



So, Who Is Your Coach?

By Dr. Gregory Wiens

I have written elsewhere about the importance of having a coach. Personally, I believe that we all need a coach. The best athletes in the world have coaches who help them excel in their area of giftedness. If they do it for money, how much more should we for the Kingdom? Paul coached the pastors and leaders in young churches. We have many of his coaching letters in the Epistles of the New Testament. However, having clearly taken the position that we all should have someone coach us, there is a trend that I am uncomfortable with today.

One of the advantages in the sports arena is that there is an easy way to assess the effectiveness of a coach. It is called the win/loss record. This is not so obvious in the church world. I am uncomfortable with some coaching I am aware of today that simply attempts to help the pastor feel better about who they are or what they are doing. Unlike in sports, there isn't a win/loss record... or is there?

Health in the physical domain always means reproduction. Your skin and blood cells are continuously being replaced and the moment your body stops growing physically, you will die. Then why do we think that we can be healthy as a church and not see reproduction? Coaching should attempt to make us better at fulfilling our calling as leaders of the Church of God. This means that coaching should make a difference in "how" we lead. It should help us win more.

In Kingdom terms, coaching should help us be more effective in leading the church in reproduction. Our coaches should make tangible differences in the effectiveness of our leadership, and therefore in the health of the churches we lead. If the church is healthier, it should reproduce converts, disciples, groups, leaders and/or other churches.

My coaches have made a tremendous difference in my life, but one thing is for sure; they have made me uncomfortable many times. My perspective is that coaching will not always feel good. In other words, a good coach will tell you things you don't want to hear or probably don't want to do at times. It is surely true in the sports world, and it is true in the church world.

I recently had the leadership of a church we have been coaching for about 18 months ask me if they were growing "enough". The reality is, that is an unfair question. Let me again use a sports analogy. Four years ago, my college team, the University of Michigan Wolverines hired a new football coach. He brought about a much-needed radical change in philosophy to their football program. After three years, he still hasn't had a winning season and many are calling for his removal, which is ridiculous. It will take him years to change the recruiting and talent pool to appropriately reflect his different philosophy.

This church, which asked me about their growth, has been an inward focused church for decades. They were content to be a family church and isolated in their neighborhood. So as with Rich Rodriguez and the Michigan Wolverines, a radical change in philosophy will take some time to build leaders, ministries and passion for reaching the lost people in their community. That is okay.

I believe healthy churches should grow. But I also know that it takes time, sometimes a couple of years for a church to turn around a declining trend that has been inward focused. You may not see

conversions during that time, but you should see leaders being built, outward focused ministries begun and a heart for the lost being manifested in the community of faith.

So get a coach, but don't get one who makes you feel better, get one who says the hard things to make you better...