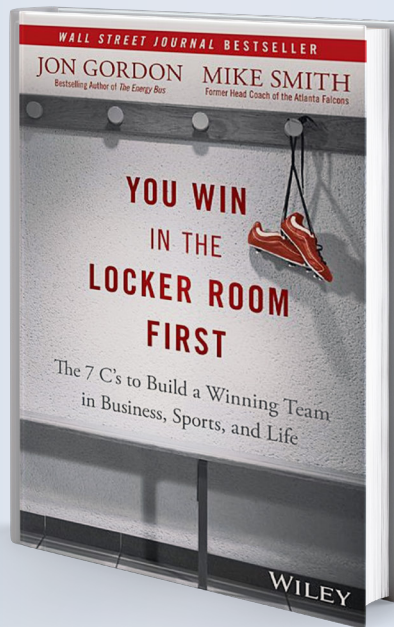


# BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



## You Win in the Locker Room First By Jon Gordon and Mike Smith

Jon Gordon's best-selling books and talks have inspired readers and audiences around the world. His principles have been put to the test by numerous Fortune 500 companies, professional and college sports teams, school districts, hospitals, and non-profits.

NFL head coach Mike Smith led one of the most remarkable turnarounds in NFL history. Under Smith's leadership, the Falcons earned an 11–5 record in his first season and would go on to become perennial playoff and Super Bowl contenders earning Smith AP Coach of the Year in 2008 and voted Coach of the Year by his peers in 2008, 2010 and 2012.

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## The 7 C's to Build a Winning Team

Looking to transform your organization? Why not study the work of two men who have done exactly that, everywhere from the locker rooms of NFL success stories to the boardrooms of major Fortune 500 companies worldwide? That's what you get with *You Win in the Locker Room First: The 7 C's to Build a Winning Team in Business, Sports, and Life*.

Mike Smith is a former NFL head coach responsible for one of the most remarkable and historic team turnarounds in the history of the league. Before he joined the Atlanta Falcons as head coach in 2008, the team had gone 4-12 for the previous season— continuing a losing tradition that had never seen them string together two consecutive seasons of better than 50% win records. Under Smith's transformative locker room leadership, the team immediately earned an 11-5 record, became constant playoff contenders, and made Mike Smith an AP Coach of the Year and peer-voted Coach of the Year three times— in 2008, 2010, and 2012.

Partnering with Smith is Jon Gordon, a best-selling author and speaker on the subject of leadership, personal transformation, and success. His message and principles have made their way into Fortune 500 boardrooms, professional sports teams, non-profit organizations, and more. He's authored 17 best-selling books and been featured on CNN, The Today Show, CNBC, and more.

But despite all of the accolades brought to the table by these two authors, all that really matters is whether this book has 'the goods.' Does it deliver on its promise to help readers build a winning team in business, sports, and life? In most respects, it does so with aplomb. *You Win in the Locker Room First* is a book packed with inspiration, motivation, and guidance for leaders from all backgrounds and in all industries or positions to help transform their organizations from the inside out.

In a compelling and easy-to-follow step by step format, the authors lay out a foundation for building a stable and successful organization, then build on each level with a practical framework that helps leaders succeed. Don't let the simplistic "7 C's" format fool you— Smith and Gordon have dug deep into both



their own experiences and research on leadership to deliver a truly actionable and in-depth guide to leading.

## Culture

After an inspiring introductory section that will excite all but the most stony and skeptical readers, Smith and Gordon dive into their self-developed “7 C’s” of building a winning organization. First up? Culture, the much-discussed but often-understood foundation to all great and lasting organizations.

*You Win in the Locker Room First* approaches culture, as it approaches much of organizational theory, with an emphasis on starting from within. They advocate for engaging and encouraging everyone to be involved, from the boardroom to the locker room, and ensuring that everyone around you knows your vision, your purpose, your beliefs, and what you stand for. They make a compelling case that once you know what you stand for, and you and your team know what your team stands for, decisions are much easier to make and require less in-the-moment debate or back-and-forth.

Finally, they emphasize that building a great culture isn’t a one-and-done task. You have to live it, value it, reinforce it, and fight for it every day and in every decision you make. That’s a lesson many startups in particular could stand to remember.

## Contagious

The next C? ‘Contagious.’ This might not be the most positive buzzword in the world of the pandemic, but Smith and Gordon aren’t talking about a virus— they’re talking about ideas and attitudes, which spread just as rapidly and can have just as big of an impact. It’s up to leaders to decide whether the contagions they spread are positive or negative.

The way they put it? “Decide to be a dose of Vitamin C, instead of a germ.”

This memorable message is expanded to speak to the importance of sharing your vision, mission, purpose, and your enthusiasm with your team. When possible, they go further to recommend developing that vision, mission, and purpose as a unit, creating even more buy-in and making the optimism and enthusiasm even more contagious.

In this section, Smith and Gordon memorably describe leadership as ‘the transfer of belief and attitude,’ a succinct way of communicating what makes leadership so important, and so powerful. As for negative attitudes? “Weed negativity from your team,” they write. “Confront, transform, and remove the energy vampires and implement a No Complaining policy.”

## Consistent

The next C stands for consistency, and this is perhaps one of the strongest sections of the book. The concept of consistency isn’t discussed much in books and talks on leadership, which is a mistake. In the world of corporate leadership, particularly

in start-ups but even in established enterprises, employees are constantly dealing with changes in management, leadership, executives, and team organization, not to mention re-brands, new products, new directions, and other transformations.

In order to help guide teams through these constant changes and permutations, a leader needs to demonstrate consistency— through the wins, through the losses, and through the unexpected storms that every company must weather.

“Address the disease of complacency,” the authors write. “Let go of the past [and] create a fresh start each year. Don’t allow your team to rest on their past success. Focus on continuous and consistent improvement. Stay humble and hungry.”

As in all things, leaders set the tone for all of these goals. Smith and Gordon advise that you ‘be the same leader whether you are winning or losing. Stick to your principles and philosophy through adversity and challenges.”

This is a powerful message, one that’s woefully underserved in the existing market of leadership texts. By including it in *You Win in the Locker Room First*, Smith and Gordon have instantly set apart their book from many others in the same genre and with the same end goal.

## Communicate

If consistency is a topic rarely covered in leadership books, communication is perhaps over-discussed. Still, *You Win in the Locker Room First* manages to mine fresh perspectives on communication as it pertains to effective leadership.

For example, Smith and Gordon touch on a vital insight that, when ignored, can absolutely derail an organization: “Where there is a void in communication, negativity will fill it.”

This is all too true in organizations both small and large, brand-new and well-established. When teams don’t get clear communication from the higher levels of management, they’re left to make assumptions— and those assumptions will rarely be positive. ‘Management doesn’t care, management has no direction, management doesn’t respect us enough to keep us in the loop.’

This book also reminds leaders that communication must go both ways— as important as it is to communicate with your team collectively and individually, your team must also feel comfortable communicating with you, their leader. The best way to do this is to reward their communication by genuinely listening, asking questions, and seeking to learn from them at every interaction.

## Connect

This section could be considered an extension of the previous one, but it involves going deeper than just surface-level communication to develop true connections with teams.

“Understand that creating a connected team is one of the most important things you can do,” the authors write. “Team beats talent when talent isn’t a team.”



# You can't just be committed—you have to consciously seek out and find ways to show that commitment on a regular basis. ”

And while Smith and Gordon don't advocate for doing away with technology-based communication methods, they stress that they cannot entirely replace face-to-face communication, in-person team building, and non-work events outside of the workspace when and where possible.

They also insightfully remind leaders not to assume relationships are strong. Leaders must always continue to foster, feed, and help grow connections with fellow leaders and teams. Otherwise, those relationships are likely to wither and fade away—even without your knowledge.

## Commit

The penultimate item in the list of the “7 C's” proves to be one of the most compelling, even as it's the most simple. Commit to your people. Commit to your mission. Commit to your organization. Most of all, commit to the principles outlined in the rest of the book. That's the overarching message of this section, that as a leader your commitment must be greater than anyone else's in your organization. More than that, it must be felt in everything you do. You can't just be committed—you have to consciously seek out and find ways to show that commitment on a regular basis. Demonstrate feelings through actions. Look for opportunities to serve your team and put them first. After all, “You don't have to be great to serve, but you have to serve to be great.” The authors end this section with a stark reminder for all leaders: Lose your ego and take ownership, instead of blaming others.

## Care

Finally, Smith and Gordon remind leaders to care. Create a culture of caring. They stress that when you truly care about your team members, they will perform at a much higher level—it's been proven in study after study.

“Value each team member as a person, not a number,” they write. “Be a transformational leader instead of a transactional leader.” This does not, the authors remind us, mean that you can't be tough. In the world of business, the most important kind of love is tough love. When you build a foundation of caring, those ‘tough love’ moments will never force a rift in your team, because everyone will know that it's coming from a genuine place and a desire to make the team better.

## The Big C: Coaching

Gordon and Smith separate one additional C from the others, and for good reason. Coaching, which they call ‘the big C,’ brings the others together and transforms the principles and

ideas listed before into action and leads to a team that wins.

According to the authors, coaching creates culture. They stress the importance of coaching with optimism and positivity, a message that's long overdue in today's climate of negativity, pessimism, and global challenges. When you consistently coach and mentor with trust, you strengthen your employees' trust not only in you but in themselves. By helping them grow through the adversity your organization will inevitably face, you show that you can be committed to their growth and progress. In essence, the message here is that by caring, truly caring, about your employees and people, you empower them to become everything they're capable of becoming.

This section of serves to effectively tie together much of what came before it, and the result is that the reader is left with an inspired sense of purpose as a leader—not only to help their company grow, but to help the people within it grow personally and professionally.

## Conclusion

Gordon and Smith have created an action plan for leaders, honed in the high-stakes world of the NFL as well as the boardroom, that will help them create a powerful culture, be positively contagious in their mission, be consistent in their leadership, communicate more effectively, connect with the people that surround them, commit to those people and their mission, and show real care for them as individuals while fostering that care among everyone at the organization.

Overall, this book will help leaders of any organization—big or small—realize they can never truly build a winning team without character at its core, supported by talent and continually nurtured by coaching and mentorship. If you're seeking guidance on how to be the leader you've always aspired to be, *You Win in the Locker Room First* is an incredibly effective guide for helping you—and your people—get there.