

Coaching Philosophies

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## Abstract

This paper will explore many aspects of coaching philosophies within sport. Developing a philosophy as a coach in any sport is a very important aspect of a coach's job. Throughout this paper I will dissect and explore many different philosophies within sports agencies, from a few current coaches, across various age groups as well as from high school associations. In addition, I will discuss many topics more thoroughly which will contribute to the formation of my philosophy for coaching. From this I will be able to develop a philosophy of my own. I will be able to better understand my own working philosophy and be able to apply it to my volleyball teams (high school to college aged girls) when coaching in the future.

## Overview

“Philosophies are the basic beliefs that guide our behavior everyday” (Vealey, 2005, pp. 20) and give our lives meaning and direction. Because coaches work with so many different types of kids, different ages and sexes, different ethnicities and backgrounds, and within different sports, each coach will have their own philosophy catered toward their individual group and their ideas. Coaches play many roles within their teams so they have to keep this in mind as well when creating a philosophy that will work best for them. It is important to establish a philosophy because it can serve as objectives for your program, set boundaries for the team (staff related), and can help justify why you do certain things. “A coaching philosophy is a work in progress – something that is constantly developing and changing as you gain additional experiences and new perspectives” (Vealey, 2005, pp. 20-21).

As coaches, it is very important for us to be able to create and work with our own philosophies. “Philosophies guide our behavior every day by helping us interpret events that happen to us, by serving as the foundation through which our lives develop meaning, and by keeping us consistent and goal-directed” (Vealey, 2005, pp. 21). Creating and actually practicing a philosophy is not an easy task. With the help of other coaches, agencies and associations’ philosophies, it will become easier to create and understand a philosophy of your own. When creating this philosophy considerations should be made based off your thoughts about the role of the sport, the objectives of sports at various levels, how to define success/role of winning, gender equity, equity for people of color, cutting players, weighing out pay-to-play, and personal ethics and sportsmanship. My philosophy will hopefully be a culmination of each of these aspects that are important when coaching.

## Application

### **The Role of Sport**

“Most children participate in sport to have fun. Other reasons most of them cite are to do something they are good at, improve their skills, get exercise and become fit, be with their friends and make new friends, and compete” (Weinberg, Gould, 2007, pp. 514). Sports can play many different roles varying from person to person. I think that sports help play roles in helping develop youth physically. Not only will they be active while they are participating, but hopefully through their sport participation they can acquire the knowledge and determination to continue and be healthy long term. As stated in *Game On*, those who exercise as teenagers are more likely to do so as adults (Farrey, 2008, pp. 71). Additionally, the long term health effects are also stated saying that,

“Physically fit men have fewer overnight hospital stays and visit their doctors less frequently than others. Not only are those who are in shape more likely to live long, they also live better. It’s been shown that thinner people make more money than heavier ones, perhaps because employers discriminate against the obese when deciding who gets promotions or choice training opportunities” (Farrey, 2008).

Farrey says it right, “We’re the fattest nation-and it all starts in preschool” (2008, pp.75). It does not help that P.E. classes are being discontinued or physical education time is being reduced in schools. Yet because our health is so important and because sports help keep the youth active and promote that lifestyle, I find that to be one of the most important roles that youth sports can play. If children are not getting the chance to be active within school, it is critical that they meet those requirements somewhere, and sport participation allows for that to happen.

In addition to fitness and physical involvement, social and emotional skills are also roles that sports can play. It is through sports where many children learn to interact with peers and share the ups and downs of practices, games and wins and losses. By participating in a team sport, youth get the feeling of acceptance. Acceptance is a very wanted and needed fulfillment within our youth. These teams allow for interaction between their peers, coaches and other adults. It is through these interactions and participation that they can learn how to appropriately act around these groups and how to handle their emotions.

“The group “culture” includes not only the formal organization culture but also the informal habits and expectations that arise from daily interactions; these informal norms may diverge from the official organizational norms and expectations. Adolescents’ perceptions of these kinds of social norms have immediate and lasting effects on their behavior” (Larson, Eccles, & Gootman, 2004, pp. 10).

Local (Greenville, NC) youth (youth 8 girls) soccer coach Jamie Quinn shared her philosophy of coaching with me:

“No matter how old you are, athletics is about having fun. If you can create an environment that makes it possible for the team members to develop a passion for the sport they are more likely to be good and come back again next year. I never want to be the type of coach that turns a sport into a job.”

I think what Jamie has said makes perfect sense and fits her age group perfectly. I like how she makes it about having fun and playing for the sake of the sport. With that age group I think it is important to make sure that it is for fun and not a job. I think I will keep in mind what she has as a philosophy to help influence and add to my own.

Other roles of sport can include developing moral values, self esteem, and self confidence. Stated by Larson, Eccles and Gootman, the Sport Friendship Quality Scale was developed by Weiss and Smith (1999) to measure six aspects of sport friendship. These aspects include self-esteem enhancement and supportiveness, loyalty and intimacy, things in common, companionship and pleasant play, conflict resolution, and conflict. “Children who perceived more positive relationships with peers in physical activity also reported more positive feelings toward physical activity, higher physical activity motivation, and higher self-worth” (2007, pp. 519). That study concluded that peer relations have a large impact on the child’s motivation for physical activity, which suggests that “promoting positive peer relationships can enhance participation in physical activity” (2007, pp. 519).

### **Functions of Sport**

The functions or objectives of sports often include fitness, entertainment, winning, fun, education (sport skills, life skills and values) and business. Each of these categories within the functions of the sport will vary and maybe even vary greatly from person to person. These will also change based off of the level and age group involved.

The youth age group is usually more concerned with just introducing the sport to the kids and having a good time. Although times are changing where teams are getting more and more competitive at younger ages, for the most part youth sports aim at the basics. With a youth group, ranking these objectives for the sport might look something like this (highest to lowest): fun, education, fitness, entertainment, winning and business. Although there is a lot of time and money spent towards youth programs and the development of youth sports, I do not find that the business end of it can surpass the importance of any of the others. It is critical however, to keep

in the mind of coaches for this age group that basic motor skills can develop greatly in a window at age 10 and 12 (Farrey, 2008, pp. 56). This age group is also a time where emotional control is addressed. Youth quickly learn the rules of the sport and how to control their tempers. Team play and the meaning of team are also greatly addressed with this age group. Youth learn what it means to be on a team and the value of the team and playing time. This is where a lot of the basics are taught for sport.

When working with an older group, say high school, competition becomes a little bit more important. The ranking might look a little something more like this: education, fitness, winning, entertainment, fun and business. I think you will find education near the top of any ranking of objective of sport because through the education you will create better athletes (skills) as well as people (life). Winning becomes more important at this age group because kids and parents become more competitive. There is also that rivalry within schools and friends where winning becomes addictive and actually quite entertaining. A high school varsity volleyball coach, Kelley Gregoriew states that her philosophy is:

“To provide student athletes with the opportunity to be successful. To teach them how to be productive as team members and learn how to be competitive. As a coaching staff our goal is to do what is best for kids. We believe that all athletes improve their athletic skills as well as their life skills. We have high expectations and set high standards for the volleyball program at Allen High School. The love for the sport and the dedication displayed by the coaches and athletes contributes to the success the Allen Eagle Volleyball Program has established” (Allen Eagles VB Team Booster Club, n.d).

Sports also function as a leisure activity/hobby. Not only do they give kids something to do, but they also keep them from getting into trouble. A lot of mischief happens during the time from school being out and dark. Many parents work leaving their children left unsupervised. Playing a sport allows supervision and time well spent (educational, fitness, friends, hobbies etc) along with learning self-discipline and respecting of rules. In addition, personal development can be enhanced by achievement, realization of self-limitations, respect of authority and social competence, all of which can be found and taught through sport.

The next age group, college, will be different yet again. This grouping will differentiate the most because this is where the peoples' jobs and schooling are dependent upon the success of the team performance. The ranking might look something more like this for college: business, winning, education, fitness, entertainment and fun. This ranking is nearly polar opposite to the other groupings. Running a college team/program becomes a business. Your job as a collegiate coach is to be successful by recruiting good student-athletes (education and fitness), keeping them physically fit so they can have peak performance and be entertaining as a whole in order to gain support from the school and community. Although you would like to have fun while doing all of this, (and if you are successful, most likely it will be fun) if your career and well-being relies on how successful your team is, the priorities get changed around. Because of this, the philosophies have to change some too. Mary Reese, assistant volleyball coach at Temple College states, "My coaching philosophy is player-oriented, each player needs to learn the best way to perform consistently and effectively, utilizing her personal strengths as well as a few new tricks" (Temple College, 2005). By this one statement alone, you can see how the dynamics of the sport has changed.

### **Defining Success**



The definition of success will also vary greatly based off the age group and level of skill you are coaching. Success is something that is earned. It is separated from winning in that it is measured by satisfaction and effort (where winning is just an outcome of a game). For the most part, winning won't be as important for the youth, as it is for the college level, but working towards success will. As seen in the rankings of objectives above, the importance of winning increases as the level and skill amplify.

Defining success in the youth age group is actually a lot less stressful. Mainly the goals at this age group are to have fun, start learning the sport and burn off some energy. Often success is measured here by how much the kids learn and pick up with the sport. Rarely is wins and losses a measure of success at this level, although wins will most likely be rewarded in some fashion. Success is completing a "season" and having a good time. Making friends and picking up/enhancing your skills in a new hobby is a great measure of success in youth sports.

When it comes to measuring success in high school, here it gets a little bit more dependent on wins and losses. Parents, players and the community start pushing for success in terms of wins and losses.

"Competition brings out both the best and the worst in people. Competition is part of life, and we face it from the day we are born until we die. Whether there is life, there is conflict, and life without rivalry, anxieties and strains simply does not exist. As long as games are played, there will be a winner and a loser, and it is everyone's lot to play both roles" (Sabock, 2005, pp. 5-6).

High school sports are becoming a lot more competitive these days, forcing wins to become the main measure of success. This is also where a lot of growth, both physically and mentally, occurs and becomes more expected to be utilized to the full potential. In addition, this is where

competitiveness starts to happen, for the sport itself and for the athletes on the squad. Less than half of all American children will play high school sports. Because of this, some success can be defined as making the team alone. Each group and coach will have different goals and different means of measuring success – for what is important to them. In the words of John Wooden (2004), “Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best you are capable of becoming” (Wooden, 2004, pp. 85). I think high school level coach of the Diamond Elite Volleyball Academy (DEVA) Ryan Summers, has a pretty good philosophy himself which also specifically addresses success.

“Volleyball should be coached the same way it is meant to be played: intensely and with a nearly obsessive focus on improving fundamentals and increasing athleticism. These are the essential keys to improvement and success on the court. Overall success, on the other hand, is much more complicated. Volleyball is one aspect in a student’s life.

Overall success is measured by the success of the individual as an athlete, but also the success of the athlete as an individual” (Wired and Designed, n.d.).

When it comes to sports in college, success is mainly measured by wins and losses. Because college sports are a business, it almost has to be that. Of course you will get success in other ways in college such as acknowledgement of academic success, but it usually gets paired with performance. However, when it comes to competing in the NCAA, there are academic requirements that must be met in order to participate. This should also be a high priority for coaches and a measure of success because even if they have the best athletes in the world, they cannot play them unless they are passing their classes. A way that the university I played at and now work at measures a type of success is through a competition with all of the sports teams. The competition includes community service, academics and life skills (workshops and lectures

to attend). The winning team each year gets a check for \$1,000 to be put towards something with their sport (extra apparel, equipment etc). I think this is a great measure of success because it measures the over-all athlete and what they do, not their performance (which is measured enough with wins and losses). This is something neat I would like to try to incorporate into my philosophy – helping make kids well-rounded athletes.

As much as we would like for success to be measured in fun ways, it is not realistic for that to happen. “Less than half of all American children will play high school sports. Of those, only 1 in 28 will go on to play any sport in college, at any level” (Farrey, 2008, pp. 31). This statement just reinforces the facts that since very few people even get the chance to play at this level, it has to be competitive.

To me, a big measure of successful will be the smiles, laughter and friendships that are made. I played volleyball in college so I know what the competition is all about. I know the importance of winning games for everyone involved. Yet, I also know that when we lost my final match of my career in the conference tournament, that we played well. I was sad that we lost, not mad. I could not be mad because we played well and tried our hardest. That to me was a measure of success. It is important for me to keep moments like that in the back of my mind when coaching and when developing a coaching philosophy. In the big scheme of life, winning is not everything. To me, improving and trying your hardest is a definition of success, at any level.

## **Equity**

Two types of equity that are very important in life and sport are gender equity and equity for people of color. Equity basically refers to fairness. Before breaking these two up and looking at them individually, I think that Sabock makes a good point saying that,

“Being fair and impartial requires treating all members of a team alike when it comes to determining who will play. You should make every effort to ensure that everyone trying out for the team has an opportunity to show how well he or she can play the game; do not predetermine who can perform well and who cannot” (2005, pp. 58-59).

Regardless of someone’s gender, race or even shape or size for that matter, everyone should be given a fair chance. It is not right if they are not given the opportunity. I really like the philosophy of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and think that it ties in with this topic. Pay particular attention to the last sentence as I think it is a great statement especially relating to allowing everyone to play. “To offer amateur sports programs through a volunteer base for all people to have the physical, mental, and moral development of amateur athletes and to promote good sportsmanship and good citizenship. Sports for All, Forever” (Amateur Athletic Union of the USA, Inc., 2009-2010).

Gender equity has become quite a big deal in the past couple of decades. With women’s participation in sport there has been a lot more involvement and push for equity (Title IX). I think that women’s involvement in sports is a good thing and they should continue to do it. Women have every right to participate as men do. However, past a certain age group I think that sports should be separated by gender. Boys and girls grow and mature at different levels, rates and to different extents. I therefore think that it is healthier, both physically and mentally, for the genders to be separated within sport. I think that girls should play against girls and boys against boys. This allows for a more even keel playing field, as well as ensuring the opportunity for everyone to still be able to play.

Another topic within gender equity is coaches. Sometimes questions arise about having coaches of the opposite sex coaching their teams. I do not necessarily see a problem with this

until a situation happens. A lot of times the opposite sex can be a good balance with the teams. I have experienced both sexed coaches, more women than men, but have had good experiences with both. I think in the past coaching has been dominated by males, but with the women movement in sports, there are a lot more women coaches. I think it is more common for men to coach women sports than for women to coach men sports teams. Women tend to stay with their same sex when coaching (what I have found from experience). However, when you do have a coach that is the opposite sex as the team is you have different rules and ways to go about doing things. For example, the coach will need to have a manager or someone (of the same sex) to go in to their locker rooms. For reasons like this it might require more work. Regardless the gender of the coach or player, like Sabock says, regardless if you are coaching boys or girls, you have to understand what makes them tick (2005, pp. 90).

### **Eliminating Players**

There are two different ways to go about eliminating players from the sport or from your team, directly and indirectly. I think any coach will tell you that one of the hardest aspects of their job is to have to cut players. No one enjoys doing it, but it is usually a part of the sport/game. I think that this aspect will also vary depending on the age and level of the athletes.

There is a fairly significant difference in the ways that kids are eliminated in sports. The first and most obvious way is directly which means just cutting them from the team. There are also two different approaches to this method and that would be to either do the more openly helpful approach or the more cowardly avoiding approach. Both methods are used on a daily basis and are needed to be used for certain situations. I think that when you have to make cuts and time permits it, it is good to be able to tell the kid in person. I think this gives it a more personal approach and you can help answer any questions for them and explain to them where

they can and need to improve. Since this approach is more personable, it is harder as a coach to do. However, I think it is a good and respectable way to let someone down if and when applicable. An example of the other approach would be to just post a list of the people (or numbers) that made the team on the wall. This way you avoid personal contact with the athletes and it saves a lot of time. I think that inevitably this approach will have to be used at some point, but I just think it is best to use it as a last resort kind of thing.

When working with the younger aged kids, I think it is more important for their involvement of a team than for winning. But I also think there is a fine line to cross to make sure that every kid gets a chance to play. You want to be able to keep as many kids that you can, while keeping everyone (parents and kids) happy. Luckily, at this level winning is not as important, so playing a kid even though they might be horrible is still okay.

At the higher levels of sport like college you do not have to deal much with eliminating players. Usually players are recruited on each team (already wanted and asked on by the coach). Sometimes there are walk-on try-outs, but are not usually done in too large of groups where you would not be able to tell the kids in person. If a current player on the team is going to be cut (for whatever reason), normally (if not always) that is done in person. There is a need to let the player know why they no longer will be participating and often there will be money or scholarship to discuss as well as a release from the team (paperwork). At this level, I do not really think it is possible to avoid the direct personal elimination, which I think is good.

### **Pay to Play**

Sport participation, like anything else is tied to money. Very rare is anything in this world free, including participation in sports. Some parents will spend thousands of dollars on their kid to keep them in sports competitively each year. Quite frankly, not everyone is capable of

spending that kind of money for their participation. Money can often separate the playing field as the kids (parents) that have it have more and better opportunities to excel in their sport. However, it can also sometimes separate the playing field by skill level in that some parents will not spend the money if they know their child is not that good and it is not worth it to pay for their level.

I support sports and programs that try to keep the costs of playing down. Especially with the economy these days most people do not have a lot of extra money lying around. You do not want kids to lose out on the opportunity to be able to participate in these activities because they cannot afford it. That is why I think the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) is such a great and widely used organization. This organization allows you to join for \$12. This organization is able to operate for such low costs because they rely on the community and volunteers to organize and coach the teams. This program is also across the United States and I think most people know about it and almost all athletes do too, or have at least heard of it. As the philosophy of a high school volleyball coach, Christy Harkins even mentions AAU in her bit.

“It is the philosophy of the Glacier High School Athletic Department to support our MHSAsponsored high school sports before promoting non-school sports (club) each season. We believe that high school students should be well-rounded athletes and participate in many diverse sports and activities. As volleyball coaches, we encourage our athletes to participate in these spring sports at GHS to represent their school, to learn new skills, and compete in a different arena from the volleyball court. We believe these skills will better serve an athlete for the life-long purpose of being an athlete and maintaining a high level of personal fitness, rather than the short-term goal of success in one sport at the high school level. During the club volleyball season, the high school sponsored sports are: Track and Field, Softball and Tennis. HOWEVER, if an athlete does not wish to

participate in Track and Field, Softball or Tennis at Glacier High and is interested in club volleyball, we would like to provide information to these athletes so they can decide if they wish to play AAU” (Kalispell Public Schools District 5, n.d.).

What I like about this philosophy of this high school team is that first and foremost they promoting sport within their school. Often coaches even at the high school level do not support their athletes playing other sports. Since high school is getting so competitive they want their kids to focus in only on their sport. I think it is great that Christy realizes that playing other sports will make the student athletes well-rounded. I then like how she offers other opportunities where to go if the students chose to play a club season. I think that AAU is a great opportunity for athletes to continue to compete when not in a school sport season.

### **Personal Ethics and Sportsmanship**

“I do not believe anyone can be a dishonest, unethical person and still be a good coach. To deliberately break rules, to cheat, to be unethical is to violate a basic trust that is inherent in fulfilling the role of the coach” (Sabock, 2005, pp. 63). Ethics is dealing with values and moral principles, what is right and wrong, and what is accepted as a professional standard or conduct. Ethical behavior often gets questioned in athletics as often people will do almost anything to win. I however will not, and hold the highest level for ethical behavior of myself and the kids I coach.

Ethical standards are pushed in athletics on a daily basis. This often happens because the definition of “accepted professional standards of conduct” is left open to interpretation (Sabock, 2005, pp. 2). When participating in athletics, it is a good opportunity for kids to learn about honesty, integrity, dignity, rules and ethical behavior. Instilling these qualities in kids will build their character not only for the sport, but for their lives. Coaches need to teach kids the right way, because it is also possible for them to learn the wrong side of these values.



“Ethical behavior is not inborn. Children must be taught right from wrong and in athletics it is the sole responsibility of you, the coach, to teach it” (Sabock, 2005, pp. 66). A common phrase that would be considered unethical that I am sure you have heard before is “If you’re not cheating, you’re not trying.” This would be something that I would not want to tolerate or promote in any way. I think that cheating is wrong and I will not put up with it.

Ethical conduct has a lot to deal with what coaches do for their job and what they let kids get away with. The NCAA has stepped in a lot with the college sports to help ensure that there are no poor ethic issues. One example of ethical issues is dealing with sports enhancing drugs and the use of illegal drugs. The NCAA has a list of banned substances that the athletes are required to follow. Random drug testing occurs in order to help enforce these rules. However, the NCAA only works with athletes in the college level. This means that there is room for error in the younger divisions. I think that it is fairly rare for younger kids to be using performance enhancing drugs or banned substances, but as coaches, it is our duty to reinforce the ramifications and punishments (must be a disciplinarian) if such actions happen.

In addition to drug use, athlete recruitment is also often an issue. This relates to both high school and college sports. I think that high school coaches are now trying to recruit good kids to their high school so they can play for them. I have mixed feelings about this one. I think that if a coach does not go out of their way to recruit a kid, then it is okay. I know that when I work at middle school/high school volleyball camps athletes from different areas and schools come to our schools’ camp. I would not consider this to be unethical or necessarily recruitment, as the kid came to us and potentially could see why they would want to attend there. Yet, I do think that other types of high school recruiting do occur, and I find that to be wrong. When it comes to college coaches, there are many rules and guidelines that they need to follow when recruiting. In

all, there are many rules in place to help coaches follow the rules when it comes to recruiting, practicing, behavior, drugs (all types) and more. It is up to the coaches to do what is right and up to the NCAA, administration and other coaches to help reinforce these rules set in place.

Sportsmanship goes along with ethical behavior in that it promotes fair play by behaving with the spirit of the game. By having poor sportsmanship and psyching out or upsetting the opposing team, it is referred to as gamesmanship. Taunting, talking trash and having bad attitudes are all types of gamesmanship. These actions are more apparent and used in sports where there is physical contact. Although I do not coach a physical contact sport, there are still opportunities for this to occur in volleyball. I find it important to be good sports and promote good sportsmanship. The American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) has a good philosophy that includes this good behavior: “AYSO’s philosophies are living tenets that separate it from other sports organizations. They are Everyone Plays, Balanced Teams, Open Registration, Positive Coaching, Good Sportsmanship and Player Development” (AYSO, 2009).

#### Summary

“Research has shown that coaches typically state their philosophies to emphasize development and experience (fun), but behaviors often emphasize performance (winning) over the other 2 objectives” (Vealey, 2005, pp. 16). I understand how coaches and people can get caught up on winning. Winning is an adrenaline high and a great feeling of accomplishment. However, there is so much more to a game and being athletes and coaches than just winning. Winning is a part of the experience you work towards. I want to be able to work towards winning but not coach to win. I want to coach to teach in hopes of winning both on and off the court. I want to promote positive experiences and a healthy lifestyle. I hope to lead by example and help

instill good qualities in the kids I coach. I think that the assistant volleyball coach at Winthrop University, Chuck Rey, has a great philosophy,

“To teach life lessons through volleyball; by passing on my love and passion for the game; to instill in a team fundamentals, discipline, and an internal motivation; develop an unwavering daily work ethic that extends beyond the court into a complete intellectual, physical, and nutritional regimen; adopt a positive , respectful, and considerate attitude for each other and for those we come in contact with so that the team may continually improve in unity towards a common goal” (Volleyball Coach Chuck Ray, n.d.).

I think that this philosophy hits most of the points that a good coaching philosophy should have. By talking to different people, doing some reading, and searching on websites, I have been able to come across many coaching philosophies. I have learned and compared ways I would like to preach and ways I would like to avoid. By doing this work I believe I am able to more strongly create a better and more realistic coaching philosophy for my athletes and me.

After combining all of the researched information about philosophies, beliefs about the role of sport, objectives of sports, definition of success and winning, gender equity, equity for people of color, cutting players, pay-to-play, and personal ethics and sportsmanship, I think I have been able to come up with a well thought out and complete philosophy. My current philosophy for the older volleyball girls that I coach is:

“To lead by example by teaching the skills and technique needed to be successful in the sport of volleyball and the bigger game of life. I will inspire my athletes to play with the heart and dedication that will make not only themselves proud but their coaches, family and community too. I will teach my girls to succeed through preparation, teamwork,

focus, attitude, athleticism, effort and passion. I will give every girl every opportunity to set them up to be the best they can be both on and off the court.”

I feel very confident that my newly created coaching philosophy is a great start to my coaching career. I look forward to using it and tweaking it over time as I face new challenges and grow through my coaching experiences. The German philosopher Goethe once said, “If you treat people as they are, they will stay as they are, but if you treat them as they were what they could be, they will become what they ought to be” (Sabock, 2005, pp. 84).

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