

## Phil Jackson.

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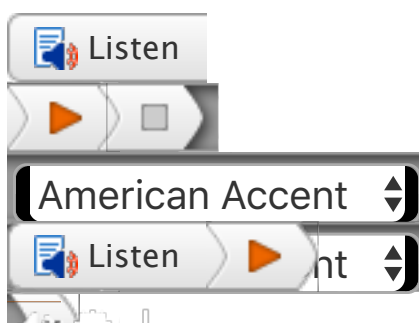
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PHIL JACKSON



## Section:

### Face To Face

## Inc. talks to the world champion coach about the abuse of anger and the handling of key employees

Q. In business as in basketball, most leaders are forever calling their competitors "fierce," and calling upon their companies -- teams -- to "fight back." You don't. Why?

A. Because fury doesn't work in competition -- at least not the way you usually see it invoked. What's more, it works even less well as the competition itself gets tougher. Anger is the real enemy in basketball, not your opponent.

Q. But how can anger be avoided?

A. It can't entirely. In basketball you're dealing with anger at a very visceral level all the time. You're always within a heartbeat of a fight. The players are much bigger and stronger now than they were 20 years ago, and intimidation is part of the game. You have to get into this warrior attitude where you do not lose control and erupt. You have to maintain a fine edge where you understand that you just don't blindly throw yourself into the fray.

Q. And if an opponent pushes you so hard you have no choice but to retaliate?

A. But you do have a choice, is the thing. If you follow our game, you'll remember that whenever the Bulls played the Detroit Pistons in the late '80s, the unity and awareness we'd worked so hard to build would collapse. Detroit's primary objective was to throw us off our game by raising the level of violence on the floor. The players reverted to their primitive instinct.

Q. Which was?

A. To use force. And while that response was disappointing, it wasn't surprising. They'd been conditioned since childhood that every confrontation was a test of manhood. That's how basketball players are trained. Win or die is the code; rousing the players' blood lust is the method. But that approach ultimately backfires. It stinks as a blueprint for competition, and I set about to change it.

Q. You talk about the difference between playing hard and playing angry. How do you keep your players from crossing that line?

A. My team learned not to cross it during our 1991 play-off series against the defending champion Pistons. As we moved toward a four-game sweep they got more and more desperate. Everybody on our team was slammed around. John Paxson was thrown into the stands by Bill Laimbeer. Other players were tackled, tripped, elbowed, and smacked in the face. But they all laughed it off. The Pistons didn't know how to respond. We completely disarmed them by not striking back. At that moment, our players became true champions.

Q. Doesn't Michael Jordan, your star player, have a reputation for being among the most competitive people on earth? Doesn't anger fuel his competitiveness?

A. I don't think so. Michael Jordan is the epitome of what I call the peaceful warrior. He has endured more physical punishment than any other player in the league, but he rarely shows any signs of anger. His ability to stay relaxed and focused in the midst of chaos is unsurpassed. Once he was upended by Detroit's front line on his way to the basket and brutally slammed to the floor. It was a malicious hit that could have caused serious damage, and I expected Michael to be fuming. But he wasn't. During the time-out that followed he shrugged it off. It's attitudes like his that I've tried to encourage ever since I came to the Bulls.

Q. How?

A. Continual reinforcement. What I tried to do was to get the players to walk away from confrontations and not get distracted. The idea is not to wilt or act dishonorably in the face of overwhelming force, but to be savvy enough to use the enemy's own power against him. There has to be a blueprint for giving your all out of respect for the battle, never out of hatred of the enemy. Practically speaking, we instituted a series of "silly" fines to discourage our players from insulting the other team --for example, a \$10 fine for taking three-point shots at the end of the game when we were ahead by 20 points or more. That only demeans your opponent and builds rage that might be returned later on.

Q. You mentioned preparing your players to take what you called the "right action." What did you mean?

A. A lot of what we do is to put players through the motions over and over. We do a lot of meditation and visualization. So there's an orientation toward always asking our players, "Do you know what you're doing so you can exhibit the right action that we would require of you?"

Q. So you're a teacher.

A. Yes, and a counselor. You use a lot of persuasiveness. You have to establish your philosophy and a system that embodies your fundamental approach. You have to be able to read failures and successes quickly, to make adjustments to your team so that there is constant growth. Finally, you have to have a long-range plan or long-range ideas, so you understand what is a good victory and what's an OK victory, what's a good loss versus what's a devastating loss. That keeps the mood swings in this business from getting too high and low.

Q. The sense one gets about professional basketball these days is that it's a very disharmonious world: spoiled players, disruptive agents, overwhelming media glare. How do you sustain a sense of "team" under those conditions -- especially when, in Jordan, you have one disproportionately key employee?

A. First of all, I try to include Scottie Pippin at the same level as Jordan, because they both are so important to our team. I don't give Michael more elevated status, and he serves as our

cocaptain with Scottie. Yet I also know -- and he knows -- that he's an icon in our society. So we try to talk a lot about how his teammates are doing and how he's feeling about the game and his level of play. Michael said to me point-blank early last year that he considered Scottie to be the leader of our basketball club because he felt he was still catching up to him after two years of being absent from the game. So he's very honest and forthright about his role on this team.

Q. What about Dennis Rodman, another key employee? Rodman was new to your team last year and had been regarded as a troubled -- and potentially troublesome -- talent. Couldn't his addition have destroyed the harmony of the group?

A. Maybe. But I think the other players see Dennis as a special, talented person who has come into this business without as many advantages as others. He didn't start college until he was 22, and he didn't come into the NBA until he was 25. He was a late bloomer who didn't attend one of these basketball factories where the players get all sorts of attention. He's risen to his stature in an ungainly way. So the players were accommodating to him.

Q. But didn't they resent him as an outsider?

A. The surprising thing about players is that while they keep tabs on the special favors others are getting, they're very loyal to each other. They step up physically for each other on the court, and that sacrifice makes them comrades.

Q. Does reminding them of that help them transcend the idea that the star gets most of the glory, and preserve the notion of a team?

A. Absolutely. Basketball is a team game, and everybody who plays it knows that. You've got to have five guys working together like the fingers on the hand, and until that happens you're all going to stick out in an awkward way. So even though there are a lot of guys who want to have individual glory come their way, they know what it really takes to be a success in basketball. The sport itself demands that at one end of the court, there's no ball and everyone has to play defense together. At the other end, all the players have to coordinate their activity with the ball. That lends itself to very intense team play. It's a game that makes for great bonds.

Q. Rousing the troops is a time-honored leadership play. Why does it stink?

A. Because it's distracting. It undermines all the careful preparation designed to enable players to take the right action in each circumstance they face. I know it from personal experience. As a kid I often threw temper tantrums when I lost. Losing made me feel humiliated and worthless. My obsession with winning was often my undoing. I would push so hard to succeed when things weren't going my way that it would hurt my performance. There's a line between playing hard and playing angry.

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PHOTO (COLOR): PEACEFUL WARRIORS: Even in the physically brutal realm of pro basketball--where the idea of competitive 'battle' isn't just a metaphor--it's those who don't fight who most often win. Or so says Chicago coach Phil Jackson (with Michael Jordan).

PHOTO (COLOR): Phil Jackson

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