

Using Coach Woodens' Philosophy in Law Enforcement

By David A Crisler Jr.

Introduction

Have you ever been the subject of the "Epic Butt-chewing"? I luckily can count on one hand the number of these I have received in my over 21 years in law enforcement. Conversely I can count on my other hand the number of times in my career the number of these I have delivered those same "epic butt-chewings" to those working for me.

Coincidental with my time as a leader I have also been blessed with the opportunity to coach several different sports at the middle/high school levels. It was several years into these two roles together that I finally made the connection that supervising and leading staff members at work was a whole lot like leading one of those sports teams. Once that connection was made, I could honestly say "I get it".

In coaching, John Wooden has been a huge influence in the way I lead my teams, the way I deal with players and their parents. In law enforcement however, Woodens' concepts are rather new to my leadership toolbox. I've probably used them in just the last seven years or so.

One of the best parts of Coach Woodens' philosophy of leadership is the concept of Constructive Correction. Using the concept of Constructive Correction, I've discovered has limited the anxiety of my subordinates, in turn making them more productive and happier at work because they realize that from me at least there will be no "Epic Butt-chewing's". Let us take a look at this one small, but important component of John Woodens' leadership and coaching philosophy.

Constructive Correction

So what is Constructive Correction exactly? Well as the name implies it is a way to correct your subordinates while providing a constructive or building-up of them. Part of the reason why correction goes so wrong in law enforcement is because we do it either at the wrong time, the wrong place, and sometimes leaders do not know all of the facts, or do not do a great job of gathering them. As we all know law enforcement is a very stressful profession. We have to make some split second decisions, and make choices that can negatively impact the lives of others John Wooden said it best himself, "Criticism and correction differ, especially when it comes to methods and motives. Criticism puts someone down. Correction means I want to help" (Wooden, J).

As law enforcement professionals and leaders we should always want to help those who we

lead. They are a reflection of us, their behavior, their work ethic, their priorities, their accomplishments, all reflect on us as their leader. Our subordinates are an extension of us to the public we serve as well as to the upper echelon of our organization. Think back to the interaction with your superior that you have labeled the “Epic Butt-chewing”. Think about more than just why you were on the receiving end of the butt-chewing. Think about how your superior handled the situation. How did they call you down to the office? Did they sit you down at the table across from them, or did they tower over you? There are many other questions we can ask about the encounter, but I believe you see my point. Think about these items when you administer Constructive Correction. If you do, I think you will find that the session with your employee will be much more positive, and much more complete.

Conclusion/Advise

The next time you have to address an employee and administer some correction, remember the simple principle of Constructive Correction. It is just one part of John Woodens’ great plan in making yourself a better leader. Remember, you want the correction session to be positive and your employee to go away from it corrected and ready to work, not cranky and ready to figure out ways not to work.