

THE BIG IDEAS

Coach Maslow
On the football field.

A Winning Philosophy
What's yours?

Oops. Fired Again.
But only 5 times.

Win Forever.
The philosophy arrives.

Practice Is Everything
Period.

In the Absence of Fear
That's the way we want to play.

The Only One
Be you.



Win Forever

Live, Work, and Play Like a Champion

BY PETE CARROLL WITH YOGI ROTH · PORTFOLIO © 2011 · 256 PAGES

“The process of self-discovery that was necessary to formulate my vision, and the power of having a philosophy has given me a confidence I didn’t have before. One of the keys to success lies in knowing and believing in yourself. When you are confident and you trust in who you are, you can perform to the best of your ability, and that is exactly what I plan to do. Whether you are coaching the USC Trojans or the Seattle Seahawks, working at your job or running a household, all you should ever strive for is to be the best you can be . . . and that is the essence of what it means to Win Forever.”

~ Pete Carroll from *Win Forever*

Pete Carroll.

Super Bowl-winning coach of the Seattle Seahawks. Super inspiring guy.

Pete wrote this book after an incredibly successful decade coaching the USC Trojans (thankfully he started at USC after I left UCLA—go Bruins!) and right before he started coaching the Seahawks—a team that had won 9 games in the 2 seasons before he showed up.

He basically called his shot—quickly turning the team around and winning a Super Bowl after a few seasons. That’s remarkable.

This book captures the essence of his philosophy: To *Win Forever by Always Competing*. It’s an inspiring semi-autobiographical look at his journey in life and in football to craft the philosophy that now guides his success on and off the field.

If you’re into sports, you’ll definitely love it. Even if you’re not, it’s a great read packed with goodness.

I’m excited to share a handful of my favorite Big Ideas and tie them back to other teachers we profile in these Notes so let’s jump straight in!

COACH MASLOW ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD

“The top level of Maslow’s ladder is what he called the level of self-actualization. This is the level where a person’s needs have all been met to the degree where he or she is liberated to go out and make an impact on the world.

It is also the point where people, in a host of different ways, begin to strive to be the best people they can possibly be. When we reach this level, we can begin to have access to what Maslow called “peak experiences,” or moments of great happiness and high performance. At this point people can begin to actualize moments of full potential.

From a coaching perspective, one aspect of Maslow’s findings influenced how I looked at players. Maslow is widely considered to have been the first psychologist to study happy, healthy people—from regular folks to extraordinary minds like Albert Einstein. He wanted to understand how

“I knew that the first step in doing great things was affirming the belief that great things are possible.”

~ Pete Carroll

"We were far more wary of setting expectations too low than of setting them too high, and by placing great expectations on our student-athletes, our coaching staff had the belief they could field a championship team year after year."

~ Pete Carroll

they were able to be happy and successful in their lives. I was intrigued by that thought and would begin to look at my players with that new perspective.

What I learned about Maslow's insights challenged me to start asking: *What if my job as a coach isn't so much to force or coerce performance as it is to create situations where players develop the confidence to set their talents free and pursue their potential to its full extent? What if my job as a coach is really to prove to these kids how good they already are, how good they could possibly become, and that they are truly capable of high-level performance?"*

That's so cool.

Coach [Maslow](#) on the football field.

Pete talks about how inspired he was by Maslow as a graduate student/coach at the University of the Pacific. He was particularly inspired by Maslow's [Toward a Psychology of Being](#) (check out our Notes on that book + another book by Maslow called [Motivation and Personality](#)).

As you probably know by this point, Maslow was kinda the Grand-Godfather of the Positive Psychology movement. Way before researchers were looking at how to help people optimize their lives, he was studying the healthiest among us and asking, *How can we all be like THAT?*

At the peak of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the need to self-actualize. Here's how he puts it: *"Musicians must make music, artists must paint, poets must write if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves. What human beings can be, they must be. They must be true to their own nature. This need we may call self-actualization... It refers to man's desire for self-fulfillment, namely to the tendency for him to become actually in what he is potentially: to become everything one is capable of becoming."*

As we become healthier human beings and satisfy our lower needs for safety and survival and love and esteem, the need to actualize our potential becomes as real as the need for oxygen.

What one CAN be, one MUST be.

Pete brought that wisdom to the football field—making his primary job as a coach all about helping his athletes experience their own greatness, to perform at their highest levels and to actualize their potential.

YOUR OWN WINNING PHILOSOPHY

"I slammed the book shut, stunned.

It had been six months since I'd been fired as the head coach of the New England Patriots and in the summer of 2000 I was trying to figure out what to do next with my life. I was reading a book by the legendary basketball coach John Wooden.

It took him sixteen years to figure it out, I told myself, but once he did, he absolutely knew it. After that, he rarely lost, and he went on to win ten of the next twelve national championships. It seemed he won forever.

Looking back, I had been feeling all but down and out. Suddenly everything had changed.

I reached for a pad of paper and started writing. What Coach Wooden had done that so impressed me was to pull together his own vision, philosophy, and belief system into a detailed plan for winning. Once he had it, he went on, year after year, to build teams that were almost unstoppable. I needed to come up with a plan of my own. I needed to develop my own winning philosophy and design a plan for implementing it. I started that afternoon."

Those are the very first words of the book.

I remember being fired up when I first listened to them and again when I re-read the book.

"The power of affirmations is incredibly strong. Because I have always believed that what you expect is usually what you get, what you focus on is what you draw to yourself."

~ Pete Carroll

Imagine that. When we think of Coach Wooden (who ESPN ranked as THE best coach of the 20th century, effectively making him the greatest coach ever), we think of his 10 championships in 12 seasons.

We pretty much NEVER think about the fact he coached at UCLA for 16 (!) seasons before he won his first title. And, he coached for a number of years before even showing up at UCLA.

In a fixed-mindset society, we like to think that greatness is born, that little or no effort is put in by those who achieve great things. But that's NEVER the case. That's the first point.

The second point: Once Coach [Wooden](#) figured it out, he FIGURED IT OUT. Hah! He was almost unstoppable. As Pete says, it was as if he could win forever. Now, Pete just needed to figure out HIS vision, and philosophy and plan to implement it.

Guess what? The same thing holds true for us. WE need to figure out *our* philosophy for being unstoppable—for creating an optimal life. We need to figure out what we're doing when we're ON—the fundamentals we're rockin' and the thoughts and behaviors we engage in that help us perform at our best.

So, what's your vision for *your* life? Your philosophy for optimizing + actualizing? Your plan to put it in action so you can win forever and experience higher and higher (and more consistent) levels of happiness, meaning and mojo?!

Bust out your pad of paper and get on that! :)

OOPS. FIRED AGAIN.

"Unfortunately, I was still learning how to be a head coach while in New England. As with the Jets, I did not know myself well enough to teach my philosophy to the owner, the front office, and the support staff. After all I had been through, I was still searching for the exact vision and philosophy that would ensure my future success. As hard as it is to admit, I needed those challenges and some adversity to bring forth my truths, soon to be revealed."

That's so good.

Get this: Pete was fired FIVE times before leading USC to its extraordinary success. FIVE (!!!) times. As he says, he needed those challenges and adversity to bring forth his truths.

That's how it is for all of us. We need to look at failures as stepping stones to our success—challenging us to get stronger and more clear on who we are and what we're committed to.

[Robert Emmons](#) is one of the world's leading scholars in the positive psychology movement. Here's how he frames the importance of challenges in his great book, *Thanks!* (see Notes): *"It is relatively easy to feel grateful when good things are happening, and life is going the way we want it to. A much greater challenge is to be grateful when things are not going so well, and are not going the way we think they should. Anger, bitterness, and resentment seem to be so much easier, so much more a natural reaction in times like these..."*

The religious traditions encourage us to do more than react with passivity and resignation to loss and crisis; they advise us to change our perspective, so that our suffering is transformed into an opportunity for growth. Not only does the experience of tragedy give us an exceptional opportunity for growth, but some sort of suffering is also necessary for a person to achieve maximal psychological growth. In his study of self-actualizers, the paragons of mental wellness, the famed humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow noted that "the most important learning lessons... were tragedies, deaths, and trauma... which forced change in the life-outlook of the person and consequently in everything that he did.""

Sounds an awful lot like what Pete just described, eh?

Back to YOU. Are you experiencing any challenges in your life and/or ruminating about challenges from the past?

Quit beating yourself up and start seeing the opportunities for GROWTH inherent in those setbacks. We all have them. The best among us use them as fertilizer for our seed of potential. Let's do *that*. :)

WIN FOREVER

"Perhaps the most powerful weapon in the Win Forever philosophy is the drive to constantly be looking for ways to improve."

~ Pete Carroll

"At the base of the Win Forever pyramid, the foundation is the philosophy. I collected all of the things that I believed were important in my life and in football and from that I derived the philosophy for Win Forever. What Win Forever means to me is aspiring to be the best you can be, or as I like to refer to it, "maximizing your potential." But Winning Forever is not about the final score; it's about competing and striving to be the best. If you are in this pursuit, then you're already winning."

Winning Forever.

It's NOT about the final score. Period. It's about being in the game, striving to be your best and using every moment as an opportunity to get just a little closer to actualizing your potential.

A couple other key aspects of Pete's philosophy include the idea to "Always Compete" and to strive to "do things better than they've ever been done before."

Let's break that down for a moment.

First, there's "Always."

And when Pete says "Always" he means ALWAYS.

Use every.single.moment. as an opportunity to compete with yourself (!) to see if you can do things better than you've ever done them before.

Super inspiring. Reminds me of the Greek word that sums up my entire philosophy: Areté. We come back to this word/concept again and again throughout these Notes.

Basic idea: Guys like Socrates and Plato and Aristotle told us that if we want happiness, a sense of FLOURISHING and well-being, we need to live with areté.

The word directly translates as "virtue" or "excellence," but it has a deeper meaning—something closer to "expressing the highest version of yourself moment to moment to moment."

THAT's where the magic is.

Always Compete. (Always!!!)

Moment to moment to moment you are capable of expressing a certain version of yourself.

DO THAT. Be THAT version of yourself.

To the extent you don't, there's a gap between what you were capable of being and what you actually were in that moment. It's in that gap (and only (!) in that gap) that regret, anxiety, depression and all the other ick sauce exists.

Close the gap and you actualized your potential in that moment. Do that consistently and you're going to blow yourself away—feeling extraordinarily good, confident and capable as you march toward maximizing your potential.

Want to Win Forever—experiencing a higher, more consistent level of happiness, meaning and mojo (and every other measure of personal and professional success)? Live with areté. Always compete—striving to do things better than you've ever done them before.

PRACTICE IS EVERYTHING

"Our players learned to compete one snap at a time, one practice at a time, and ultimately, one game at a time. When we focused like that, we were able to achieve our best results and play at our full potential."

~ Pete Carroll

"Practice is Everything" is one of the core tenets of the Win Forever philosophy. We want to create an environment that will permit each of our players to reach his maximum potential, and one of the ways we do that is by practicing with great focus. A player who is fully prepared on the practice field will feel ready to meet whatever comes his way on game day and thus, feel more confident and able to minimize distractions of fear or doubt."

Practice is Everything.

Pete shares some super inspiring stories about how he runs his practices and keeps his players going at full throttle and pushing the outer reaches of their potential all the time to condition them for game time. (Amazing stuff.)

Coach Wooden taught the same thing.

He didn't focus on winning championships. He focused on trying to make today's practice PERFECT—knowing that if you can string together a set of masterpiece practices, you're going to do just fine come game time.

(But if you're constantly leaning too far forward and thinking about the outcomes you're after, you'll be distracted and fail to prepare adequately and under perform. But only every time.)

Here's how [Wooden](#) put it: "When I was teaching basketball, I urged my players to try their hardest to improve on that very day, to make that practice a masterpiece.

Too often we get distracted by what is outside our control. You can't do anything about yesterday. The door to the past has been shut and the key thrown away. You can do nothing about tomorrow. It is yet to come. However, tomorrow is in large part determined by what you do today. So make today a masterpiece. You have control over that.

This rule is even more important in life than basketball. You have to apply yourself each day to become a little better. By applying yourself to the task of becoming a little better each and every day over a period of time, you will become a lot better. Only then will you will be able to approach being the best you can be. It begins by trying to make each day count and knowing you can never make up for a lost day."

Always compete, eh?

PLAYING IN THE ABSENCE OF FEAR

"A head coach's primary objective is to orchestrate the overall mentality of his team. Great teams commonly display an air of confidence that separates them from others. They have earned the right to be confident through their hard work and success. The best teams utilize that confidence to share a feeling where they not only expect to win they *know* they are going to win. That knowing is what allows a team to play in the absence of fear. That concept was the main objective and the ultimate focus throughout my nine years at USC and will also be now in Seattle."

Confidence.

The word comes from the Latin *con-* (expressing intensive force) + *fidere* (trust). It basically means INTENSE TRUST in oneself—which is EARNED via hard work and *knowing* you've been showing up and doing your best moment to moment to moment. (ALWAYS COMPETE!)

It's that tenacious commitment to constantly striving to do your best that allows you to relax and, as Pete says, "Let it rip!" come game time.

Here's to the intense trust that's a by-product of doing your best day in and day out!

"Listen to your heart, trust your intuition, and allow yourself to be fascinated by the adventure of finding the real you. It's the journey to discover your personal truth that will make all the difference."

~ Pete Carroll

THE ONLY ONES DOING IT

"I remember hearing an interview with the late, great guitar player and leader of the band, Jerry Garcia. I can't remember exactly what question the interviewer asked him, but it was something along the lines of "How do you feel about being possibly the greatest rock-and-roll band of all time?" A classic softball question, but rather than responding with the usual fluff, Jerry said something I'll never forget. "No, man," he answered, ever so relaxed. "That's not how we think of ourselves at all. We don't want to be the best ones doing something—we want to be the only ones doing it."

That cool reply stuck in my head. And as I thought about it over the years, I came to realize what an important concept Garcia was onto. The best performers, whether athletes, entertainers, or anybody else trying to do anything well, are the ones who aren't trying to win by playing someone else's game. Each person is made up of a unique combination of strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and talents, and any one of us can only truly maximize our potential in the context of that individual makeup. That's why it doesn't make sense to think about competition in the context of any one opponent: If you are really in a Win Forever mind-set, the only comparison that matters is yourself. Your goal should be to maximize your potential and your performance as a permanent way of being, rather than just in terms of individual victories."

What would your life look like if you quit trying to be the best at something (relative to others) and simply tried to be the best version of yourself?

Let's focus on fearlessly stepping into the next best version of ourselves as we actualize our potential and give our greatest gifts in greatest service to the world.

Here's to Winning Forever!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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About the Author of "Win Forever"

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Pete Carroll is the coach of the Seattle Seahawks. He was previously the head coach of the USC Trojans. He has also been the head coach of the New York Jets and the New England Patriots and defensive coordinator of the San Francisco 49ers.

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.