

# Coach's Critique

Two-time NCAA champion men's basketball coach Rick Pitino shares advice for achieving success in life.

by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor

Teaching others to achieve success is something Richard "Rick" Pitino knows a little something about. A native New Yorker, early in his career he accomplished his dream of coaching in the NBA for the New York Knicks in the late 1980s and for the Boston Celtics in the early 1990s.

He then shifted his focus to college basketball and holds the distinction of being the only men's coach in NCAA history to lead three different schools (Providence, Kentucky and Louisville) to a Final Four and being the only coach in the NCAA to lead two different schools to an NCAA National Championship — the University of Kentucky in 1996 and the University of Louisville in 2013.

Pitino chronicles his philosophy toward success as a motivational speaker and author. His most recent book, *The One-Day Contract: How to Add Value to Every Minute of Your Life*, was released in October 2013. Pitino shared highlights from the book during the opening session of the 2013 National FFA Convention Oct. 30 in Louisville.

Pitino says two years ago he was inspired to reflect on his life — and write the book — as he approached the age of 60 and after an unexpected loss by his team to local school Moorhead State. After the game upset happened, Pitino says, "For the first time I thought about stepping out of the game I love, my passion."

However, as he pondered it more, he says, "I realized I was letting a loss get me down; I was running from the challenges that lie ahead."

Everyone experiences failure at some point, he says. The question is: How do you treat failure?

Pitino's philosophy is that failure should be viewed as "fertilizer that will help future



► University of Louisville men's basketball coach Rick Pitino (center) waves to FFA members attending the 2013 national convention. He is flanked by national officers Clay Sapp (left) and Joenelle Futrell.

things grow in your life." He adds, "Handle failure with courage; you must learn from it."

## New outlook

That experience prompted Pitino to reflect and work to improve himself. He recalled that during his career with the Knicks, while visiting with a group of Wall Street brokers, they chastised Pitino for the multi-year, multi-million-dollar contracts that players got.

"In our industry, if we have one bad trade, we're fired," they told him. "We live on a one-day contract."

That phrase stuck with Pitino, who says, "The one-day contract is about being as good as you can be every single day, so you move beyond ordinary and become extraordinary." Pitino says he has practiced this philosophy of having a one-day contract with himself and his team for the past two years, and he credits it with helping him

be as passionate of a coach at age 60 as he was at age 30. It has also contributed to his continued success — including the 2013 NCAA Championship.

Pitino's contract with himself — and advice to others — includes a daily routine and what he calls "meticulous" preparation for each day.

Strive to wake up with a positive outlook each day, he suggests. He listens to upbeat music as he drives to work to help encourage that mind-set. Throughout his career, Pitino says he has aimed to stay positive and remove negative people and distractions, particularly talk radio, from his life. He recounts a time when he was coaching the Knicks that he listened to the negative comments on the radio and says, "I didn't like what was said about myself or other coaches. As a result, I noticed I wasn't going to work in an upbeat, positive mood ready to attack the day's problems and ready to make my team better."

Realizing this, he stopped allowing negativity into his life.

"For 30-plus years, I've never turned on

## Coach Pitino's playbook

- Surround yourself with positive people
- Live by a one-day contract
- Know the time and place for technology
- Listen to be an effective communicator
- Look at adversity with honesty and courage

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talk radio. I turn away and turn off and totally tune out cynical, negative people," he says.

In today's world of social media, he cautions others of the negative messages they allow into their life, and encourages them to instead surround themselves with optimistic people.

"My first piece of advice to people — especially young people — is to turn off the negative; tune out the cynical and surround yourself with positive and upbeat people, because they raise up everybody's abilities."

### **Turn off distractions**

Along with tuning out negativity, Pitino

advocates having a "laser-sharp focus on what you want to accomplish." He adds, "You can't get distracted; avoid traps along the way." As an example during his presentation, he held up a cell phone and said, "This is an addictive piece of equipment. I know because two years ago, I was addicted."

Pitino said he began to notice that he was always on his phone, and the people he was with were always on theirs, as well.

As part of his contract with himself, Pitino decided to put his phone away while he was with others. "When I meet someone I want to treat them as the most significant person in my life at that moment."

He advises, "Never take anyone for granted who you meet in life. Leave a lasting impression, whether it's 5 minutes or 20 minutes. Do a commercial on who you are and what you're all about."

To the young generation he adds, "You are the generation of the distracted. Turn off your phone when you go to dinner and when you are with others." If his players are on their phones during mealtimes, Pitino will take them away for 24 hours. He says they consider that a worse punishment than running at 5 a.m.

"Don't fall into the trap of technology," Pitino advises. "Technology is awesome, but there's a time and place for it. When you are

in the company of others, make them your focus.”

Regarding communication, he also offers this advice: Listen four times more than the amount you speak. “Everybody loves listeners,” Pitino says and notes, “I’ve learned this the hard way in recruiting.”

He shares the story of a young man he tried to recruit several years ago — going to his high school games during the course of two years. When it came time for the young man to sign, Pitino spent 45 minutes “preaching” to the student and his family

**“Handle failure with courage; you must learn from it.”**

**— Rick Pitino**

about the university and his basketball program.

“I broke every rule of communication,” Pitino says in retrospect. “I didn’t build a bond or relationship; I didn’t listen.”

That student didn’t even come to visit the campus and didn’t sign. Pitino moved on to another player and went in with a different approach — asking them questions, listening to their concerns. He was invited to stay for dinner, the family visited campus that weekend and the player signed with Pitino’s team within the week.

Pitino reiterates, “Listen and read the road signs. To master communication, listen four times to the amount you speak and you’ll know how to sell in different situations.”

Lastly, Pitino reminds himself and others, “Remember your passion. ... Start each day on a one-day contract, wake up ultrapositive, and pursue your dreams and goals.”

He concludes, “When adversity crops up in your day, handle it by looking it straight in the eye. Don’t make excuses and point fingers at others; meet those challenges.”



**Editor’s Note:** *Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and a cattlemaster from Whitewood, S.D.*