



Phil Jackson: Role Model Coach
By Jim Thompson

Watching the Lakers win the NBA title, last night I began to count the ways that Phil Jackson is a model for youth coaches.

1) He builds players' self-confidence. Trevor Ariza, who came up big in the playoffs, said he knew he wasn't going to get pulled from the game if he missed a shot, which fueled his confidence to keep playing hard. Jackson's players don't tighten up in the clutch, worried about what will happen if they miss. They play to win, not to avoid looking bad. Players don't do that if they are worrying about their coach giving up on them.

2) He develops players as leaders. Michael Jordan never won a title until Phil showed him how to make his teammates better. And now even those who called Kobe Bryant the most selfish player in the NBA, can see how Bryant has grown under Phil as a leader who makes his teammates better.

3) He doesn't let the emotion of the moment control his behavior. Phil has been called the Zen Master, sometimes mockingly, but I believe his meditation practice provides a detachment that allows him to keep his head when those around him are losing theirs (full disclosure: I meditate daily and find it helps me deal with my challenges, which admittedly are much less than those of an NBA coach).

Jackson was pummeled by the press during the playoffs-for not coaching enough, for going through the motions, for mailing it in. I took his calmness instead as a sign of someone who sees the big picture-that life is filled with unavoidable ups and downs. Overreacting to a loss can disrupt a team's momentum and damage its self-confidence. Phil retained his equanimity and didn't.

4) He is a community builder. In a videotaped talk Jackson gave for PCA nine years ago, he rarely used the word team. He talked again and again of creating a community that players wanted to be part of. His masterful handling of Dennis Rodman with the Bulls was an example of bringing out the best in a troubled and talented individual by showing him what he could be part of if he bought into the team's culture.

5) He has a sense of humor about life. At some level life is absurd and recognizing that helps keep us sane. Phil is able to keep perspective with his jokes and use of irony (which, I notice members of the media often don't get!). His splicing of popular movies with game film is both fun and effective in making points more effectively than banging a player over the head with a lesson he needs to learn.

6) He's a learner. By his own admission, he started out as a control-freak, a nasty-

snarly coach, like so many others, but he realized that it wasn't working for him. He embodies what PCA calls a "teachable spirit."

I first met Phil when he wrote me asking permission to use some of my ideas in his coaching clinics. Our mutual friend Rich Kelley had sent Phil the manuscript for my first book, *Positive Coaching*, and Phil had actually read it. He is constantly looking to learn new things, even to the point of reading a book by a guy (me) who never coached beyond the high school level.

7) He fills Emotional Tanks. Phil latched on to a PCA staple, the "Magic Ratio" (5 Emotional Tank Fillers for every criticism), and used it to turn Horace Grant's career around. Grant became a key player in the Bulls' multiple championships under Phil, and he chose to come back to play for Jackson in LA late in his career.

I often think that if we could get every youth coach to bump up his/her plus-minus ratio toward the magical 5:1, PCA could fold up its tent and declare its work over. By the way, it's called the Magic Ratio because kids with full E-Tanks do things that do indeed seem magical.

8) He grows on his players. So many coaches have an unpleasant intensity that grates on players to the point that they soon want to move on, even if they've had success with that coach. Phil's style of treating players as total human beings causes players to feel better about him the longer they play for him. Derek Fisher after last night's final game: "He doesn't try to control you as a coach. He empowers you to be who you are...He doesn't put himself in the way. He let's us do it." Earlier he said, "I love that man." Wow.

9) He's competitive in the truest, best sense of the word. Contrary to what some believe, PCA is not anti-competitive. Life is full of competition and kids need to learn to compete effectively. It is the win-at-all-cost mentality that is the enemy. Phil embodies competition in the original sense of the word: a "striving together" to be our best, rather than the degraded form of competition that David Shields calls "De-Competition," in which anything goes if it helps you win.

10) He Honors the Game. No, he is not perfect and yes, he did criticize officials' calls in the playoffs, which led to fines from the NBA. But, as much as any coach in pro sports, he coaches with an underlying respect for officials and opponents.

In his videotaped remarks to PCA nine years ago, Phil talked about being influenced by Native American culture and how tribes valued their opponents because without them they would have no one to fight. Crucial to the Bulls being able to defeat the Detroit Pistons was getting his players to respect the "Bad Boys" as worthy opponents who were giving them a gift by forcing them to play their very best to be able to compete.

11) He demonstrates moral courage-standing up publicly for what one believes is right even when it's not popular. When his (and my) alma mater, the University of North Dakota, gave him an honorary doctorate last year, he used the event as a platform to stand up for Native Americans who feel the UND nickname dishonors them.

Noting the positive influence Native Americans have had on his spirituality, he said, "We have to rethink our nickname...the Fighting Sioux because it's not a beneficial

nickname to these people. It's not beneficial to us." Phil noted that UND would still be powerful whether called the Sioux or the Flickertails. "I propose in this year of change we do the right thing."

12) He supports the PCA Movement. Phil is PCA's National Spokesperson and he donates his time and money to building the PCA Movement. When I am asked, "How much do you pay Phil Jackson to be your spokesperson?" I get the satisfaction of saying, "Nothing! He pays us!"

In Houston after a tough game against the Rockets in the Conference semifinals, he finished his press conference and walked out of the room. A reporter said she had one more question to which he replied over his shoulder, "I'm done." She said, "It's about Positive Coaching Alliance." He immediately turned and said, "I'll talk about that any time." (You can see the interview at)

Phil sees the transformation of youth sports as part of his legacy. I hope you will join the PCA Movement and help Phil Jackson and PCA make history by turning youth sports into the very best youth development experience possible.

- To become a **PCA Member**, go to <https://www.positivecoach.org/MemberNew.aspx>
- Visit [PCA's Youth Sports Spotlight blog](#) to comment on this article or to offer any thoughts on Phil Jackson and his historic 10-NBA Championship achievement.
- If you know coaches, parents and youth sports leaders who would appreciate reading this article, please forward it to them!