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## ----- PREFACE

While grabbing my shin I was eye level with Tim. “I’m sorry, that was a total accident!” As he backed his chair, his smile said it all. Tim had convinced the committee to accept his application to our annual middle school 3v3 basketball tournament. He turned a quick half-circle and sped down the hall. Over the noisy crowd and hum of his wheelchair I barely heard instructions to find a third player.

One day from the tournament put us at a distinct disadvantage. Any player that was a player was already taken. Any player that thought he was a player was taken. The rest were wise enough not to play. This was serious competition. Convincing a non-player to part with money and dignity to play with an “old man” and kid in a wheelchair was a tall order.

Tim did not understand all that. He was in the tournament and we were going to compete. The next day Tim drove up with the smallest kid in school waving from the back of his wheelchair. Drew was our final pick. His qualifications were speed, hustle and a promise to practice a game he had only heard about. “It was going to be fun,” I said. Tim frowned, “Fun! We are not here to have fun. We are here to win! Get your game face on and work hard!”

Tournament day! Excitement everywhere. Two girls and half the male population planned on playing or cheering. The classroom clock moved slower than usual. Entering the gym we joined a large crowd forming around the tournament schedule. Everybody was pointing to Round 1 match-ups and throwing trash talk at possible round 2 foes. I was the only adult player interested in the board. My Teacher presence had no effect on their crazed indifference to anything but basketball. To them, I was just another player wanna be.

“Six wins!” yelled Tim. His dedication and constant push forward engaged my youthful desire to show others I can play. During warm-up, Tim chased loose balls he could not grab. He yelled for Drew to make baskets like he practiced the night before. They wanted to play, and win. They were pushing to win!

It was not just an individual showing. It was about winning as a group, as a team. They never played on “teams.” They were never selected to play pick up games outside of school. There was absolutely no reason to pick them to play, and they knew it. But, they were here to play today. An understanding developed that we were winning to keep playing. Winning meant you no longer watched from the sidelines. Today, when you win, you play! It was not about winning the tournament. It was about playing. Peers would have to stand on the sidelines and watch them, for a change. The only way to play was to keep winning...as a team. Achieve to play!

We were lucky our first two rounds. I still believe it was a deliberate gimme by the great scheduler. Nevertheless, our victims were probably bad enough to fall prey to any third round survivor. Tim and Drew grew quiet between games. I sensed they were attempting to feel this out. Having never experienced competition in a formalized arena, they could have done almost anything with this new experience. They could settle with being satisfied playing two more games than ever before, or they could decide to risk that comforting belief and play to win. More than play to play!

They discussed the situation and gave me their answer during the third and fourth games. They collectively gave everything in themselves to play and win. They verbally pushed me to forget who I was. They told me to see myself as their leader. They wanted to experience more of something they had never done before. Yes, they wanted to keep playing and watch everybody watch them play. Winning brought a new kind of attention they never experienced on a basketball court. One person could not accomplish this. It had to be accomplished together.

We were grotesquely behind game 5. One win from the Championship game, with a gym full of intensity, fueled by 14-year-old adrenaline. The impossible was happening. We were still playing and everybody was watching us. My teammates were focused on the game, as if the crowd was not there. That surprised me. I called time out to ask what they were experiencing. They slowly worked their eyes to the crowd. They had honestly forgot about them. The watchers were now the watched, but it did not matter anymore. It was more than win, play and be seen.

They were fueled by a higher desire to win. To win meant they were not only center stage today, but tomorrow as well. Winning now meant this experience could last forever. They were not gullible enough to believe this vaulted them as future participants for pick up games. They did recognize the value of bragging rights for at least one year...possibly, the rest of their lives. An enhanced peer status with staying power. Something they earned! Our opponents did not know it...but game 5 was over. With an unmatched passion to win we crushed our opponents in fine order.

Game 6, Championship, Tim cried. We had to wait for him to compose himself. I still do not know why he cried. We huddled together to set our game plan and prevent others from seeing him slip. Drew told him he cried to win! Cry to push hard! “Make those tears work for you.” I did not recognize it then, but his words still remind me the power of taking any experience and re-defining it toward reaching your goal.

It worked! Tim led us through an exhausting and emotional game. Our game plan was simple. Don’t let the other team have the ball. Tournament rules gave the ball back to the team who scored, so we could not miss. I sometimes acted out of a character, given my position, age and size against 14-year-old kids. I justified it as achieving for others and to this day, still cling to that thought.

More than 25 years later, my teammates and I stay connected from that one experience. That experience taught me everything I have ever needed to Parent, Teach and Coach kids to a higher

level of performance. The ingredients to bring out a powerful experience of higher performance with peers and self remain as influential today as it did in that tiny gym a lifetime ago. In many ways Tim met us where we were and pulled us into his world. To get more out of us he encouraged with words to move forward, never to harm. He reached high enough to place himself in a new arena. He never knew how he would react to success, but when confronted with a new experience of winning he re-defined his goal and moved himself forward while pulling us with him. Drew took Tim's potential roadblock and re-defined it to bring him back to his goal. Knowing your desired outcome is invaluable. Along the way, by pushing himself to a higher level of performance, Tim assisted others to a keener understanding of life. Lives improved! People he knew and many he would never meet.

I thank Tim, Drew, Students, Parents, Teachers and Coaches who taught me the value of assisting others to a higher level of accomplishment and performance. I am sure all the kids in your life will find their own unique way of Thanking You for reading this book. I know Tim, Drew and I thank each other every time we meet. After all...they earned eternal bragging rights!

Continued...I love words and appreciate their influence and potential to impact lives. I have not always followed grammatical rules in this book, such as ending a sentence with a preposition or the use of they instead of he or she. I beg forgiveness for my informal grammatical approach while leaning toward a conversational delivery.

I also refer to young people as Kids. For me, that magical word has always expressed an appreciation and connection with a critical developmental period of our lives. I do believe this...almost any word use, communication, behavior, intent, decision can't be too bad if fueled by a sincere love for life, people and helping. Fueled by love we can always give our best effort, check if we reached our outcome and make a new decision...fueled by love!

CHAPTER I  
**INTRODUCTION**

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**Higher levels of Engagement,  
Performance and Happiness...**

Push or pull them forward! Facilitate kid Growth! Parents, Teachers and Coaches know kids have unlimited potential. We also know they get stuck. Engagement, effort and performance can nose dive at home, in a classroom or on a playing field. It can be a temporary experience or a pattern that takes life in almost everything they do. They need an Adult who has the desire and know-how to push or pull them forward!

This book is about how to assist kids toward higher engagement and performance at home, in the classroom and on the field. Bring them toward happiness as the fully engaged and achieving person they seek. Believe me, they want to achieve! They know it will bring them happiness. What they do not always know is how to get unstuck and move forward. You already make a difference. You can add to your already successful repertoire of Adult-Kid interventions toward a higher level of engagement and performance.

Our children have within them, the "stuff" to live a more accomplished and happy life. A life filled with meaningful direction, effort, loving relationships and self fulfilled happiness. They also own a personal idea of what they want for themselves but do not know how to get there. At the very basic level of intervention, they need to believe that one Adult understands, believes in them and can assist, to get them from where they are to where they want to be.