

Excerpt 1: Bill Parcells Coaching Philosophy

Former NFL coach Bill Parcells on motivation, building a program, leadership and more on his coaching philosophy told through a series of quotes and short anecdotes.

- *On Leadership:* “When leaders have a vision, they can picture the desired result of a project before they begin; they rely on their own measuring stick. In an unstable environment, it is especially vital for leaders to articulate their vision for the organization—clearly, explicitly, and often. It’s easy to get diverted by all the variables outside your control, to let them eat away at your vision and self-confidence. But detours will doom you. Lose faith in yourself and you’ll fulfill your own worst prophecy.”
- *To players after a disappointing loss:* “One of the things you can do in this business is fool yourself. It’s human nature. Don’t try to put a spin on it and the effort you made because anyone who looks can see the effort wasn’t there.”
- Parcells would constantly ask players, “What did you just see?” during games to keep them mentally alert and focused.
- *Adapting as a coach weekly:* “It’s a week to week thing in coaching, every week has a different theme. You have to figure out which is the best way to approach it. It’s like being a jockey. A horse is never the same for all 10 rides. The jockey has to sense what is happening early on and then adjust to it if he wants to get the most out of the horse that day.”
- “The worst thing that can happen to a player [from a player’s perspective] is for him not to know what the coach is really thinking about him.”
- *Importance of teaching your staff:* “Train the coaches under you to see the game as you see it: “Look, if I can just leave you with one thing when I leave here, it’s my eyes. What do my eyes see?”
- “Just because you’ve identified a problem doesn’t mean you’re any closer to solving it. It doesn’t make a difference if you know why you are failing, you must do something about it.”
- Super Bowl XXV team’s mantra: “Make the Other Team Quit”
- “Bill understands pressure involved in this game,” Romeo Crennel, a former Parcells assistant coach, says, “He wants to know whether the players and coaches can handle the pressure. Therefore, he applies it during the week to see if they can handle it. He wants to know who can perform under that pressure the game brings.”
- *Staff unity:* “A staff should always stick together, mentality should be **“One wrong, all wrong.”**”
- *Parcell’s goal for each of his teams: play consistently to its potential—*“My challenge as a coach is to organize, structure it, give the team a good enough design and motivation to allow the team to play to its potential.”
- *Maturing as a coach:* “As a young manager I was much more confrontational, more distracted, paid attention to things that I learned weren’t quite so important. As I became more of a veteran manager, I eliminated things I knew didn’t make any difference.”

- “When you’re losing, you coach better. You scrutinize things more closely. You’re paying attention to more detail to give your team every little edge that you can to win.”
- *To a player*: “You know, maybe my expectations for you as a player are higher than your own and if they are, you and I are going to have a problem. I think you need to elevate your expectations because I see more potential in you that you can see.”
- *On motivating the team 3 days prior to the 1990 NFC Championship game*: Parcells gathered his team and explained to them that if they were to beat the 49ers in San Francisco, the Giants would travel directly to Tampa for the Super Bowl rather than coming back to New York. He told his players that they could pack for a weekend if they planned on losing in California or they could pack enough for an extra week in Tampa. As the team mulled the question, Parcells grabbed an extraordinarily large suitcase from under the table and slammed it on the table, saying “I think you know my answer.”
- “You may only need one thing to motivate a player. Find that one thing that he responds to and that’s all you need.”
- “If you respect a player and he respects you then you have a relationship and in a relationship all commentary is allowed. I can say anything to Pepper Johnson and he’ll understand where I’m coming from because of the mutual respect.”
- Former assistant: “He’s just as comfortable joking with his players as he is questioning their manhood.”
- Because it’s impossible to control every element of the locker room, he gets 5 or 6 players (“his guys”) to speak his message for him and who are his eyes and ears and completely devoted to him.
- “In a competitive atmosphere, to stay the same is to regress.”
- *To a player*: “Don’t come in here and say ‘Bill, you owe me a chance.’ I don’t owe you anything. You make your own chances.”
- *To rookies during their first minicamp*: “Can you be the same person every day? Don’t be the guy who looks like a world beater one day in practice and the next day you’re bored and just can’t keep up.”
- *To his 1999 team after a rash of early season injuries*: “All the excuses are in place if you want to use them. If you do, you will not have a productive year.”
- *How to know when to back off conditioning in practice*: “Pay attention to the two best conditioned athletes on the team. When they start showing fatigue, stop. If they’re dragging, the rest of them are a lot worse.”

Locker Room Sign: **Individuals Win Games but Teams Win Titles**

- *Parcells view on injuries*: “You must be present in the training room to make sure it doesn’t become a social club.” He would set the temperature in the training room at an uncomfortably cold rate so players would take their time seriously.

- *What Parcells looked for in a coach:* “I want someone who’s consistent, who’s not afraid to confront the players and who makes the players accountable for their performance.”
- *Challenging Phil Simms:* “You used to be a leader, but now you’re trying to be everyone’s friend.”
- “It doesn’t take athletic ability to hustle.”
- “I go to practice everyday with the sole intention of trying to improve my team.”
- Each day in practice Parcells takes one game situation and teaches every player and coach who might be involved how to handle it.
- “The only players I hurt with my words are the ones who have an inflated opinion of their ability. I can’t worry about that.”
- *To a player:* “Don’t confuse routine with commitment.”
- “Losing may take a little from your credibility, but quitting will destroy it.”
- *Focus on your player’s strengths:* “It’s easy to downgrade people by dwelling on their weaknesses. It’s harder to look at them with fresh eyes and identify their strengths and how they can help the organization to function.”
- “To teach, you have to listen as well as talk.”
- *On what sets disciplined people apart:* 1. The capacity to get past distractions. 2. The willingness to condition mind and body for the task at hand. 3. The ability to keep your poise when those around you are losing theirs.
- “My job is to call attention to the things that I think are the difference between winning and losing. If I can’t do that, then I have failed as a coach.”
- “The desperate team usually wins.”
- *To rookies at first minicamp:* “If you are sensitive, you will have a hard time with me. I expect 3 things: BE ON TIME. PAY ATTENTION. PRACTICE AND PLAY HARD.”
- “I’m looking for guys who are willing to do whatever it takes to win all the time.”
- “Excuses and alibis are the main enemies of accountability. People can’t become accountable unless they understand exactly what you want.”
- *Challenging Bryan Cox:* “I once left a gasoline can in Cox’s locker with a note that read, ‘Is there any gas left in your tank?’”
- *On building a championship team:* “I’m not interested in being a competitive team. I want a champion team. That’s the only goal a guy like me can have. I’m not interested in making a team competitive week to week. I’m interested in champions.”

- *Be careful with your postgame criticism:* “The worst thing you can do to a player immediately after a game is to call attention to the errors he just made.”

- *Keeping up the pressure in practice:* “I believe that pressure is the only thing people respond to in any undertaking. When a player deals successfully with pressure during the week, game pressure won’t faze him.”

- “The team that makes fewer mistakes will generally get the opportunity to win, even when the opposition has more talent. On Monday, I’ll talk about a blunder that cost some other team a game that weekend.”

- “Anybody that has their own agenda that’s separate from the team’s won’t be around long.”

- *The importance of concrete follow-up after film review:* “You have to continually monitor and assess them, and do it as objectively as you can. A strong leader will preempt all alibis that a player might use. I watch the tapes by myself first, early Monday morning. That afternoon I set the tone of our meeting before my team looks at them: “I’ve been studying this all day now, and this is what I saw....”

“The most difficult thing in coaching is to scrutinize the performance the same way whether you win or lose. When you lose, the problem looks like an H-bomb. That’s why your players say the coach is never happy. But a lot of times when you lose, you see more good things than when you win.”

Quotes compiled by Ken Mannie, Head Strength Coach at Michigan State University.