



The Mark of Excellence

Coach 'Em Up Principle:

Excellence leaves a God Mark not a Me Mark.

Training Value:

Personal Wholeness (Integrity)

Game Plan:

In FCA, we will honor and glorify God in all we do. In Colossians 3:23-24, Paul writes, “whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” The “whatever” part is hard; because it means everything we do needs to be for God not others. We need to pursue excellence in all we do - including board meetings, donor visits, directing camps, planning our day, and ministering to coaches. God deserves our best, not our leftovers.

Excellence has to come from a right heart. It comes from the inside. We think excellence is the results or the fruit of our effort, but it starts with the heart. Abraham Lincoln says it best: "I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me." Excellence comes from within.

Let's unpack excellence. If you took a one-question test on excellence, the ultimate question would be this: ***“What mark will you leave?”*** What kind of imprint will you make on others as you do ministry? An imprint is permanent mark. To make an imprint means to engrave, etch, impress or inscribe. When I was eight years old, I had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ride my older brother's motorcycle. Wanting to show him how big and tough I was, I took off at full speed! Less than 100 yards down the dirt road, the cycle's front tire hit a hole, which sent me flying! I landed in a nearby ditch, and the motorcycle landed on my back. Talk about painful! Fortunately, the curve of the ditch allowed most of my body to be spared from the impact. The only part of the motorcycle that was touching me was the muffler, which was pressing into my back. Unfortunately, since it was hot, the muffler burned through my shirt and my flesh, and I experienced a new level of pain. My brother came quickly to my rescue, which spared me from being seriously wounded. I was, however, banned from riding his bike ever again. And even though the wreck happened 36 years ago, I still have a nice burn mark on my back—the imprint of that hot muffler. What kind of man or woman does it take to make a permanent mark on our society today? When we talk about pursuing excellence, it will take persistence. Marabel Morgan said, “Persistence is the twin sister of excellence. One is a matter of quality; the other, a matter of time.” If not excellence, then what?

Excellence is not perfection, but it is the pursuit of doing our very best. If we want excellence throughout FCA, we need to be men and women of excellence. To achieve this, we must answer three questions:

1. Who do you serve?

If we answer Jesus Christ, then we need to then ask, is the Lord well pleased? Three times in Scripture we hear the Father's words “this is my beloved Son who I find all my delight.” Does God delight in our serving? We say without Christ we can do nothing, but we often do ministry as if we can do something without Christ. Is it something or nothing? It has been said, “When I try, I fail. When I trust, He succeeds.” The flesh only knows one thing – failure. The Spirit knows only one thing – victory. Are we a part of supernatural ministry or natural ministry? Let's be on guard for misplaced confidence. We need to have confidence in the Spirit not the flesh. Who do you serve? Paul reminds us in Colossians 3:23 to serve the Lord and not man.

2. How's your work?

If you have a passion for excellence, then is your work well done? In Ephesians 2:10, we know that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. These good works are God works. Howard Hendricks wrote, "Am I doing what God has prepared me to do? That is the divine secret." Doing the Lord's work with excellence is the goal. It is simply doing the work of the work with a faithful heart. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul writes: *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.* Are you an approved or an ashamed worker? To stand approved of the work, we need to be serving with standards. In FCA, we should be compelled to pursue excellence in all policies and procedure – understanding that certain things become non-negotiable. Also, we know that pursuing excellence means sacrifice.

Bertoldo de Giovanni was one the greatest sculptor of his time, and he was the teacher of the famous artist Michelangelo. Michelangelo was only 14 years old when he came to Bertoldo, but it was already obvious that he was enormously gifted. Bertoldo was wise enough to realize that gifted people are often tempted to coast rather than to grow. One day he came into the studio to find Michelangelo toying with a piece of sculpture far beneath his abilities. Bertoldo grabbed a hammer, stomped across the room, and smashed the work into thousands of pieces, shouting this unforgettable message, "Michelangelo, talent is cheap; dedication is costly!" Excellence is not available at a bargain yard sale. John Wooden, "There is no substitute for hard work. Most people have a tendency to look for shortcuts or at least for the easiest way to complete any given task. If we only put out a minimum effort, we might get by in some situations, but in the long run, we won't fully develop the talents that lie within us." How your work? Is it excellent?

3. What's your foundation?

If your answer is the Word of God, then is the Word well used? As ministers of the Gospel we need to have a passion for the Truth, and we need to handle the Truth with accuracy. In Titus 2:7, Paul writes, "Set an example of good works yourself, with integrity and dignity in your teaching." We need to have purity of the doctrine as we teach and instruct. Our ministry needs to be grounded in the Word of God. Nothing more; nothing less.

Every time we serve and lead, we leave an imprint. When we are committed to excellence, we naturally desire to leave the kind of mark on others that will have an eternal impact. We need to give our best to God, not just what we have left over after we chase our own pursuits. Our leftovers have nothing to do with excellence. We will always be tempted to hold back what is God's in order to use it for our own pleasure and benefit, but that does not honor him. Being excellent requires the total release of all our talents, gifts and abilities to the calling of becoming more like Christ. We cannot hold back or keep anything for our own glory! We must stay hungry to grow and to learn in all areas: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. When it comes to the pursuit of excellence, the ultimate question is whether we leave a "ME MARK" or "GOD MARK".

Martin Luther put it well, *"The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."* Leave the mark of Jesus. That is the path of excellence. We all must be committed to excellence and to leaving behind the imprint of Christ. What about you? Do you pursue excellence? Are you marking others with excellence?

Make a Play:

It's time to make a play. Circle up with staff and ask each other these questions.

1. Why does excellence start with the heart? What does it mean to have an excellent heart before an excellent ministry?
 2. How does the three other core values (integrity, serving teamwork) integrate with excellence?
 3. Is the Lord well pleased with your work? Why?
 4. Is your work well done? In what areas can you improve?
 5. Is the Word well used? Are you properly using the Word of God?
 6. How can FCA become a ministry of excellence? Share one way.
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