

8 ‘Negatives’ You Can Learn from Bobby Knight

Basketball coach Bob Knight gives his unique take on the best path to success in the game and in life.

Bob Knight is a glass-half-empty kind of guy. As one of the most iconic basketball coaches in the college game, Knight has grabbed 902 wins, three NCAA championships, four National Coach of the Year awards and Olympic gold medals for his Team USA. Something bold was behind those achievements. And it wasn't optimism. It was what he calls "negative thinking."

In his new book, [*The Power of Negative Thinking*](#) (Amazon Publishing, March 2013), the long-time Indiana Hoosiers coach shows how bad coaching is the same as poor leadership. According to Knight, unrealistic optimism won't win you anything, not a game or a business deal. So what does Knight mean by negative thinking?

"What seems too good to be true usually is," Knight writes. "There is a genuine need to be cautious, to look both ways before crossing any streets in life. Paying attention to the downside is a difficult but essential quality for achieving long-term success in any occupation or family situation."

Here are some of his takeaways about the power of negative thinking:

Failure is about mistakes. And success is about preparation. To succeed, you must eliminate mistakes. "Victory favors the team making the fewest mistakes."

Preparation is key. You can't depend on pure hope and crossing fingers if you want to experience success.

The negatives "no" and "don't" are important for setting parameters. Knight considers these the greatest words in the English language. They are firm and final—and they bring positive results.

Leaders help their "players" understand their personal strengths and weaknesses. "That's how teams win: by playing to their strengths and away from weaknesses."

Get rid of the ideas that don't work anymore. If it was valuable once and isn't anymore, throw it out and move on to the next idea that will allow you to grow. Knight knows passion is vital, but "driving that passion into a ditch is pure stupidity." It is the ability to adjust, to transform the game plan, that will boost success.

Ditch your comfort zone. A leader will know when a teammate's norm isn't cutting it—hearing that negative feedback is essential, says Knight. It will help you realize that you won't move forward or win if you stay inside that zone.

Utilize "negative imaging" and prepare for potential problems. This is where the "if...then..." model comes into play. Gather information and plan goals with multiple courses of action, and you'll better your chances of success. If something happens to put you off track, then go to the next option.

Demand results. To win, you have to demand action and expect the upmost productivity out of your employees. "Successful leadership is [about] being hard to please."

Knight intertwines his story of basketball glory with the key aspects of his cautious and conscientious approach to leadership. Much of this bracing book rings true, but at *SUCCESS*, we believe a leader can stay realistic and cautious while fostering a warm, positive atmosphere and keeping clear goals alive before his or her team.

What do *you* think?

