b> Not as good Broken/Deficient Fated	<b>View of Others</b> Advantaged Privileged Blessed
<b>Feelings</b> Helpless Jealous/Bitter Depressed	<b>View of World</b> Hard/Difficult Against me Ignoring me

I was embarrassed. I brought shame to my family; I was lost as a person and I knew it. I also realized that I was letting my friends run my life. I was going nowhere. I confused loyalty with friendship. I was reaching out to get validation from others in order to define my value and self-worth. To gain that recognition, I was compromising all of my personal convictions and my family values. This led me into a constant no-

man's land regarding my peer relationships. We intoxicated each other with our dysfunctions, delusions, and disorders and eventually poisoned our relationships. The crazy thing about this period of my life was that not only did I not have a friend to stop me, but I wasn't being a friend to anyone else either.

Going forward, I focused on what I wanted and where I wanted to go. A year later I met someone who would become my best friend throughout my college days and young adulthood, Eric Price Jr. We were rivals on the basketball court in high school, and at the end of our senior season, we both made the Central Florida all-star game in Orlando. Because we were both from Marion County, they made us roommates. That weekend our connection was electric and instant for both of us. It actually had less to do with basketball and more to do with our personalities and our dreams for ourselves and our families. We literally wanted the same thing. Just like it had been with Lendell, Eric and I looked nothing alike. He was a giant of a man at 6'7, 260lbs, and I was 6'3, 160lbs. And just like

with Lendell, I was accepted for who I was but also challenged to be greater. Eric also inspired me. He has an incredible story of overcoming the adversity that always seemed to come into his life. He is one of the strongest people I have ever met in every sense of the word. Eric was with me during some life-changing transitions: college, marriage, fatherhood, and career choices, and we still talk today.

The most important thing I can highlight when it comes to friendship is something that is lost, that stops the connection and hurts the communication,...that is listening. Not just listening to sounds and noises and words, anyone can do that. But listen to the heart and the will and the want too. You have to care enough about another person's needs and forget, or get over, your own. This is when you start to discover a higher purpose and a greater connection and the art of listening.

Oh, I've got 5,000 social media friends and the reality is, no disrespect, but none of them are my real friends. I've got two real friends in

Bermuda and two real friends in the States and that's it. Those are my only true friends of the 5,000 people on social media, who are virtual friends.

I found out what true friendship is. Being a friend is listening, the art of listening and the value of loyalty. That's what helps me win and that allows me to be a good friend to someone else, a real friend because we value loyalty and we value listening. A real friend you don't have to please. My real friends don't care what my bank account looks like. They don't care what my relationships look like. They don't care what my employment looks like. They just care about me and I just care about them. That's beautiful.



## - CHAPTER IV -



### **Being a Student**

*Lesson: Learn to Grow and Grow to Learn*



*Wise men and women are always learning, always listening for fresh insights. (MSG, Proverbs 18:15)*

*“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.” -  
**Albert Einstein***

*“The capacity to learn is a gift; the ability to learn is a skill; the willingness to learn is a choice.”  
**- Brian Herbert***

Being a student is vital to life and, whether you know it or not, you are always learning - but what are you learning? Two things that are very important to note: what are you learning and why are you learning?

I was terrible in the classroom. I never made honors. The crazy thing is that I was a natural outside the classroom when it comes to sports, hands on activities, and social skills/awareness. As a student in the classroom I was bored out of my mind. Throughout my entire elementary and middle school years, I never excelled and was a behavior problem. Nothing changed even with different teaching styles and intervention when I got to high school. I attended public schools my entire life. The reality is that

their resources and manpower are limited. As a student, you must take ownership of your education - both formal and informal. I finally made a decision that I wanted something different for my life and my actions started to back that up.

One of the first things I noticed when I started assessing my situation in high school was that the O-stars (the name we called boys from Ocklawaha) were the best athletes, but nobody was going to college on scholarships - or to college period. Why not? For some, it was that they had low GPAs, which meant that sports stopped after high school for them, especially if they could not pass their ACT or SAT. Then there was behavior. I noticed people that I'd always connected with change right before my eyes, or perhaps it was me that was changing. All I know is, suddenly I was aware of some people's cocky, arrogant, disrespectful behavior, which in some situations resulted in getting kicked off the team or kicked out of school.

As a young student athlete, there was really no one to walk me through the process of getting

to college. Because of my desire to play basketball, college was not an option, it was a necessity. The problem I had is that I couldn't count on anyone besides myself to ensure that everything was in place. No one in my community had ever gone to college, so there was no roadmap for me to follow. I had to map the course out myself.

It was standard that you pass your SAT as a junior, but I wanted to try it earlier. I figured it was just like basketball; it wouldn't hurt to have a little practice and scout the competition, not to mention the knowledge I would gain about the test if I did have to take it again. Incredibly, I passed it on my first try of my sophomore year. There was one less hurdle to cross on my way to college.

What I learned along this road, is that people respect a young person who is focused and determined, and that they are willing to help if you ask. I just focused on getting to college. The closer I got to graduating from high school, the greater my focus.

During high school I used to have a bible

study group in my community, which helped me to become a better reader. I was sitting around a dinner table with an ex-drug dealer, two ex-drug users, and what we call a "hood mama", Mrs. Fillmore. Mama Ethel, a pillar in our community and mother of twenty (which made her like everyone's mother or grandmother), would sit in her living room and watch Trinity Broadcasting Network, TBN, the world's largest Christian television network, while we were studying the Bible. It was real. I got the chance to ask a lot of questions and have honest discussions. This small weekly exercise actually helped me, as a student, to read with a purpose, to learn and understand, and not just go through the motions. See, motivation is critical to learning; especially for boys because of our "wiring". External reasons like basketball and friends can only take you so far. It's not until the reason is internal that we truly unlock our ability to learn and think critically.

The positive steps I took outside of school actually helped me to go to school more focused, and with a plan. As I mentioned earlier,

I was making honest observations about my situation and myself. I also made sure I had a 3.0 GPA. I knew I had to send college applications to different colleges all over the state of Florida. I used the money from my part-time job to pay for all of the applications. Mr. Miller, the instructor for video production (the same one who gave me the disciplinary referral), knew about my dream of playing in the NBA. He allowed me all the time I needed to make my own highlight tape in the video production room.

When it came to earning a college scholarship, I had to take ownership of the process. It hit me in my senior year on our awards night when, after going to school for 12 years, I received all of the athletic and popularity awards while my classmates who weren't athletic or popular received \$5,000, \$10,000, and \$20,000 worth of scholarships. After years of manipulating the system, I felt like the biggest sucker, because I didn't even know that the scholarship money was an option for me. The reality is, as a conventional student, I never applied myself, not whole-heartedly. I was

ashamed and embarrassed to know that I didn't know. I was so insecure about what people thought of me, whether I was smart or dumb, so I wouldn't even try, because that was the safest thing to do.

I had never been exposed to anyone studying and did not get that exposure until I was in college. It was hard because for so many years, I cheated, I copied, I fell asleep, I didn't ask questions, I didn't apply myself. When you do that for years, even though I had the desire, I had not developed any of the skills necessary to organize and study properly. It wasn't until I had a thirst for knowledge, about MYSELF, that I had the desire to want to learn every aspect of my life, including school.

College was different. I needed legitimate help as I struggled with comprehension and written articulation of my thoughts. I got what I got in high school by hook or crook. I didn't remember anything from the classroom. College required a great deal of studying and comprehension. I couldn't use the art of persuasion to extend time or get extra credit. I

found myself going to my teachers' offices after class. I spent what seemed like days in the library and got tutored by my girlfriend. My roommate was studying, my girlfriend was studying, and what seemed like the entire campus was studying. So I just learned from their examples and kept asking questions. I struggled and continued to try and never gave up.

After graduating from college, I pursued my dreams and desires and got married. Like most other graduates, I quickly settled into a professional environment. I soon realized that I was incompetent in certain areas and therefore limited in my options. The reality of going back to school was inevitable both for my personal and professional growth. I really enjoy and appreciate being a student now. It's almost like it's going to school for the first time.

I went to Bermuda College to get my teacher certification. I realized the more desperate the situation for me personally, the greater my focus. I was paying Bermuda College so I wanted to know everything. I sat in the front of class and asked questions every day. Because

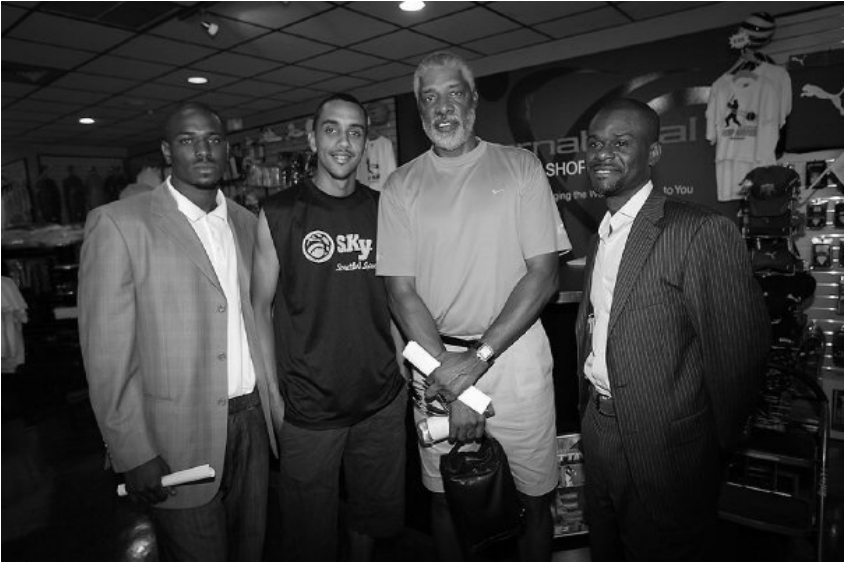
of my focus, I achieved my highest academic success while attending Bermuda College.

I realized the reason that I was never good in school was because I didn't really believe in myself. I realized that I cannot only be a student in the classroom, but I must be a student in life if I want to grow to my fullest potential. Each level of adversity, or opportunity - depending on your perspective - requires growth. I am always learning, writing, reading and looking forward to the next challenge in my next chapter. Being a student is a lifelong journey to discover yourself and acquire the skill of problem solving.





## - CHAPTER V -



### **Being an Athlete**

*Lesson: Fall in love with the process  
of becoming not the product...*

*Do you see someone skilled in their work? They will serve before kings; they will not serve before officials of low rank. (NIV, Proverbs 22:29)*

*“Skill is only developed by hours and hours and hours of beating on your craft.” - Will Smith*

In my neighborhood we played games and sports—lots of them—but I loved basketball the most. When we played basketball, we mostly played three on three. I’d never received any formal coaching on how to play basketball until high school, and by that time I was already an elite one-on-one player. Growing up and playing in the country meant that we had some rough conditions. Our courts had no blacktop and sometimes we played in grass. Other times, we’d play on rugged terrain just off the road or driveway. By the time I was ten, I started playing one-on-one for money. I could beat everyone my age, so I had to play older guys. I had to make my way over to Crack Hill and Dre’s house - the place where the Dope boys (D-boys) would sell

drugs.

The D-boys would put the money up for me to play someone else in the neighborhood and, if I won, I would get a portion of the earnings. I was the young gun from the Quarters and Yiddi was the young gun from Crack Hill. He was two years older than me. We used to call him Baby Jordan because he could hang in the air, move the ball around, and make acrobatic finishes. Yiddi was good, and his best asset was his defense. He would squat so low and guard you so tight. He had great instincts and fast hands. When we were up against each other, I had to fight like hell just to try to get around him. With money on the line, we both would bring it. Playing Yiddi was like World War III, and with all the D-boys watching, you had to represent. We played all-out because fouls weren't called. That meant play hard, or else. There was only one person who was the right choice to be my "hype man" during those days—Roni. He'd always front me the money to play in these games because he believed in me. This environment is what made me the fierce competitor that I

became.

I had guardian angels around me my entire life and athletics was no different. Little League Baseball is where I met one of the most influential men of my life, Coach Dan. Coach Dan was a white construction worker who recruited in our neighborhood for his Little League Baseball team, the Reds, and his Pop Warner football team, the Bears. I'll never forget that dusty, red pick-up truck and his unforgettable looks—the grizzly beard and chewing tobacco bulging out of his lower lip. Even though he was white, he didn't seem white. He had a pass from everybody. He was always amazed that so much talent existed in a small, country neighborhood. When baseball and football season came around, you'd always see Coach Dan. He would take kids on his teams to practices and then back home. He created a strong trust not just with me, but with all the families in the neighborhood. He left a lasting impression on me.

There was one story that Coach Dan always told about my dad. He had driven my cousins home from the baseball park. My daddy

noticed I wasn't on the back of the truck. My daddy asked Coach Dan, "Where is Chris?" Coach Dan looked at him and responded, "I don't know" My daddy responded in his classic aggressive direct tone, "GO GET HIM!" Coach Dan pondered for a minute and said to himself, "*This man needs to take his ass and get his own damn son.*" Then he gave it a second thought, "*I better do what the hell he says.*" Then he got back in his truck, drove to the baseball park and yelled out to me, "Chris get your ass in this truck!" I quickly got in the back and went home.

Coach Dan was the first mentor in my life who showed me the importance of making a personal investment. He would give me cleats, pick me up for practice and drop me off at home. Making an investment with his time, talent and money. The most important thing he did though, was be authentic. Coach Dan was no faker.

I enjoyed baseball, but I had been waiting for the opportunity to play on a real hardwood basketball court- something I had never done before in my life. I didn't want to do anything to ruin that chance. I was mindful of everything

around me leading up to the games and even practices. My parents weren't big on other people taking me away from home, so I knew that any conflict, distress, or altercation could end my dream. I would do my chores, be on my best behavior at school, and do my work. Like some boys, nothing about academia excited me, nor did threats from teachers ever inspire me to want to learn more or work harder. Basketball had a power over me that would challenge me at my core and invoke me to strive for excellence in any area of my life in order to give me the opportunity to play the game that I loved.

I was so excited! Uncle Lendell (Lendell Sr.) was our coach. Uncle Lendell was another blessing to me and my athletic development. He put me on my first-ever organized basketball team. Without him, there would have been no team. He also picked me up for every game and every practice in that big blue pick-up truck of his. We boys would jump in the back and rock out to music on the boom box and crack jokes. We always had practice on Fridays at Lake Weir High School's outside courts followed by games

on Saturdays. We had six players and I still remember them like yesterday: Lendell, Gator Jr., Robert, James, Tim, and me. We went undefeated 11-0 and won every game by double digits. We won two games with only four players and still beat them by double digits. I was only ten and was playing in the 11-12 division. I am thankful that Uncle Lendell gave me an opportunity to play organized basketball.

My uncle noticed that I had talent. He kept encouraging me, even though I had a little street and showboat in my game; he let it ride. Uncle Lendell knew it was important that I stayed confident because I was so young. Others must have noticed it as well because I was getting comments like “Baby Jordan” and “Little Penny.” I loved Penny Hardaway. He was the hottest thing in the NBA and, man, was he smooth with it, too! Even though I was the smallest on the team. I was one of the best players. I quickly learned that to be good at something you don’t have to be big, you have to be prepared.

Around this time, I remember basketball changing from being just a game to becoming a



way of life. I didn't just play when asked or when it was presented to me. I played every day in my mind. I would create opportunities within my current environment even if I was by myself. I transformed into my coach, trainer, and opponent. I was not satisfied until my skills were highly proficient. During my personal training, I would always self-evaluate how consistent I was in executing under pressure during a game. What do I need to add or take away from my performance to do better the next time? I would study the greats like Michael Jordan, not just to learn their moves, but also to learn their training and mentality. I adopted this philosophy of success early: "separation is in the preparation". I would practice my moves on the court in my yard over and over, and on top of that, I would practice shooting for hours and hours. I remember playing by myself from daytime into the night. I continued to shoot even with no lights on outside and I would develop night vision. I could see the red rim even when it was pitch black outside because my eyes had adjusted from being in the dark so long. I was in a zone.

Nothing mattered - not food, money, friends or even family. Not once did I even consider my current situation and circumstances. I was lost in my imagination. I visualized I was playing in the biggest game of the year with a packed crowd and everything on the line. The team needed me to make a big play. It was so real I could see the defenders, my teammates, the officials, how much time was on the clock and the score. I would set my man up to get open and catch the ball. I started my dribble and told everyone to clear out. Everything started to slow down and the clock would count down. I made this incredible move to create separation from the defender to get my shot off. Then I would pull up and shoot and hold up my follow through like Michael Jordan. Then, right when I started to watch the ball go in the basket, a bug flew in my ear!

My reality quickly killed my imagination and I yelled, "MAMA!" I ran in the house and loudly explained that I had a bug in my ear. Mama held me over the sink, turned my head to try to flush out my ear with the water sucking device and

said, “I don’t know why you out there in the middle of the night shooting a darn basketball. This is why you should have your butt in the house!” What my mama failed to understand at the time was that my dream was more important than logic, and my desire to live in it was bigger than being comfortable or safe. Right after she was finished I wanted to go back outside. Nothing else had this type of effect on me. I was good at any sport I played, but I was in love with basketball.

I was the best in my school and was top five in the county, but no college was sending scouts or recruiters to my school. Simply put, no one was looking for me. I had to change that. So what do you do when the summer before your senior year you are not being recruited after working for something since you were six or seven years old? That is the moment where you realize what type of person you are. I never played the victim or begged people to help me. Losing was not an option at that stage.

At the start of my senior year, I made a plan. It was tough, but necessary. I quit football

and got a part-time job, which meant I was finally able to buy my own car. My parents made it quite clear that I'd have to pay for the gas for that car, too. I needed that car, though, because I had to maximize my opportunities for a college to recruit me. This meant great grades, more time at the gym, and less time being wasted. Due to hard work and planning, I only needed two classes my senior year to graduate. I had extra time and I used it wisely.

The school janitor happened to be attending my church. I knew he had to clean the gym an hour before school started, so I convinced him to let me come in early to work out. The result of having a plan, being a competitor who was becoming disciplined, making the necessary adjustments and being consistent, prepared me to receive a basketball scholarship. I was the first in my family to do so, and the only one in my graduating class from any sport.

I had an outstanding college career, played professionally overseas for three years, and faced many obstacles and challenges, but

because of what I persevered through in high school, I was prepared to persevere in college and my pro days.

Here's the most common narrative for a young athlete. Boys are being programmed socially to be a part of a local team, a local big man on campus. They have been socially conditioned to be the God. They are celebrated at pep rallies. They are celebrated in the newspaper or on the internet. They are celebrated on the field or the court. The coach made sure that you were lifting weights, that you were sprinting, that you were running, that you were jumping. But he didn't make sure that you were loving yourself and your family, that you were equipped to be successful in life. His whole function was that you were successful on that team. And he was doing the scam, just to make sure I got enough GPA, just to be eligible for his team.

So you graduate, only to realize that you have no real skill set for the marketplace, no real skill set for your home. And then as soon as that is over,... "You can go work at McDonald's?"

Seriously?!? Guys will go and be drug dealers. Guys still have to have that aura. They're not even really so much chasing the money, per se. They're chasing that status or that false sense of reality that was given to them in high school; that they just can't see themselves amongst their peers to be a minimum wage worker. And it's not like they can't do it, or they won't do it, but that wasn't what was told and sold to them. You begin to build up so much resentment, frustration and anger. No one taught you how to channel this negative energy. They just built you all the way up. Built you up to be this strong massive powerful passionate male and then say, "Go get a job."

You say to yourself, "I didn't have to go through all of this to go get a job at marketplace. I could have been at my house this whole time to do that. I thought you were building me up. I thought everybody was building me up. I thought the newspapers, the radio, the interviews wearing my jersey, I thought all of that was building me up to get me ready for something that I was about to achieve later." You were

going to be Lebron. The reality is, there is only one Lebron. But that's not what they made you believe. If you can do that, then you will be just like him. No, that's not the case, mate. They should have been preparing you to NOT be Lebron, and if you happen to be Lebron, cool. But if you happen to be just a husband and a father and a man who gives back to the community, you're really good at it, because you were prepared to do that anyway. A lot of times you're prepared to be Lebron, and when you realize you're not going to be Lebron, depression sets in, anger sets in, anxiety sets in. And then you can't cope. And so what do guys do to cope who can't cope, who don't want to talk? They cope by drinking. They cope by having sex. And they cope by smoking. And then those, in effect, get you in a world with other antisocial behavior and environments that become more detrimental to you and your responsibilities, commitments and loved ones.

I've interviewed people in prison. I've interviewed people in a boys' home. These are beautiful people, talented people - artists, chefs.

People who love God, but life has dealt them a hand that no one helped them to play the hand effectively. It is not because they were not talented, they're crazy talented. They got crazy work ethic. They got crazy dreams and aspirations. They got a good heart. People are always asking, "How do you feel about working with gangs?" How do I feel? They're people. They're good guys. Do you think these guys are walking around with horns on top of their heads, like they're the devil with a pitch fork? That's not how they function. That's how the world makes you see them. That's not how it is.

My example is ... like everyone else who plays basketball who has a love for it, you want to make the NBA, right? But the obsession of trying to be the best player that I could possibly be has taught me way more than reaching the NBA would ever teach me. And it has given me way more opportunities than the NBA. I've traveled the world. I've been in leadership positions. And all these things that I've done has nothing to do with whether I made the NBA or not. Me being a leader; me, being a husband;



me, being a father; me, being a mentor, I picked up the skill set necessary. I picked up that stuff from my dedication to my craft. I call it a transferable asset. My dedication to my craft showed me how to focus, how to prepare, how to plan, how to be strategic, how to analyze, how to recruit, how to communicate. It showed me so many things that I was able to transfer to other areas of my life just because I had such a dedication to my craft. If you focus on what am I doing today to get better? If that is your focus, just on today and getting better, there's no doubt eventually you're going to accomplish not only that, but sometimes a lot more.

## - CHAPTER VI -



### **Becoming a Teammate**

*Lesson: Be coachable and accountable to  
your teammates*

*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. (NIV, Hebrews 10:24)*

*Teamwork makes the dreamwork.*

When you're a part of a team, you have to be two things for that team to be successful no matter how good you are; you have to be coachable, and you have to be accountable to that team. So coachable to do whatever it takes for the team to do better, and accountable for your actions, good, bad or indifferent to the team.

I started my sophomore year in high school, ready to play football and confident about what I could do. I was taller, stronger, and more experienced. I'd played spring league and worked out over the summer, too. I wasn't playing football aggressively to be a better football player, I thought it would help make me better at basketball. Football helps with overall strength, toughness, and being comfortable with contact. That year I started as quarterback, punt returner, kickoff returner, and defensive back. I

was also a hitting dummy for the varsity team, which was not fun, but it made me tougher.

Another invaluable benefit of football was the two coaches to whom I was exposed: Coach Pettis and Coach Rodney Lightsey. Coach Pettis had me watching football and playing all season long, grooming me for something—although I had no idea what at that time.

Coach Pettis was hard on me because I was the quarterback. He said the quarterback has to show up early and leave late, win every sprint, and encourage all the offensive linemen to finish their five-lap runs in good time. Earn your teammates' respect and give your teammates respect by your example.

Coach Lightsey was a new coach, and a lot of the players didn't warm up to him—particularly the black players. We'd made an assumption that since he was black, he would understand our culture. He did understand our culture, but refused to have low expectations for us. Coach Lightsey was about discipline and teamwork, period. I had my fair share of run-ins with him, but only when basketball started. He was the JV

(junior varsity) head coach. Unfortunately, even though I started to recognize and understand the consequences, I was still very cocky. I thought that I was the best on the team and in the school. After all, I was last year's MVP. Before the season started, Coach Lightsey was going to announce the team captain. To my surprise, I was not the captain. I quickly asked to talk to him after practice that day. I was looking for an explanation as to why I wasn't the captain. I said, "I am the best player on this team! Why ain't I the captain?"

Coach said, "My captains do not get discipline referrals."

Oh...I had no idea that he'd known. In my video production class with Mr. Miller - one that I'd enjoyed - I'd given a guy who'd made a joke the middle finger while the camera was rolling. Mr. Miller had seen the tape and sent a referral to the office. So once again, I found myself reverting to behaviors that I knew were not productive or conducive to achieving my goal of getting a college scholarship.

I got over not being a captain and decided that now it was time to kill on the court. I had to represent. While I was preparing for my first game, I wore high socks and wrote "O star 4 life" on them. Coach Lightsey ask me to take them off. I refused to take them off. He refused to play me. When halftime came I quickly took them off and let him know that I was finally ready to play for the team and not for myself. I wanted to play. In my mind, I felt like I had so much leverage, that I was bigger than the team. I mean, they couldn't win without me. I'm MVP. I was so arrogant and cocky .

Even when you're ready to play for the team you can still have a lot of selfish ways about you. I started doing my thing and then he took me off because I wasn't playing defense. He said, "If you're going to be my MVP on offense, you got to be my MVP on defense, or you will not play." So it was the first time ... because defense is not about being cool and hip, defense is about work, discipline, focus, commitment, and sacrifice. These were areas of my game I haven't acquired yet, and areas in my personality that

weren't a part of me. I didn't take off those socks because I respected my coach or my team. I only took them off because I wanted to get what I wanted which was to play, but what it did was make me end up doing both of them, respecting my coach and my team, because I was playing on his terms. I wasn't playing on my terms any more. That was the new narrative for that season. And that's why we were champions because I wasn't playing on my terms, I was playing on his terms. That's when I started becoming a teammate and a captain. We became district champs that year. And that was the first time in high school I became a champion of anything.

I was a work constantly in progress. Even though I made strides in the right direction as a teammate, I still had room to grow. My junior year in high school, Sam, one of my friends since middle school, was down and out as we were walking to the gym for practice. I told him not to worry about it. He said, "You don't understand. This always happens to me, and I am just tired of it!" I was more focused on training than listening

and kind of rushed the conversation. I just remembered him being down and not interested. The next morning the school made an announcement that all athletes were to meet in a certain classroom. When we walked in the room police officers were everywhere. I didn't know what was going on. After everyone sat down and got quiet they told us that Sam had killed himself the night before. There was an instant shock that hit the room. Then there was crying all over the place. All I could think about was the conversation that I had with him the day before. He had reached out to me and I was so preoccupied with my own agenda, I wasn't really listening. I quickly realized that life is more important than any sport or game. Sports and being a teammate is a platform to be a better person and be a support system for others, your teammates in particular. I have struggled with this story for a long time, but every time I talk about it, it helps me to cope. I know that it wasn't my fault and that I can't be held to blame, but to even consider that a change in my attention



could have made a difference, has been a burden to bear.

As an adult, we tend to brush off teenagers and their problems. We forget what it is like to be a teen and feel as if you have no other options. That this thing that is happening to you, that you are feeling, will pass. The young mind has not developed enough to know, and things can literally seem like life or death to them.

Fast forward to Flagler College and I am in my junior year, just 4 years removed from the incident at Lake Weir. There is tension among the players that, once again, the coaches have no clue about. I was the co-captain of the team and earned my starting position. We had two guards named “Smooth” and “Brick” who transferred from junior college who were both great players, but that meant that one of them had to come off the bench. We were all good enough to start, no question. I understood the system, had the most experience, and also understood our culture and how to work it. Junior college, also known as Juco, can be a very selfish culture and I noticed that difference of attitude was negatively

affecting our team. We would win games, but there were still complaints about playing time. Because we were winning, we all ignored it. Then we had a game around the Christmas break and lost to a team that we had beat 9 times out of 10. I was frustrated. I had to do something. So I met with the coach privately in his office and asked him not to start me and instead to bring me off the bench. He agreed and we won 17 games straight. We accomplished the greatest season in our school's history. I was awarded our conference's tournament MVP coming off the bench. I want to thank "Smooth" and "Brick" for challenging the team and challenging me because we all became better for it. As a captain, you always have to think about what is best for the team. In high school I hadn't thought like that, so I was grateful for growth.

Being a teammate in adolescence and high school, and being a teammate in college are different because the personal and social needs are so different. From college to adulthood being a teammate goes to a whole new level – particularly with the pressures of drugs, alcohol,

and women. Playing against the Bermuda National Team and the US Select Team was challenging, but it was nothing like being a professional athlete. I had the honor of playing on a professional streetball team called SKY,(Serving Knowledge to Youth) where I was tagged the “Rainman” for my shooting ability. That was when I met the youngest player on the team who became a great teammate and friend, Patrick “Pat da Roc” Robinson. Pat da Roc never smoked, drank, or even said a curse word in his life! He is truly a remarkable person. Even though he is younger than me, I admired his character and love for the game. He gave me an outlet on tour and many times we just hung out by ourselves because we weren’t into other elements. We were an overseas traveling team going from country to country and city to city. I vividly remember that one tour was 14 cities and three countries in 21 days including five or six different time zones. During that tour, people treated me like a celebrity just because I was a part of that team. I was never big on drugs and alcohol, so they never really presented a problem

for me. My challenge was with all the attention I was being given by women. By that time, I had learned all types of strategies to avoid problems. Pat da Roc was another great escape. We would be in the hotel lobby and I would ask him to help me with the tricks that he did with kids. Pat is great with kids. By spending that time with him, we developed a strong relationship.

As much as I - like any other athlete - would like to give you a long list of all my sporting accolades, I want to focus on the lessons I learned and thank the people who allowed them to take place.

I want to thank Coach Lightsey and Coach Pettis for the hard and tough lessons of responsibility and being a leader. "I always believed if you put in the work. The results will come."- *Michael Jordan* I learned a lot from all of them, but I had no idea how much more I'd still have to learn in my life. Every day seemed to bring about a new experience and a new challenge for me. Being a teammate was something I never valued until my high school experiences. I learned something very powerful

then that has helped me throughout my entire life. I learned to listen. I learned to listen not only to words, but to the needs and the hearts of people. For everyone playing basketball, it is not just exercising, it is also a release from the stresses of life. As a man, and now as a coach of youth basketball, I am always listening to my players in order to allow basketball to be medicine for their souls.

## - CHAPTER VII -



### **Being a Mentor**

*Lesson: The power of just being there.*

*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.  
(NIV, Proverbs 27:17)*

*“The best way a mentor can prepare another leader is to expose  
him or her to other great people.”  
- John Maxwell*

Before we touch on how I became a mentor, please understand that I was first a mentee. I want to share my transition from a mentee to mentor. The number one asset to having success as a mentee is willingness, openness, accountability, and availability.

After my encounter with the law, my freshman year in high school was somewhat of a scared straight experience. That encounter was also the first real self-assessment I did regarding the people in my life and whether our relationship was positive or negative compared with the goals in life I wanted to achieve. I was open and willing to try something different in my life.

Around this same time, my cousin Maurice was getting released from county jail after serving two years. His restrictions were pretty

tight and he couldn't go more than fifty feet past his own front door. We were all excited to see Maurice. He was our neighbor.

I was curious to see Maurice. I hadn't seen him in quite a while. We had one thing in common—basketball. He was in great shape. He also shared that he'd just become a born-again believer in Jesus Christ. That also had me interested. Our new relationship had an instant impact on my life. Maurice loved basketball and God and would let everybody know it, all the while still being hood and street.

The truth is, so much in the urban culture is a façade. Maurice was the first man I knew who took accountability. I didn't realize it at the time, but Maurice became my first mentor outside of my daddy. He acknowledged that he was wrong. That he made the bad choices of selling drugs, lying, cheating, messing with women and drinking to excess. He showed me that acknowledging your mistake does not make you weak, but displays your strength. He took responsibility for his actions, right and wrong. His ability to be transparent with me, as he dealt



with the day-to-day limitations of probation, let me know that you can change your circumstances regardless of your situation. I admired his realness and confidence in himself, his love of God, and his ability to get things done.

Our time together became a daily occurrence. School would end and I'd go over to his house to play one-on-one in his backyard. Now, Maurice wasn't tall, but what he lacked in height on the court, he made up for in aggression. Maurice was the hardest fouling dude I ever experienced in my life. I kept reminding him that we were not in jail and I was not the police. It didn't matter. He played with street rules, which meant no fouls called. If the defender happened to feel bad about something they did, they'd give you the ball afterward. That never happened with Maurice!

When our game was done, we'd go into his house and watch TBN, Trinity Broadcasting Network, the world's largest Christian television network, or the Word Network and listen to certain preachers. This was the first time in my

life that I watched church on TV. I didn't realize it at the time, but Maurice was planting seeds in me for a desire to know about Jesus and what it means to be a Christian.

As a sophomore in college, I began to settle into the college environment and to create a lifestyle that was productive for me. I attended church regularly, taught Sunday school, and really was bonding with the young men I taught. I had been dating, Nicole Brunson, my future wife, for over a year. As Nicole observed my

interactions with the young men in my Sunday school class, she said to me, "You should become a Big Brother, Big Sister (BBBS) Mentor." I liked the idea and signed up. I was connected with a nine-year-old named Kurt. When we talk about kids...who are completely disenfranchised and polarized...like in the projects, this kid was in the projects. His house was in the hood, and it's being respectful to call it a house.

He was a good kid that needed a little extra help in school. We got together once a week. Through these meetings, we grew close and got to know each other, so much so, that I requested parental consent to see him after school hours more than once a week. It was approved. Like a snowball rolling down a hill, he quickly became the little brother that I never had. I did with him what Maurice did with me. I took him everywhere I went, including Sunday school. I enjoyed all this time so much, as did Kurt.

For him, to see a college kid listening to the same music he was listening to, at a prestigious, historical, private college, the captain of the

team, in the game, in the newspaper, on the radio, and... that was his buddy? It wasn't like a social buddy. He was in my apartment while we were playing video games. We went to the movies together. He was at every home game. He was our ball boy. He knew all the players. He knew my girlfriend. He knew all the cheerleaders. He went to church with me. He went to Bible study with me. He got a chance to see that it was more than just playing basketball. It was bigger than basketball. It was bigger than college. It was about being a good person. And it was about being a good person all the time; being accountable, and being accounted for. And he lived it. He had a chance to get away from the hustle and bustle of the streets, the neglect, or just the poor examples that he was exposed to. He got a chance to just get away. I was grateful that I was able to share that time with him.

Being a mentor is humbling and gratifying because the biggest asset is your presence. I remember when Kurt reminded me of this. This particular time Kurt was at my apartment and I wanted to find some money to take us out to

dinner, movies, or something fun, but I couldn't. Finally I told Kurt, "Hey man, I know you are used to going out with me, but I don't have any money." He said, "That's fine, I just want to be with you." That's when Kurt taught me that life is not about status, but about having access to caring human beings. This made me feel good because I was accepted for being me.

The reality is, I needed Kurt. He was a lost boy, but I was a lost man, clueless about what I was doing and where I was going, but thought I knew everything. Kurt allowed me to see myself. He's probably one of the most influential people that ever came in my life. Beyond helping me see myself, he was also helping me to take ownership and responsibility for my life and to know that my life was worth it. I had value, and I had something to give, and it wasn't just about basketball. And here this whole time, I thought I was helping him, and every single day he was helping me.

As a mentor to young people I would like to highlight four major values that are critical for a mentor to a mentee's development:

- Character- For me, character is integrity. Integrity is keeping your word. Your word has to have some value to it. Character is doing and saying consistently what's best for all parties involved. You may have to be the one who is inconvenienced, or uncomfortable or has to make sacrifices, and that is OK with you. If you are doing it for the right reasons, it's worth it. Character is extremely hard to achieve, but if it's important to you, you will keep on trying. You may not be popular, but you'll be necessary.
- Availability –Availability is in direct correlation with consistency. When you're talking about being a mentor, you're in a relationship. The most fundamental piece of a relationship is being available. There's no relationship if I'm never with you, never talking with you, never seeing you. If you're not spending time, there is no relationship, there is no mentoring, nothing.

The foundational pillar of having a great mentee and mentor relationship is that you make yourself available from both sides. You gotta show up. You gotta show up to grow up.

- Support - Support is someone who supports you and your future, so support looks more like coaching than counseling. Counseling wants to go backwards to understand how you got to this point in your life. Coaching, when it comes to a mentor is, "I'm helping you leave your situation to grow you to your next point. That support looks like I love you because I'm here. I love you because I'm listening. But I'm not going to just drag you along. I'm not going to enable you, I'm going to empower you. I'm going to push you and nudge you from the back. But you gotta do it, and you gotta stick to it." The reality is, a lot of times you've got holes. You've got gaps. You've got blind spots. A true mentor is going to tell you that they're there and then they're

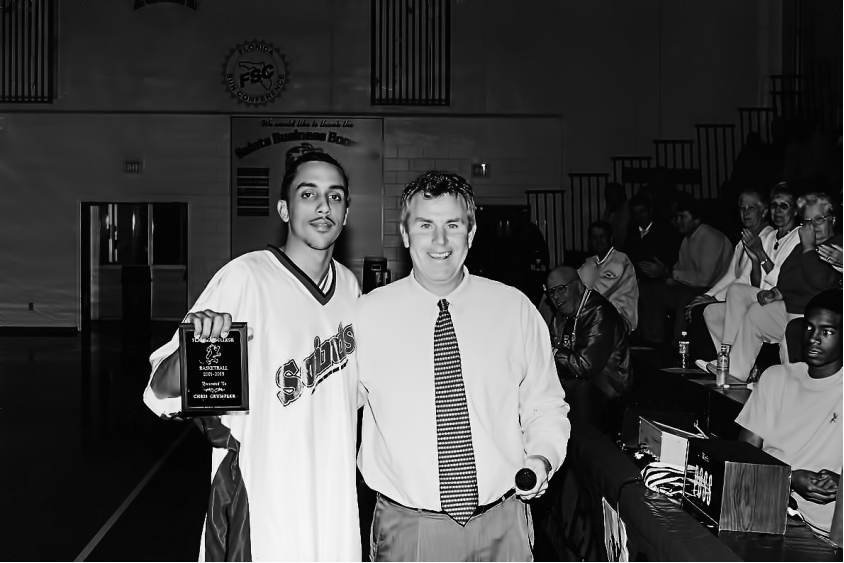
going to let you do something about it, because you don't grow if somebody fills the holes for you. Actually you become a cripple, and they become a crutch. And then the relationship becomes dysfunctional.

- Wisdom - The best information you can get is the what, when, how, and why of someone achieving something you are ultimately trying to achieve or headed towards. One thing that I learned that's way more powerful than conventional education in any respect, is just being around someone who has garnered success from their choices. It doesn't matter whether they learned from mistakes, or they just studied and were so knowledgeable that they were just very efficient. They display an incredible amount of wisdom by the choices that they made to achieve the things that they achieved.



To be a mentor you need a mentee. The success of that relationship depends on the level of investment of both parties. I consider myself blessed to be both and grateful to have people who took the time, effort, and energy to invest in my life and development. My mentors were significant to me, not because of their degrees, their money, their skill set, or their network. They were of value to me because of their heart, because of their presence in my life, and just being a genuine human being; sharing their heart and sharing their love. There's power in that. There's real motivational, inspirational power in somebody just being available and showing you that they care about you, giving you life lessons and values, by being there and being a good example.

## - CHAPTER VIII -



### **Becoming an Educator**

*Lesson: Education is caught, not taught.*

*My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding (NIV, Proverbs 2:1-2)*

*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”-- Nelson Mandela*

*“I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious.”*

*Albert Einstein*

Before becoming an educator, one must first be a student. Really you are always a student. My student journey is one of trial and error. My wife is the definition of a student as she puts in the time, energy, and focus. When I met her in college I was amazed at her study habits, organization, and focus. She could concentrate on a subject or assignment for 3-5 hours straight. As inspiring as she was, that just wasn't me. I needed breaks and I also needed to have music and the TV on at the same time, plus food and snacks. I also work well under pressure. So I would complete a lot of my work at the last minute - not because I procrastinated, but because I needed to feel the pressure in order to be challenged.

As an educator, it is important to understand that students produce different results with different systems and pressures. What you believe about students determines the amount and type of energy that you transfer to your students. I truly believe that the students are the answer now and in the future, for all of our issues. I also believe that teachers have the greatest access to unleash the possibilities of that reality, but also have the influence to keep it caged inside forever. I personally don't have a great system or process that guarantees any student success. My track record for student success is not in my lesson plans or curriculum, even though those things are important. What allows success for my students is relationships. My relationships could be used to build or destroy - it all depends on whether your interaction is intentional or reactionary.

A lot of times in education teachers build the classroom to what they like. They don't build a classroom to what the kids in it like. They structure the classroom to make them feel comfortable. The reality is that in order for them

to grow, most times out of ten, you're going to have to be uncomfortable.

In a classroom, if the teacher is the master guru of content, no one cares. What matters is, "Can you teach me? Can you meet me where I am and take me where I need to go?" Period. It's really not can you do that, it's are you willing? You need to be willing to structure your learning environment conducive to your pupils and your population, which may ultimately affect parts of your comfort and convenience. You may have to put some rap music on. You may have to learn how to do some dance. You may have to learn to bake some brownies. You may have to go on some field trips that you don't want to go on; and walk through whatever; and go through whatever; and try whatever; and put on whatever.

If you're an educator saying, "That's not my thing," then success is not your thing. Because these kids are unique. These kids are brilliant. These kids are talented. These kids are geniuses. They're not robots. So you can't put them in an assembly line and go through checks and

balances and say the product's going to come out all right once I just go through this maintenance order. They're human beings. You have to listen and respond. You have to watch and learn. You have to make adjustments daily.

Accountability and responsibility become a part of your subconscious when you personally take ownership of students. Only then do you become more invested in their development and success, not only as students, but also as people.

My initial relationship with students was I was trying to get their acceptance and be cool. I wasn't exerting my authority, competence and control at all. I was trying to be cool and accepted and that's what got me in trouble because they would use that against me. I was blurring the lines. I didn't have clear boundaries.

My first year at Cedarbridge Academy in Bermuda I got into a casual friendship with a student and when he was called to the office for disciplinary action he used our conversations against me and that reflected badly on my professionalism. From that one experience I

learned to control my relationships with boundaries and to earn my respect, authority, and acceptance from all the students.

Consistency was a huge goal for me. As a professional educator I was somewhat in no man's land. I was soaking up everything around me. I had a great role model in the principal of Cedarbridge Academy, Mrs. Kalmar Richards. She amazed me. She showed up at school thirty minutes early every day, so she would greet every student. She was always present and in the moment. I found out that she did this despite her husband being sick every day and having to make a long drive (from the other end of the island) to get to work every day. Being a professional was a challenge for me, but I was grateful for another professional, Nancy Mattola, who went by the book and focused on helping the students. I thank Mrs. Richards and Ms. Mattola for their patience and willingness to teach me and keep me accountable. They taught me how to properly communicate and administer in a school environment.

I was good at working with students, but I wasn't the most effective at managing my multiple roles due to inexperience and my lifestyle. Now I wasn't living the fast life, but I was living the selfish life. The problem was my level of maturity. I was still operating around myself, but my responsibilities had called me to operate around my family. I had become a husband and father, but I wasn't being a husband and father as it relates to time management. My personal management was affecting my professional role as an educator because I was not properly prepared. I was constantly in a reactive mental space instead of having a well thought out plan of action. From 2007-2011, I improved. People like Ms. Mattola and Mrs. Richards would call me into their offices, point out my mistakes, and then give me tools to help me move forward. I truly appreciated that.

In 2015, I became the Executive Director of Impact Mentoring Academy, IMA, a small private school and a registered charity in Bermuda that is an all-boys school for middle and high school



students. My focus was the charity component, personal development, and quality controls.

This led me to the big piece that allowed me to be more effective as an educator, connecting to my students. I would get involved in their world and show them that I cared outside of the school environment. The best ways to connect are through sporting events, lunchtime, and social activities in the school and in the community. “I don’t care what you know until I know that you care!” That is something I always remember about students.

My junior year in college I realized I wanted to help young men believe in themselves, but I never fathomed I would be a teacher or a coach. Now, 13 years later, I am amazed how much love and care teenage boys need today. It’s obvious that more distractions are in the home and fewer connections. Boys, and teenagers in particular, need love and affirmation from men that they respect. Being an educator is the most important position in a community. We have access to children 30-40 hours a week for their entire childhood development. Children spend more

time in school than any other place throughout their lifetime. This is the reason I want to be a part of effective change in our educational system around the world. Empowerment is the purpose of education. The curriculum is not the answer, curriculum by itself is just information. Education is the knowledge of oneself to understand how to operate to one's best ability while using personal gifts and talents and developing necessary knowledge and skills. Students are a product of their environments. This has been the case since the beginning of time. Never blame students and always own the outcomes so that you have the power to change the process and consequently change the results.

We're all students, we're all learning. It just depends if your system, if your school, if your class, if your relationship, is something that can be trusted by others. You have to ask yourself, "How was this built? Was it built to benefit me or was it built to benefit we?" Was it taking into consideration others and how they feel? A lot of times that's not the case, and as a result you

don't have a lot of trust from stakeholders on almost every level. And so, real effort, real curiosity, real trust is just not there. Your job is to just try your best to assess. When you're assessing, you're assessing how you are in relation to the person, the place, or the thing. And then make the necessary adjustments to try to improve that relationship. Then simply go back and forth to see what's effective and what's not until the point where the person gains ownership of their life and their learning. Then you're no longer dictating to them what they have to do or not do in order to grow and learn.

## - CHAPTER IX -



# Being an Entrepreneur

*Lesson: Bet on Yourself*

*Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.  
Proverbs 10:4 (NIV)*

*Sluggards do not plow in season; so at harvest time they look  
but find nothing. Proverbs 20:4 (NIV)*

*In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.  
Proverbs 14:23 (ESV)*

“I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. 26 times I’ve been trusted to take the game's winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life and that's why I succeed.” - Michael Jordan.

“The critical ingredient is getting off your butt and doing something. It’s as simple as that. A lot of people have ideas, but there are few who decide to do something about them now. Not tomorrow. Not next week. But today. The true entrepreneur is a doer, not a dreamer.” –Nolan Bushnell.

“For all of the most important things, the timing always sucks. Waiting for a good time to quit your job? The stars will never align and the traffic lights of life will never all be green at the same

time. The universe doesn't conspire against you, but it doesn't go out of its way to line up the pins either. Conditions are never perfect. "Someday" is a disease that will take your dreams to the grave with you. Pro and con lists are just as bad. If it's important to you and you want to do it "eventually," be like Nike and "just do it" and correct your course along the way."- Timothy Ferriss.

I remember working. Picking peanuts and peas in a five-gallon bucket with Grandma when I was eight or nine years old. I remember washing cars for my family members for five dollars when I was 11 and 12. I remember getting my first job at 14 years old for Marion County Public Schools where I was a part of the maintenance crew for the summer at Lake Weir Middle School. I remember working all through high school at McDonalds, KFC, and a warehouse for cake decorations. These jobs were all like hustles. Clock in and clock out and just try your best to make it through the time.

Then Maurice Mills Lawn Care happened.

Just like all the other jobs, I went in with that same mindset and attitude. Maurice was my cousin and he owned a small landscaping business. Like most people, I was just thinking about money. Working for Maurice was so much more, and it was my first experience with an entrepreneur. It was life changing. I was with Maurice in the hot summer sun in Florida from 7:00 am - 7:00 pm, cutting grass, raking leaves, chopping down trees, and weed-whacking. None of it ever felt like work. We enjoyed each other. We were enjoying life while we worked. We would just randomly stop by the barber shop and kick it if it was too hot outside. We would play one-on-one at houses that had basketball hoops after the job.

Every day it was like I was hanging out with my big brother. We talked about life and he showed me everything about his business: Scheduling appointments, paying bills, collecting payments, and maintaining the equipment. The seed was planted in me to be a business owner and an entrepreneur.

Once I moved to Bermuda, I was in survival

mode. I had just become engaged, got married, and had a honeymoon baby. I was living day-to-day and was losing my mind. Once the dust settled I begin to think about opportunities around me. The first came with a travel website for network marketing. That didn't work. Then I made a DVD to tell my life story. That didn't work. Then I had a summer basketball camp that has been successful and I still have it today. From that, I developed a basketball training academy. Then I made a mentor after school program, and then a leadership camp for boys. I failed early because I was not personally invested. I just wanted money. For me, doing something for money never worked.

Get a good job! Go to school to get a good job! That's all I remember hearing from adults my entire childhood. No one was talking or teaching how to build wealth or an enterprise. I wasn't being empowered to own my ideas and harness my creativity - to think like a producer and not a consumer. Through social media we all have a platform and a network that can be monetized at any moment. There are kids on YouTube making



thousands of dollars giving video game instructions. You don't have to be rich or overly educated, but you must deliver a quality service or product on a consistent basis. You have to have a commitment and dedication towards your craft. I want to highlight intangibles that I have learned and valued in my short experience.

I don't believe that being an entrepreneur's for everyone. I don't, because two things you got to have when you're an entrepreneur, you've got to fight, and you have to solve problems. Some days I don't want to solve problems, but at the same time, my desire to create my dream, to have my freedom of tongue, to build something for my legacy and for my grandchildren overrides my comfort and complacency of not wanting to deal with anything and just work for someone. I was walking in my truth and realizing that I wanted to own my time, and I wanted to own my financial freedom. I think the reason why you want to be an entrepreneur is big. Those are my main reasons why.

There is a misconception that you work less when you are an entrepreneur. That has not been my experience. I found out that you actually work more and harder. That's why I have to be personally invested and care about the work and the people. My faith and my family keeps me motivated. That's another thing that helped me press through adversity - my "why" was bigger than me and bigger than money. I don't know if that is the only way, but I know it works for me.

To produce an idea, a thought, you personally have to pay for everything. You have to pay with your money, you have to pay with your time, your talent, your network. In order to produce that, it's gonna cost you, but there are many benefits like autonomy, authority, learning, creativity, and the biggest and greatest asset anyone can have: Owning your own time. Once you experience owning your own time, it is so hard to work for someone else. I didn't appreciate it then, but I would later.

If I can emphasize anything about the value of being an entrepreneur it is time - something that is priceless and more important than money.

After you taste owning and managing your own time, it is incredibly hard to give it back to someone else. Once I became a full-time entrepreneur in 2014, I had no idea how stressed I had been. I was working as a director making almost six figures, running a program that was giving back to others, but I had no quality time for myself or my family on a daily basis. When I became an entrepreneur, I could take my kids to school and pick them up every day. I made breakfast, lunch, and dinner. That, for me, is quality time. It wasn't a burden or strain because I also had time to work out, read and write every day. You have to figure out what quality time looks like and means for yourself and how much value you put on your time.

The opponent to being an entrepreneur is a familiar one: F.E.A.R. (False Evidence Appearing Real) in the words of the great Les Brown. Fear is an enemy of us all. There is only one way to beat this opponent and that is faith. Faith in yourself, in your abilities, and in your dreams and aspirations. Another word for faith in business is risk. It's not just calculated risk but PDP

(Passionate, Determined, and Purposeful) risk. The reality is that the money or know-how may not be in place initially, but that doesn't matter if it is something that is ringing deep down in your soul; not a dream, but a vision that stays with you day and night.

I recently watched the movie "Gods of Egypt" and in it, the God of Rain had to fly into the sky to talk to his father who was protecting the world from a dark force. Fear is like that dark force that keeps coming to ruin your universe, but every time that feeling comes up, you have to stand and face it and shock it with your weapons of empowerment and encouragements to let it know he doesn't have any power over you. I use music, friends, a mentor, and even videos on YouTube to help remind me of the power I have over my life and my future. When you are an entrepreneur, you have to protect your mind, body, and soul from any elements of fear because you are the #1 asset to all your ventures. "When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you." -Winston Churchill.

Being an entrepreneur, I conquered the biggest obstacle: fear. The reason I feared was because I was afraid to lose what I had. The crazy thing is that what I had was success in others' eyes, but my reality was that I was living in mediocrity. The vision that God continued to show me for my life was not living from check to check, struggling to manage my home and my lifestyle. The courage required to be successful as an entrepreneur was needed in all areas of my life. When you overcome fear as an entrepreneur something amazing happens that you don't even expect to happen. Who you are influences others, and the people you live with feel it the most. I would always encourage my wife to overcome her fears, the reality was that I needed to focus on overcoming mine and to let my example and execution bear fruit.

Sometimes life just pushes you to the point where you have to make a decision. I've been through my struggles, but it's important to understand that the hardest thing as a entrepreneur is getting over the fear, that you are not good enough. You're concerned about a job,

or career, or whatever. You could always get a job. The question is, will you always have a chance to fight for your dream or create financial stability? Getting over the fear, then knowing that as an entrepreneur, you're going to have to fight for what you want. You're going to have to solve problems, but you're going to get a chance to build a legacy, and you're going to get a chance to own your time. To me, that's priceless.

Someone asked me recently if I enjoyed the work I do. I don't know necessarily that I enjoy it as much as I'm at peace. I'm at peace with my soul. That, at some times brings a lot of joy. The work itself, all the stuff that it takes and requires from you is not necessarily a joyful thing, but it's a grateful thing. It's an honor for me to give my body up as a sacrifice daily in service to God. It is something that I'm just very grateful for each day of my life. I used to be a very selfish person, comparing and competing and...judgemental, I had a lot of that spirit in me. I had truth, I had talent, but I had the wrong spirit. God says "Worship me in spirit and truth". I stopped trying to pretend that I'm somebody, or trying to prove

to myself that I'm somebody, and just be who God is calling me to be.

## - CHAPTER X -



### **Becoming a Husband**

*Lesson: Power of Commitment*



*He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord. (NIV, Proverbs 18:22)*

*“I have seen the best of you and the worst of you, and I choose both.” -unknown*

Being a husband, for me, has been the number one personal development system in my life. Marriage has very little to do with love and everything to do with commitment. Love plays a part, but we're taught that's all you need and the reality is, love can kind of get it started, but it definitely doesn't keep you married. It's all about commitment to your vows, commitment to the person and their family and a commitment to your faith.

The first time I met my wife, Nicole was my final night of going out ten nights in a row. I wasn't hungover, I just was completely out of my element. I didn't go to church Sunday morning which was something I was always doing. I didn't even wake up until lunch time, so as I went to lunch in my basketball shorts and t-shirt. I was sitting at the table and this beautiful black girl

walked by. It looked like she was just coming from Catholic Church with one of her friends or classmates or dorm mates or whoever. She was just beautiful. She just grabbed my attention immediately. I kind of gave her hawk eyes, you know where you just watch somebody from a distance. I had seen her previously through a window, walking across campus but this was the first time she really caught my attention. I knew I wanted to talk to her, I knew I wanted to know her, so I asked around the basketball club "aye man what's up with Nicole do she sleep around?", they was "no, no, no, she only kissed this one guy" nobody was able to get her blah-blah-blah. Since she passed that test, I was like "cool".

I can't remember how I approached her, but I approached her like I wanted...she had a friend that I danced with in the club, so I approached her like "oh, I'm talking to you because I know your friend. " using that as an excuse that I was trying to talk to her friend. I was never trying to talk to her friend. I was trying to talk to her.

We talked differently, I was a southern country boy, she was a British Island girl. We couldn't understand each other and we were both speaking English! We just laughed at each other about being different, acting different, speaking different, coming from different places. We never had a boring conversation. We never had a dull moment. I knew she was special. In those first few weeks, there were multiple times that Nicole and I talked for like eight hours straight. So we'd talk from nine at night to like three or four o'clock in the morning, just talking. That blew my mind. We lost track of time. We would be like "yo, it's three o'clock, it's four o'clock" and it would still take us some time to stop talking. It was passionate when we started . It was undeniable..

Nicole didn't curse when she socialized, she was never late to class, she would always sit in the front of class, she didn't use drugs, and she believed in God and attended church regularly. I was physically attracted to her and she had an authentic and intriguing personality. The challenge was that I wasn't prepared to

appreciate her.

Outside of my faith, my wife is the greatest thing that ever happened to me and for me. That greatness comes with a price. I have experienced more pain and suffering with my wife than with any other person, place, or thing combined. The opposite is also true. I have experienced more love and joy with her than with any other person, place, or thing. Even though my children are the loves of my life, they still come second to my wife.

I was committed to my marriage, but I was not always present, engaging, or really participating. I assumed that God alone would be my guiding source. You can't just say you believe and that everything will just work itself out. Knowing and doing are two different things. My reference point had been my parents, who had always been together through thick and thin, regardless of what challenges they had. It always seemed to work for them, but I didn't know how much work they put into it, well... to make it work. My mindset regarding challenges was that you found a way to mend them, not end

them. I call it the Thomas Edison mentality. When he was trying to create a light bulb, his experiments failed over 10,000 times. People asked Edison, “Why didn’t you quit after failing so many times?” He always replied, “I didn’t fail 10,000 times. I just learned 10,000 ways not to do it!” This is powerful when it comes to one’s perspective of purpose, especially for an analytical guy like me.

Nicole had a different perspective. Her family had a history of failed relationships. Almost all her relatives were divorced or single, including her parents. This meant Nicole had been exposed to people quitting when things got too tough. That was not going to be me. I’d never quit on us. I had to let her know that. I admit, I underestimated how challenging marriage would be and neglected the fact that I alone could not do it. God and his divine wisdom is the prerequisite, intervention, and support system. Just like with my wife, I was committed to God, but not present or engaged in my day to day walk with him.

We were in our third year of marriage and Nicole was pregnant with our son, CJ. It was a very hard time for both of us personally and professionally. We had a young married couple acting as mentors for us and they gave us a 30-day challenge to do. I vividly remember the first devotional. That was all we needed, because it talked about commitment to marriage and that we should question ours. We both looked at each other and realized that the real issue was that we had lost focus on being committed to our marriage. But what does that look like? And where do we restart?

I was doing too much and, again, Nicole was not happy. I was committed but not present. I would work all day and then go play basketball. Then my energy would be low coming home and, as my wife would put it, I would bring home her the “leftovers”!

This is where my ignorance and pride begin to rear its ugly head. In my mind, I had done my job by having a full time job, coming home every day to protect us, and remaining faithful to my wife. She needed and deserved so much more.

My wife's frustration with me for almost 8-10 years was that she was not my priority and that I didn't pay attention to her needs. I remember her saying one time, "Chris, you are a good teacher, speaker, coach, player, and father, but for me, you are not a good husband because you aren't sensitive, concerned, or even aware of my needs. And you told me you loved me more than everything except God!" In my marriage, I suffered from the "foot in the mouth disease". My mouth would commit to something that my actions wouldn't even take the first step to execute.

Nicole's frustration was completely understandable. No matter how many signs she gave me, I never really heeded them or anticipated her needs. In the beginning, I was conditioned by my father's example, but I had tried to grow into my own manhood. My father was amazing, but his methods were outdated. Nicole certainly wasn't my mama. Ultimately, I realized that so many things had changed about my life, but I had failed to change my own values

and priorities. My values when I met Nicole at age eighteen were:

Basketball, Self, God, Family, Nicole, and school, but what I said they were was God, Family, Basketball, School, and Nicole.

Now fast-forward eight years. This is what I said my values were:

God, Marriage, Kids, Work, Basketball

However, what I was communicating was:

Basketball, Self, Work, Fatherhood, Marriage, God

It turned out that the problem really wasn't my values, but it was my prioritization of the values. Basketball wasn't a problem, but worshipping it was. I didn't just play the game; I practiced it, studied it, trained for it, spoke about it, socialized around it, and watched it constantly.

I was successful in work, but not in marriage, and I knew it. It was so hard for me. I struggled, despite being committed to making it work. I decided to educate myself and try to figure out what I could do better. I started by reading books such as *A Purpose Driven Life*,



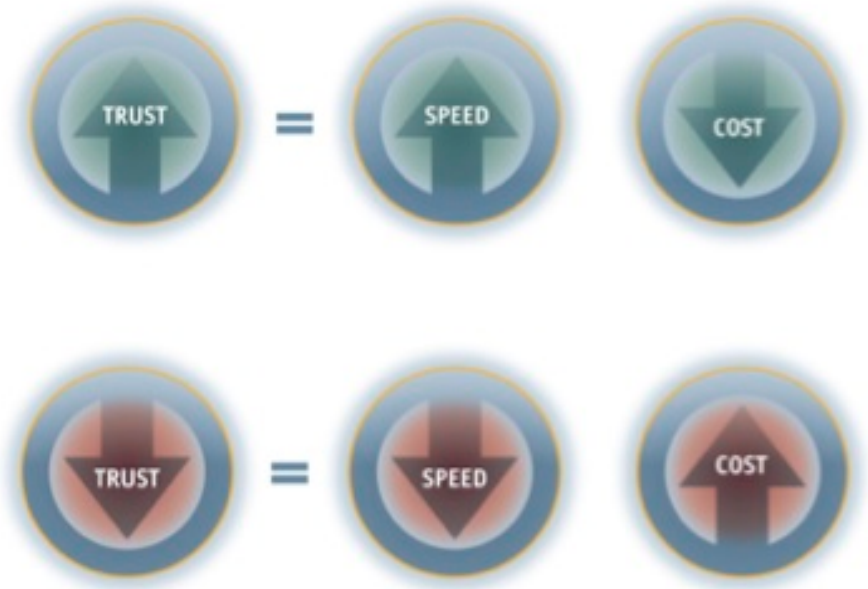
*The Female Brain, Love Dare, and The 5 Love Languages*, etc. My mentality was that I had to figure out the combination to the lock in our marriage so I could open it up and really appreciate marriage for what it is meant to be. I'd grown used to avoiding conflict instead of expressing my feelings. I was seldom consistent with my emotions and actions.

Marriage does have moments where couples don't see eye to eye. It's quite natural. What makes it problematic is not addressing the issue head on right away. I had to change my behavior and show that I was there for Nicole, especially if I knew she'd have to meet me halfway for some of these things. Still, my actions are what I could control. I was determined to do it. Marriage was proving to be a major training ground for becoming a better person. I feel it's that way for everyone, but some have more challenges, others less.

For whatever reason, I feared Nicole. I wasn't physically afraid of her, but her educational intellect and conflict resolution skills were impeccable. I am not exaggerating when I

say she could be a CEO of a billion dollar international company easily. The woman is a beast. It's an attribute that attracted me to her, but at the same time, she exposed my weaknesses. Privately I knew that she was better than me, and being a competitor, I interpreted her as a threat. This is where my fear would manifest itself through my personal pride and then I would use my physical stature and charisma to manipulate my surroundings to prove that I was in control - or at least convince myself that I was. So, instead of empowering her, I would challenge or neglect her needs in order to expose her weaknesses to prove that I was better than her.

I call this "scorecard mentality". The crazy thing about this is that we are on the same team! This wasn't all the time - it actually only happened when I felt threatened - but it happened enough to keep us going in circles and it became frustrating for the both of us. That led to a break in trust.



- Loyalty to the absent
- Acknowledgment
- Sincere apologies
- Being open to feedback

Adapted from "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" - Steven Covey

A lot of people struggle with transition, and I was no different when it came to my marriage. Transition difficulties are multiplied when there is no trust or a lack of preparedness. In basketball, the best way to get consistent results by executing in transition is to attack with a purpose. I notice people who struggle with transitions either hesitate or don't attack. They just do enough to get back in the play to show

that they are involved. There are also those who are out of shape and just don't have the stamina. Then you have those that are stuck because they are too busy complaining to the official. Complaining is not going to change anything, it's going to hurt your team. In basketball I was a beast in transition, but in my marriage I would hesitate, complain, and be out of shape. It's easy to say you want something on paper, but it's another thing to manage something in real life. I didn't anticipate how the marriage would change once you added living in the same house, a new job, new dog, new location, children, in-laws, etc. When you get married, you just don't marry the person, but you marry their life and their world. When I married Nicole I also married her past, the Brunson Family and Bermuda. I had to educate myself. I was committed and prepared for what I wanted to receive from her, but I was not prepared for what I needed to give to her. Sometimes it costs you way more than you anticipated. I mean it costs you everything. There's no part of you that you can't bring to the table, good, bad or indifferent, that's not gonna

be challenged and pushed in that type of relationship. I'm grateful for it. Without it, I wouldn't be who I am in any and every capacity. And so it is the foundation really of my manhood as an adult because that's officially when it started, when I made that decision and to stand by it. And now in this season in my life, to be able to see the kind of fruition, from my emotional intelligence, social awareness, relationship awareness and just general growth managing finances, people, my personal life, and my faith. There's no part of me that won't be stretched and pushed in a marriage, and for that, I'm extremely grateful.

My greatest influence for personal development is being married. The man that you see before you today, that people ask to speak, lead, and encourage only operates at this level (as it relates to interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and effective communication) because of a commitment that I decided to honor until the day I die. That commitment to another human being as they develop and evolve

requires me to adapt and adjust, to create a healthy relationship by listening not just to words but body language, tone of voice, and energy.

At this point in my life I am humbled and grateful because the reality is that Nicole has free will and she has to make a choice too. I am so grateful that, despite my shortcomings, disrespect, and insensitivity, after 17 years she is still by my side. I see it as a daily honor to call Nicole Star Crumpler my wife and spouse.

## - CHAPTER XI -



### **Being a Father**

*Lesson: Being a father is the most important responsibility in Society*

*Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old,  
they won't depart from it.*  
**(CEB, Proverbs 22:6)**

*“Every father should remember one day his son will follow  
his example, not his advice.”*  
**- Charles Kettering**

I feel so fortunate that Clarence Crumpler, Jr. is my daddy. Now, as a sound, educated, and mature adult with responsibilities and commitments, I understand the value of my daddy. My father is the man, not just in my eyes, but in the whole family and community. He is widely respected. I can't speak for work, but outside of that, I saw everyone, everywhere respect my daddy. He was never disrespected or insulted - privately or publicly - my whole life. That had a profound effect on me. My daddy was Superman to me. I admired him so much. I wanted to be just like him. I wanted to do everything with him. He was cool, tough, and smart.

Now it's my turn. I want to make my father proud and continue the legacy that he has



created. I live in a culture in which a black man - whether he is a father, brother, or son - in general is not respected, regarded, and ultimately not valued. My father was not a man for excuses, so even though I notice the changes in society regarding men of color, I control the choices that affect my responsibilities as a father.

When you have a young family and you're trying to establish yourself in the world, you need help. As a father, I didn't realize how much help I needed. Mainly with a lot of the basic day-to-day needs and supervision is when family matters most. During this time, there were only two places we could live: with Nicole's family or my family, and I am so grateful for Nicole's family.

Despite our early challenges of communication and finances, Nicole and I were both super excited for the baby. We read books and watched TV shows about babies regularly. We did the six-week birthing classes and read the Bible out loud to the baby. And, as all parents know, there are endless numbers of gadgets for babies. Nicole was into all of them.

Jada Star Crumpler's birth on August 30, 2007 was one of the greatest moments of my life. She was so beautiful and I was so excited. This meant so much for me because, on this day, I would experience "blood family" for the first time in my life. I didn't want anyone in the room with me. I wanted to have this experience all to myself. I remember cutting her umbilical cord and giving her her first bath. She was grabbing my pinky finger. She was perfect in every way and she was mine. It was amazing to me to witness how that can be. I recall family members saying that I would become jealous when I was no longer Nicole's center of attention after we started having children. We laughed it off. Why in the world would I be jealous of my own flesh and blood? My optimistic spirit led to neglect of the reality of human needs. For relationships to maintain order and have a healthy balance, the relationship has to be mutually beneficial. When we had Jada, Nicole instantly became a mother. Breastfeeding alone created a connection for them. She also had another major change—no employment. Then

there were our family and friends. No one asked, “Chris how are you?” Everyone just asked about Jada and Nicole. I wasn’t noticing what was happening; I just wanted to be there for my family.

I had none of the transitions that Nicole did. My body didn’t change, my employment didn’t change, and my friends saw me for me—not just the father of Jada. I didn’t surrender anything and Nicole had surrendered so much. I was only twenty-four, Nicole was twenty-six. The pure joy of being a father kept me going for over a year easily, but the repercussions of me making my personal needs a priority would be something that would remain a challenge for years to come.

As a father, most of my instincts came from two relationships: that with my parents and with my wife. I would make decisions based on those relationships and how those relationships connected to my daughter. The other part that is fascinating about blood relatives is how much you are alike and how much you share the same physical, emotional, and mental attributes. My daughter is a complete split between Nicole and

me. I think it is amazing. The amazing thing is how my daughter acts like both her mom and dad - depending on the situation. She is bold and strong and confident. I love those characteristics about her.

I started thinking about the values I wanted to give to my daughter, one being honesty. She was the only blood relative I knew about, but I knew that others were out there. I did not want my daughter to live with a big question mark concerning her family. Where did I come from? Why was I adopted? What is the health history of my biological family? I had all of these questions and more, but I couldn't answer any of them. My pride and the pain and the fear of the unknown made me refuse to do anything about it.

How I parent my daughter, Jada, is distinctly different from how I parent my son, CJ. The principles are always the same, but the method is different. Both of my children are very affectionate and loving, but I make sure that my interactions with my daughter are appropriate. My daughter is all girl, so she plays girly games and Daddy has to play because Jada rules,

literally. I learned that the most important lessons I teach my daughter are about faith: Belief in herself and her God. Confidence is everything and it is necessary in order to achieve anything challenging in this life.

My son, Chris Crumpler Jr. (AKA “CJ”) is a mini-me and I thank God for giving me this precious little dude. My son likes everything I liked as a child. Plus, he has his mom’s smarts. CJ is wise beyond his years. CJ says and does things that make you scratch your head all the time. He has a sensitivity that I have never experienced in my life. My son is uniquely gifted and has a spirit that beats to his own drum. I love the way God formed him.

As a father you first must:

- Consider your own childhood, mother’s childhood, and the influence that it had on the both of you. Also, consider the values and lessons you are going to be intentional in giving to your child.

- Be honest about your own personal needs and weaknesses and how that affects your parenting ability and energy.
- Understand that parenting is a family affair by blood or blend and humble yourself to know that you need help.

The most important trait of a parent, in my humble opinion, is presence. As a parent, the best quality you can give your children is time. I am so grateful that God has allowed me to experience every major development of my children's lives, but I am most grateful that since they were born they have lived with me. I understand and am fully aware that this is not the reality for most people. I just wanted to again put the responsibility on us as parents to make whatever decisions are necessary to give them time to be loved, to be safe, to learn, and to grow under your guidance.

Being a father is the most important role in society, and yet it's the most challenging. There's a huge responsibility in it. As I got older, I really realized why the father is needed and the value

that it brings not just to a home, but to a country, especially that community. I'm just grateful that I had a great example, and then I'm also inspired by that example. In my current practice, one place that you have to be extremely conscious of and intentional and deliberate is training your children, and the morals and value and character that it takes for them to be successful in this world. Emotionally you have to be sound. You really have to be sound and be able to manage your personal affairs so that it doesn't influence your decision making to the point where it would be detrimental to your children.

When I was younger I was just naive to really comprehend the weight and responsibility of my position in my children's life. I was conscious of it, but did not truly understand the value and importance of it. Over the years I've gotten better and better, but I'm just getting there in some respects. I do make very intentional efforts to expose and educate and empower my children in a way to prepare them to leave me. I know they're going to leave me, and I want them to have the tools to be successful. This is about

understanding the value of the responsibility of a father, but also understanding that the most important thing a father can do is train their child by their example.



## - CHAPTER XII -



### **Being a Leader**

*Lesson: Own the outcomes of your decisions*

*Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

***Philippians 2:2-4 (NIV)***

*“Leaders establish trust with candor, transparency, and credit.”*  
***Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric***

*“A leader is best when people barely know he exists...when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will all say: We did it ourselves.”*

— ***Lao-Tzu, an ancient philosopher and founder of Taoism***

*“Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.”*

— ***Sheryl Sanberg, COO of Facebook***

*“Leadership is about magnetic communication. Leaders have a way of communicating that draws people toward the vision and the horizon.”*

***-Doug Firebaugh***

*“Whenever you’re in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.”*

***-William James***

*The deeper your relationship with others, the more effective will be your leadership. People will not follow you, and before someone will lend you a hand, you must first touch their heart.”*

***-Robin Sharma***

Currently, every role in my daily life requires me to be a leader. The outcomes of these relationships and responsibilities determine my effectiveness.

Today’s leaders stand on the shoulders of the giants before us, and I am no exception. I remember in 2011 when I didn’t believe that I was a leader, didn't want to be leader, and was down about life in general. My marriage was on the rocks. Nicole and I and were discussing divorce, and I was struggling professionally, financially, and personally. I went to a mandatory conference for all educators in the Bermuda Public School System to hear a speaker by the name of Eric Thomas. Once I heard him speak, I

followed him everywhere he went that day. I sat right in the front row of his workshop taking notes and I locked in on everything he was saying. He gave me purpose that day. I bought his book and waited to have him sign it. I really wanted to ask him how I could stay connected with him in order to get this life energy that I desperately needed. I waited until everyone finished and he gave me his personal cell phone number. He came back to Bermuda to speak at a school and had lunch with me for three hours with his homeboy Karl, and he just poured into my life about purpose. I was floundering and in desperate need of direction. I not only followed Eric Thomas, but I studied him. After that conversation he gave me a book by John Maxwell called *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. I read the book and then researched John Maxwell. After studying John Maxwell, I learned that he studied John Wooden, the legendary basketball coach of UCLA. The three of these men combined, highlighted over 100 years of leadership lessons and experience. As you might imagine, I was bombarded with

information, and I would like to share a few nuggets that I have applied in my daily life as a leader.

Before we get into leadership skills, it's important to know that I learned something about each man's success: Character. John Maxwell, John Wooden, and Eric Thomas all displayed incredible character that I admired and was inspired by. How they lived their life - that is the credibility of their leadership.

It's important to note that despite these incredible examples and information in my life, I am still a work in progress as a leader. I still make mistakes and I am still learning. The difference is that I accept my position as a leader and I also take ownership, not only of my responsibilities, but the outcomes of my decisions. That allows me to have the power to make adjustments to change the outcome and my decisions. I am going to leave you with two tools to help you grow and develop as a leader. One is the leadership triangle from John Wooden. Please print and post in your bedroom, bathroom, or in a very visible place. I want you to

focus on the three sides: lessons, faith, and patience. Put your effort on the foundation which is the lessons, and take one or two lessons a week to focus your effort and energy. Then if you operate with faith and patience your character will organically develop the traits within the triangle. The other diagram is an assessment tool by John Maxwell used to determine what level of leadership you are in your relationships. This can be different for every person and can change with people if you change your level of investment.

**WOODEN ON LEADERSHIP™**

**THE ART OF SUCCESS**

**PATIENCE** **FAITH** **CONFIDENCE**

**PYRAMID OF SUCCESS**

**COMPETITIVE GREATNESS**  
 "Perform at your best when your best is required. Your best is required each day."

**POISE**  
 "Be yourself. Don't be thrown off by events whether good or bad."

**CONFIDENCE**  
 "The strongest steel is well founded self belief. It is earned, not given."

**CONDITION**  
 "Ability may get you to the top, but character keeps you there - mental, moral, and physical."

**SKILL**  
 "What a leader learns after you've learned it all counts most of all."

**TEAM SPIRIT**  
 "The star of the team is the team. We supercede me."

**SELF-CONTROL**  
 "Control of your organization begins with control of yourself. Be disciplined."

**ALERTNESS**  
 "Constantly be aware and observing. Always seek to improve yourself and the team."

**INITIATIVE**  
 "Make a decision! Failure to act is often the biggest failure of all."

**INTENTNESS**  
 "Stay the course. When thwarted try again harder, smarter. Persevere relentlessly."

**INDUSTRIOUSNESS**  
 "Success travels in the company of very hard work. There is no trick, no easy way."

**FRIENDSHIP**  
 "Strive to build a team filled with camaraderie and respect: comrades-in-arms."

**LOYALTY**  
 "Be true to yourself. Be true to those you lead."

**COOPERATION**  
 "Have utmost concern for what's right rather than who's right."

**ENTHUSIASM**  
 "Your energy and enjoyment, drive and dedication will stimulate and greatly inspire others."

**12 LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP**

1. Good Values Attract Good People
2. Love Is The Most Powerful Four-Letter Word
3. Call Yourself A Teacher
4. Emotion Is Your Enemy
5. It Takes 10 Hands To Make A Basket
6. Little Things Make Big Things Happen
7. Make Each Day Your Masterpiece
8. The Carrot Is Mightier Than A Stick
9. Make Greatness Attainable By All
10. Seek Significant Change
11. Don't Look At The Scoreboard
12. Adversity Is Your Asset

John Wooden, Head Coach

*"Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best of which you are capable."*

*"Failure to prepare is preparing to fail. Don't mistake activity for achievement."*

*"Success comes only to an individual by self-satisfaction in knowing that you gave everything to become the very best that you are capable of."*

*"Success is not in destruction of us & giving."*

*Leadership*

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I've been inspired by leaders all around me my whole life. I've named a few in this final chapter, but what I really want to resonate more than anything, I just want to awaken that God-given purpose. There's a leader in you. It's so important that you see the value in that leader, that there's somebody that's next to you, that you love and that loves you, that needs you to be that leader.

I must say it's hard. It's extremely hard. It's not hard because it's a complicated science. It's hard because you have to sacrifice and submit your personal desires, and conveniences and wanting to be comfortable for the sake of the betterment of all parties involved. By doing that you grow, you learn, you relate, and you get things accomplished that you could not do on your own.

I see why a lot of people don't want to be a leader, because it's going to push you. I reflect on these different areas that I've shared with you, and all of them have significant influence on my life. And they all pushed me from the inside to be

a better version of myself. And for that I'm thankful.

I want to encourage you to work on yourself, work on your mind, your spirit, your body, your finances, your faith, your family. Just work on it. Make it a value to yourself, to listen more, to learn more, and to be present more. It's going to cost you some convenience. It's going to cost you some comfortability. It's going to cost you some time and some sweat equity. But the return on investment, is going to be life changing. So I challenge you, I encourage you, to be a better version of yourself, to refuse to lose and to beat your yesterday. Then you can inspire the ones that you care about, and that care about you, to be a better version of themselves. So that we as a people can be a better version of ourselves.

You're a tough opponent, but “this too shall pass”. Despite how hard, whatever you're going through is, and how limited your resources, your experience, your network, or your qualifications, you're more than enough to get through this.



# THE 5 LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP

## 5 PINNACLE

Respect

People follow because of who you are and what you represent.



## 4 PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

Reproduction

People follow because of what you have done for them.



## 3 PRODUCTION

Results

People follow because of what you have done for the organization.



## 2 PERMISSION

Relationships

People follow because they want to.



## 1 POSITION

Rights

People follow because they have to.

Believe in yourself. Push yourself.  
Challenge yourself. Refuse to lose.



# EQUIPMENT

Figure it out for yourself, my lad,  
You've all that the greatest of men have had,  
Two arms, two hands, two legs, two eyes  
And a brain to use if you would be wise.  
With this equipment they all began,  
So start for the top and say, "I can."

Look them over, the wise and great  
They take their food from a common plate,  
And similar knives and forks they use,  
With similar laces they tie their shoes.  
The world considers them brave and smart,  
But you've all they had when they made their  
start.

You can triumph and come to skill,  
You can be great if you only will.  
You're well equipped for what fight you choose,  
You have legs and arms and a brain to use,  
And the man who has risen great deeds to do  
Began his life with no more than you.

You are the handicap you must face,  
You are the one who must choose your place,  
You must say where you want to go,  
How much you will study the truth to know.  
God has equipped you for life, but He  
Lets you decide what you want to be.

Courage must come from the soul within,  
The man must furnish the will to win.  
So figure it out for yourself, my lad.  
You were born with all that the great have had,  
With your equipment they all began,  
Get hold of yourself and say: "I can."

**--Edgar A. Guest**

*In closing, I really want to talk about the importance of owning your truth. Even the part that hurts, even the part you don't want to address. There's so much healing, forgiveness, growth, and strength that comes from me dealing with the real truth of me being white. Me being adopted. My whole ... I guess life, I was ashamed of it. I was ashamed of both. It was a disappointment to be adopted. It was a disappointment to be biracial, in particular the white part.*

*To now be here and to be proud, to be thankful, to be grateful, to thank God that I was adopted, to thank God that I'm biracial ... these last two pictures I want to represent closure and healing. The pictures represent my truth.*

*I'm adopted.*

*I'm biracial.*

*I'm black.*

*I'm white.*

*I've got two mommas.*

*I've got two daddies.*

*I've got old brothers.*

*I've got young brothers.*

*I've got old sisters,*

*I've got young sisters.*

*I'm educated,*

*but I'm country.*

*That picture in Ocklawaha and everybody that's in*



***My Truth, My Family***



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