



VIEWPOINT

# Bob McKillop: Teaching leadership on and off the court

BY BOB MCKILLOP *SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER*

SEPTEMBER 22, 2017 04:12 PM



Coach McKillop works to instill leadership skills in his players that will extend to other areas of their lives.  
J. ANTHONY ROBERTS *AP*



Listen to this article now

02:24

Powered by [Trinity Audio](#)

I coach an NCAA Division I basketball team, and it's a time when, all around us, we are fighting to take back leadership. It's a battle, not over who we should elect, but what it means to lead. This struggle extends across our campuses, our communities and our nation. Our players and our neighbors alike seek leaders who will encourage and support them as they pursue their dreams and do so while living an honorable life. Instead they see from our leaders a cascade of style, pettiness and a dearth of substance.

Our experience, and that of other coaches entrusted with guiding young student-athletes applies across our society: Leading allows freedom but requires accountability. It inspires confidence but teaches humility. It demands a foundation of trust and commitment and care – by the leader and those under his or her charge. These are powerful tools with which leaders can surmount the most vexing obstacles, such as entitlement and arrogance and a lack of honor and integrity.

We teach our players that they must not just play the game, they must see the game, the whole court. Early on, they struggle because they come from an experience in which a parent tells them, or a “street agent” whispers in their ear, that they are the next Steph Curry. When that prediction fails to materialize, the collective instinct is to grab the remote. Switch the channel. Change the coach. Move to a different school. We witness this when a disgruntled group calls to remove a school principal or oust an elected official. Our team didn't win. Let's kick somebody out.

#### TOP ARTICLES





SKIP AD

Leadership is not fame and fortune. It is a daily battle against the temptations and demons that invite you to surrender what is honorable.

## NC Opinions newsletter

Commentary that's driving the conversations  
across our state.

**SIGN UP**

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google  
[Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

Leaders must create a culture of accountability balancing freedom with responsibility. Responsibility comes before freedom. We craft alignments and plays yet teach and nurture the freedom to make decisions within each play. The outcome falls on their shoulders. Step back further. Expand that view. On campus they live free of their parents' daily oversight, probably for the first time, but they must meet weighty obligations, such as Davidson College's distinctive honor code.

Our players have trouble finding that balance outside. Love and discipline struggle to exist side by side. Parents often fail to love with discipline or the reverse. Outside the home, our players see in our society, in living color every day, what they do not want to become as leaders: arrogant, self-aggrandizing and unwilling to listen to a different view.

Young people like our players need examples and guidance in leading lives with honor and integrity. This may seem like a small example, but when the team is on the road, no one leaves their hotel room a mess, littered with pizza boxes and empty drink bottles. Someone has to clean that up, we remind them. That person is someone's aunt or uncle, sister or brother, mom or dad. A simple guideline, but it serves as one of the building blocks of conduct and leadership. It inspires and nurtures an attitude about how to act, how to live, how to lead.

Perhaps the most powerful guidance we can instill in tomorrow's leaders is to understand that time and love are their two greatest gifts. When you have time, it becomes easier to love. When you love, time stands still. All else follows: the faith of those around you, the openness to see other perspectives, the patience to solve problems larger than yourself. Every day is an opportunity to spend these gifts. Treasure them and use them wisely. Teach this and live this and our battle for leadership can be won.

Clean in front of your doorstep and the world will be a cleaner place.

## All-access digital subscription

Connect to local news for just \$1 a month for 3 months

[VIEW OFFER](#)

*McKillop is the head coach of the Davidson College men's basketball team.*

[COMMENTS](#) 

[READ NEXT](#)

[TRENDING STORIES](#)

Concord police officer dead,