

Bill Parcells: Motivational & Coaching Ideas



My wife said to me once, "Explain to me why you continue to do this? The times that you enjoy it are so much fewer than the rest of the other stuff. What kind of ego do you have that you have to keep proving things to yourself? Why do you do it? You're not happy, so why do you keep doing it?"

I told her she didn't understand. I told her it's just about competition because my whole life, since I was seven years old, you went to the gym or you went to the playground. It was always 'who are we playing and where?' I'm still doing it. Nothing has changed. It's still, Who are we playing today?

Bill Parcells Required Reading

1. “What Keeps Bill Parcells Awake at Night?”
Newspaper article by Michael Lewis, New York Times
2. No Medals for Trying
Book by Jerry Izenburg
3. “A Hard Man for a Hard Job”
Magazine article by Jack McCallum, Sports Illustrated
4. “Summer School”
Magazine article by Peter King, Sports Illustrated
5. The Final Season
Book by Bill Parcells & Will McDonough
6. Finding a Way to Win
Book by Bill Parcells with Jeff Coplon
7. Parcells: A Biography
Book by Bill Gutman

- “You don’t get any medals for trying. You’re *supposed* to do that.”
- “I don’t wanna hear about backups. Backups are expected to come in and play. If they can’t, then you gotta get them off your team.”
- “The worst thing that can happen to a player [from a player’s perspective] is for him not to know what the coach is really thinking about him.”

Locker Room Signs

Individuals Win Games but Teams Win Titles

Blame Nobody. Expect Nothing. Do Something.

- “I told them—and now this is right after Taylor had been suspended— about a unit that I knew about that had gone over there [Vietnam] with about one hundred guys and the first day they lost eighteen guys in battle. And the next day they had to go back out there. The point I was trying to make to them was that right now Bavaro and Banks ain’t ready to play. You lost your punter, Marshall can’t play, Benson’s retired and Taylor just got suspended, so really that’s 6 Pro Bowl players who can’t go.

“Now we’re not talking about losing lives here. Some of those guys will be back, but now even the press is feeling sorry for you because they don’t know what you’re gonna do. You’re playing the defending Super Bowl champions and nobody thinks you can win. Nobody thinks you have a chance. And they’re feeling sorry for you and they’re talking about Taylor’s suspension. They’re doin’ all those things but on Tuesday morning, they’re only gonna want to know one thing—who won the game. That’s all—who won the game. It’s black or white. You won or you lost. They’ll be sitting in the diner drinking coffee and eating their Danish and there’s only one thing they want to know about when they pick up the paper. Who won. Not who didn’t play or who tried, but who won.

“And when they came in after winnin’ the game, that’s all they were shouting, ‘Who won the game? Who won the game?’

- “We talked about a lot of things. He has to play Kentucky this Saturday. And he pointed out that here we are—two coaches, with athletes, some of whom are about to play the biggest game of their lives—and here we are trying to motivate them. Makes you wonder, doesn’t it?”

- When he was invited to preseason minicamp before preseason training, Parcells had asked him to drop by the office to talk. “Tell me about yourself,” the coach had said.

“Well I played special teams and—“

“No,” Parcells interrupted, “I mean tell me about yourself. I know about your football.”

● “You do not point to someone and simply say ‘Lawrence can’t play, you’re it.’ His duties are so diverse that a number of people are going to be asked to do a number of different things.”

● “See this kind of game is just like playing baseball. If your fastball is getting them out, you just keep on throwing it until there’s twenty-seven of ‘em gone. It’s that kind of thing. If you get away from that in a game like this, it’s only because you want to show everybody how smart you are as a coach. That’s like carnival football: jugglers to the left, seals to the right, and then everybody says, ‘Look how smart the coach is. This is really exciting.’ But you’re not a coach at all then. You’re a carnival barker.”

● “Mock intercepts the ball in the end zone. Now we’re in the locker room and the press is all around him and a reporter asks, ‘Is that the biggest play you ever made in your life?’ and the kid says, ‘Yep.’ Now the guy asks why and Mock says, ‘Because if I don’t make it, they win, but I made it so we win.’

“I knew right there I had that kid. I knew he understood. That’s how simple it is. You get your coaches and your players to understand it, you win. You don’t get anything for being smarter or flashier. All anybody wants to know is if you won.”

To Have mentality .vs. To Be mentality

You work to be the best you can be and then the rest follows. It’s not To Have first. It’s To Be first. You shouldn’t work to have the cars, the money, the houses. Play to be the best you can be and the rest will follow.

● “You can’t sit there and look over your shoulder and wait and see if he is going to beat you.”

● “If it weren’t for games like this, I wouldn’t be here.”

● “I know that it just doesn’t matter who can’t play or who isn’t 100 percent. You can’t rationalize like that. There’s a way to do it... a way to win. You just have to find it. That’s the mentality of what coaching is about.”

“Mickey [Cochrane, his high school basketball coach] taught me that. He always said there was a way to win every game. Finding it is what separates some people from others. I remember a game. I was seventeen years old. And the score is tied and he calls timeout. He says to me, ‘Parcells, I’m gonna get you the ball in this location with your back to the basket with 8 seconds to go in the game. Your job is to get in the basket.’

“Alright, now he has to get through the technical part of it to get me the ball. He has to deliver the situation. That’s coaching. That’s what he’s supposed to do. I’m just focusing how to get the ball in the basket because the rest of the job is his. That’s being a coach. Maybe I didn’t realize it at the time but he reduced it to the bottom line for me when I was only seventeen years old.

“So maybe we don’t have Taylor and maybe Simms isn’t 100 percent. But there’s a way to put us in a position to win that game tomorrow. It’s my job to find it.”

● “It’s gonna be hungry dogs. You could play this game in the parking lot. I’d just as soon do it there with nobody watching at eight o’clock Sunday morning. If I tell Taylor or Carthon or Mowatt we’re going to the parking lot at Bloomingdale’s and we’re playing on concrete tomorrow morning and nobody is going to be there but the Eagles, they’ll all show up. They don’t care. Because that’s where the game is.”

“It comes from the fear that I have to do more than he does—whoever he is—because I want to make sure I’m better than him.”

Club Fighter Mentality

In the old days of boxing you’d find a club fighter, a guy who was pretty good but knew he was never going to be a champion. He kept on fighting because it was a way to make a living. He had to keep on fighting hard, even though he never aspired to be a champion. I told them we can’t have that mentality and be successful. We want to be good enough to be on top of the card at Madison Square Garden. We could not trap ourselves into thinking about going through the motions the rest of the way. If you let some of them do it, they would. It’s human nature in a situation like this.

● Importance of teaching your staff, train the coaches under you to see the game as you see it: “Look, if I can just leave you with one thing when I leave here, it’s my eyes. What do my eyes see?”

● As a head coach, no less than five unexpected things will happen to you every day—it’s all about how you react to them.

● There are 3 fights that a team has to fight every day:

1. Division from within (team chemistry; unhappiness regarding roles)
2. Competition (your opponents)
3. Outside influences (agents, media, family)

● **“Just because you’ve identified a problem doesn’t mean you’re any closer to solving it.** It doesn’t make a difference if you know why you are failing, you must do something about it.”

● Super Bowl XXV team’s mantra: “Make the Other Team Quit”

● Former assistant: “If you coach for Bill Parcells there is not one day you can take a breath. It’s like dog years: one year working for him equals seven. But it makes you better and you learn so much.”

● “The one guy I answer to is the one in the mirror.”

- “I’ve never feared confrontation (although I’ve never sought it). It’s a winning attitude, especially when attached to an addendum. If you’re afraid of confrontation, you’re going to have a problem being a head coach.”
- “I want beavers. What do beavers do other than chop down trees? NOTHING, it JUST chops trees. I want guys who just think football.”
- Parcells gives all former assistants that move onto head coaching jobs a desk plate that reads “Just Coach the Team.”
- Bill Belichick on Parcells: “Bill never loses sight of the big picture.”
- Prior to a playoff game, Parcells gave Taylor an airline ticket to New Orleans. “Fly down and give the return ticket to Pat Swilling [New Orleans Saints linebacker] because he’s the only one that can handle Pankey [Los Angeles Rams offensive tackle Irv Pankey]—you certainly can’t.”
- “Bill understands pressure involved in this game,” Romeo Crennel, a former Parcells assistant coach, says, “He wants to know whether the players and coaches can handle the pressure. Therefore, he applies it during the week to see if they can handle it. He wants to know who can perform under that pressure the game brings.”
- Staff should always stick together, mentality should be “One wrong, all wrong.”
- “If they don’t bite as pups they probably don’t bite.”

LOSERS ASSEMBLE IN SMALL GROUPS AND COMPLAIUN ABOUT THE COACHES AND OTHER PLAYERS. WINNERS ASSEMBLE AS A **TEAM** AND FIND WAYS TO WIN

- “The first thing you have to do to turn around a team is to **envision the process**. Envision the process and do it as fast as you can because patience isn’t a virtue in this business. You’ve got to know what you want is to look like. I’ve had championship teams. I know what they look like, act like, behave like. I know the price they pay and I know how they conduct themselves and go about trying to accomplish these tasks.”
- Parcell’s goal for each of his teams: play consistently to its potential—“My challenge as a coach is to organize, structure it, give the team a good enough design and motivation to allow the team to play to is potential.”
- “As a young manager I was much more confrontational, more distracted, paid attention to things that I learned weren’t quite so important. As I became more of a veteran manager, I eliminated things I knew didn’t make any difference.”

- “When you’re losing, you coach better. You scrutinize things more closely. You’re paying attention to more detail to give your team every little edge that you can to win.”
- To a player: “You know, maybe my expectations for you as a player are higher than your own and if they are, you and I are going to have a problem. I think you need to elevate your expectations because I see more potential in you that you can see.”
- “Motivation has to be self-starting. I don’t have the ability to motivate anybody that doesn’t want to do it. **People confuse motivation with proper direction.**”
- “You have to draw a fine line between people that just don’t care and those that need direction.”
- “You can’t lead from an ivory tower. You have to be in the mix.”
- On Thursday prior to the 1990 NFC Championship game, Parcells gathered his team and explained to them that if they were to beat the 49ers in San Francisco, the Giants would travel directly to Tampa for the Super Bowl rather than coming back to New York. He told his players that they could pack for a weekend if they planned on losing in California or they could pack enough for an extra week in Tampa. As the team mulled the question, Parcells grabbed an extraordinarily large suitcase from under the table and slammed it on the table, saying “I think you know my answer.”
- “You may only need one thing to motivate a player. Find that one thing that he responds to and that’s all you need.”
- In the locker room after clinching the 1998 AFC Championship, “You hear same old Jets, same old Jets. Well now you’re the Champs and nobody can take that away from you. You have a responsibility to keep playing that well.”
- “We’re too stupid to be any good right now.”
- In the Giants 1989 regular season meeting with the 49ers, the G-men were able to only run for 13 yards. Prior to their meeting with the 49ers in the NFC Championship, Parcells routinely referred to the offensive line as “Club 13.”
- Former assistant: “Parcells would challenge his players to reach for more and he had the rare ability to make it seem like a question of their very manhood.”
- “If you respect a player and he respects you then you have a relationship and in a relationship all commentary is allowed. I can say anything to Pepper Johnson and he’ll understand where I’m coming from because of the mutual respect.”

- “The ability I have as a coach is to see the end picture. I’ve been around enough to know what it takes to get a team to reach its potential.”
- Former assistant: “He’s just as comfortable joking with his players as he is questioning their manhood.”
- “I want players who *want* to reach their potential.”
- In regards to a player he rode too much: “Maybe I got on him a little too much. Maybe I never let him know what a good player I thought he was. But, you know, I ran into him recently and he said to me, ‘Thank you for being the way you were. You made me a better player.’”
- Because it’s impossible to control every element of the locker room, he gets 5 or 6 players (“his guys”) to speak his message for him and who are his eyes and ears and completely devoted to him.
- Former player: **“When Bill would say something in general terms, I would literally think he was only talking to me.”**
- **“In a competitive atmosphere, to stay the same is to regress.”**
- On taking over a losing situation, “They went from a group of guys who were beaten down to guys who were more confident. I saw it here, I saw it in New England, with the Giants. There’s a distinct pattern and when it happens, the team gets hungrier, wanting more challenges and victories.”
- To a player: “Don’t come in here and say ‘Bill, you owe me a chance.’ I don’t owe you anything. You make your own chances.”
- To rookies during their first mini-camp: “Can you be the same person every day? Don’t be the guy who looks like a world-beater one day in practice and the next day you’re bored and just can’t keep up.”
- To his 1999 team after a rash of early season injuries: “All the excuses are in place if you want to use them. If you do, you will not have a productive year.”
- How to know when to back off conditioning in practice: pay attention to the two best conditioned athletes on the team. When they start showing fatigue, stop. If they’re dragging, the rest of them are a lot worse.
- “Sometimes you fall into the trap of giving a player, especially a young player, too much too soon, to a point where he is overcoached. With most guys you have to spoon-feed them a little at a time and in a sequence that makes sense. If you tell him everything

you know or everything you think he needs to know, he can become confused. You can't give him too many things to think about. If you do, **he's not playing—not reacting to what's going on. He's thinking too much.**”

Cyclone Hart & Vito Antuofermo

Parcells didn't see the Hart-Antuofermo fight in person but was told about it, years ago, by a friend and boxing trainer, Teddy Atlas. It stuck in his mind and now strikes him as relevant. Seated, at first, he begins to read aloud from the pages: how in this fight 29 years ago Hart was a well-known big puncher heavily favored against the unknown Vito Antuofermo, how Hart knocked Antuofermo all over the ring, how Antuofermo had no apparent physical gifts except “he bled well.” “But,” Parcells reads, “he had other attributes you couldn't see.” Antuofermo absorbed the punishment dealt out by his natural superior, and he did it so well that Hart became discouraged. In the fifth round, Hart began to tire, not physically but mentally. Seizing on the moment, Antuofermo attacked and delivered a series of quick blows that knocked Hart down, ending the fight.

“When the fighters went back to their makeshift locker rooms, only a thin curtain was between them. Hart's room was quiet, but on the other side he could hear Antuofermo's cornermen talking about who would take the fighter to the hospital. Finally he heard Antuofermo say, ‘Every time he hit me with that left hook to the body, I was sure I was going to quit. After the second round, I thought if he hit me there again, I'd quit. I thought the same thing after the fourth round. Then he didn't hit me no more.’

“At that moment, Hart began to weep. It was really soft at first. Then harder. He was crying because for the first time he understood that Antuofermo had felt the same way he had and worse. The only thing that separated the guy talking from the guy crying was what they had done. The coward and the hero feel the same emotions. They're both human.”

● To players after a disappointing loss: “One of the things you can do in this business is fool yourself. It's human nature. Don't try to put a spin on it and the effort you made because anyone who looks can see the effort wasn't there.”

● “It’s a week-to-week thing in coaching, every week has a different theme. You have to figure out which is the best way to approach it. **It’s like being a jockey. A horse is never the same for all 10 rides. The jockey has to sense what is happening early on and then adjust to it if he wants to get the most out of the horse that day.**”

● Parcells has an incredible disdain for injuries: “You must be present in the training room to make sure it doesn’t become a social club.” Parcells would set the temperature in the training room at an uncomfortably cold rate.

● “What do I look for in a coach? I want someone who’s consistent, who’s not afraid to confront the players and who makes the players accountable for their performance.”

● To Phil Simms, “You used to be a leader, but now you’re trying to be everyone’s friend.”

● “Early on with the Giants, I don’t think I was being myself. I was too wrapped up acting like I thought a head coach was supposed to act and not really being a good leader. Hey, just be Bill Parcells. **JUST COACH YOUR TEAM!**”

● “One of Parcells’ strengths has always been to poke and probe players. What he likes to do is elicit a response. He can do it in a playful manner, where you almost think he’s sarcastic or he can do it in a serious way.”

● “Discipline is the only thing you don’t have to be consistent with. Consistency, in terms of punishment, is overrated. A leader is obligated not to be consistent, but to be right- to do what’s best for the organization.”

● “It doesn’t take athletic ability to hustle.”

● Parcells posted a memo in each player’s locker saying “What will you do to help us win?”

● “I go to practice everyday with the sole intention of trying to improve my team.”

● Each day in practice Parcells takes one game situation and teaches every player and coach who might be involved how to handle it.

● Parcells works extensively on special teams because he feels you’ve got a chance to get better faster on that than anything else. (Equivalents of this in other sports?)

● “The only players I hurt with my words are the ones who have an inflated opinion of their ability. I can’t worry about that.”

● To a player: “Don’t confuse routine with commitment.”

- “Losing may take a little from your credibility, but quitting will destroy it.”
- Focus on your player’s strengths: “It’s easy to downgrade people by dwelling on their weaknesses. It’s harder to look at them with fresh eyes and identify their strengths and how they can help the organization to function.”
- “To teach you have to listen as well as talk.”
- On what sets disciplined people apart:
 1. The capacity to get past distractions
 2. The willingness to condition mind and body for the task at hand
 3. The ability to keep your poise when those around you are losing theirs
- On how performance impacts confidence: “**Confidence is only born of demonstrated ability.** A team’s collective mental side is ruled by the psychology of results. In other words, past outcomes dramatically affect the group’s attitude going into the next game. **A team teaches itself what it is on the field, in action.**”
- “As a head coach you must know that the coming season won’t be without several crises. There’s no doubt about it. They’re coming.”
- “A half hour of candid conversation tells more about people than a mountain of statistics. For starters, I might ask them to name three or four of the most important things in their life. Family or religion often top the list, which is fine; football doesn’t have to be number one. But football better be in there somewhere or I’ll deduce that this guy isn’t all that interested in the job.”
- “ERW player” = a player who just eats, rides and warms up (doesn’t play)
- After losing to Seattle on a fumbled snap: “You don’t want to go through the whole process again, to get to right where we were. You know? And all you got to do is kick a field goal, the most elementary of plays, and then you just don’t do it. And so I don’t want to go through that process again. Too much blood.”
- “My job is to call attention to the things that I think are the difference between winning and losing. If I can’t do that, then I have failed as a coach.”
- “Dumb players do dumb things. Smart players rarely do dumb things.”
- “The desperate team usually wins.”

BE ON TIME. PAY ATTENTION. PRACTICE AND PLAY HARD

- To rookies at first mini-camp: “If you are sensitive, you will have a hard time with me.”
- “I’m looking for guys who are willing to do whatever it takes to win all the time.”
- “A coach wouldn’t throw you to the wolves if he didn’t think you had some wolf in you.”
- “Game Quitters” = players that seem as if they’re trying to win, but really they’ve given up (choosing a way not apparent to the naked eye). Game Quitters are more concerned with public opinion than the end result.
- “I’m not really in the excuse business. We have an expression: ‘Don’t tell me about the pain, show me the baby. I don’t want to hear about the process. Let’s get the job done here.’”
- A coach lives in a black and white world – you win or you lose – and the black side stays with you a lot longer.
- When leaders have a vision, they can picture the desired result of a project before they begin; they rely on their own measuring stick.
- In an unstable environment, it is especially vital for leaders to articulate their vision for the organization—clearly, explicitly, and often.
- It’s easy to get diverted by all the variables outside your control, to let them eat away at your vision and self-confidence. But detours will doom you. Lose faith in yourself and you’ll fulfill your own worst prophecy.
- “If they don’t beat when they’re puppies, they usually don’t bite.
- Asked Willie McGinest while they were on stage for McGinest’s press conference introducing him as a Patriot, “Are we getting the McGinest who played against Penn State, or the Willie McGinest who played against UCLA. I don’t want the guy who played against UCLA, because he isn’t very good. But the guy who played Penn State has a chance to be great.”
- Traditions are made to be broken. If you’re doing something just because it’s always been done that way, you may be missing an opportunity to do better.
- Consistency is overrated. A leader is obligated not to be consistent, but to be right—to do what’s best for the organization.

Three things that can ruin any organization

Competition: whether your rivals are Toyota and Honda or the Washington Redskins and the Dallas Cowboys.

Public perception: If you're always seen in a negative light, your group's moral will likely go under.

Division from within: When your team is united, it can ward off any flak from negative perceptions; it won't make any difference what outsiders think. And when your team is working together, your competition will have fewer weaknesses to exploit.

- “It’s one thing to hate failure; it’s another to fear it.”
- Collect all the input you can before big decisions. Then cut off the seminar and do what you think is right.
- “Excuses and alibis are the main enemies of accountability.”
- People can’t become accountable unless they understand exactly what you want.
- The importance of concrete follow-up: You have to continually monitor and assess them, and do it as objectively as you can. A strong leader will preempt all alibis that a player might use. I watch the tapes by myself first, early Monday morning. That afternoon I set the tone of our meeting before my team looks at them: “I’ve been studying this all day now, and this is what I saw.”
- Once left a gasoline can in Bryant Cox’s locker with a note that read, “Is there any gas left in your tank?”
- In scouting, you must always be thinking, ‘how are we going to lose?’
- “There are 28 teams in this league, if we practice harder than 27 of them, we will win.”
- When Parcells began having success with the Jets (who had been 1-15 in the season prior to his arrival), he would ask players “Which way is better?” when he felt there was some complaining going on in the locker room.
- T-shirt slogans: “Who Says We Can’t?” & “Take Another Step”
- “He gets everyone to think alike, from top to bottom. I think it’s one of the biggest reasons we’re winning. He gets everyone to come together for one common goal: to win.”
- “If the players on this team aren’t ready to go on Sunday—that doesn’t mean win. I mean go, give it their best effort—then I don’t want them.”

- “If you’re a football player and you can’t pay attention, I don’t want you. If it’s not important now, I can’t imagine when it would be.”
- “If I have a strength as a coach, it’s to coach a team to the best of their ability.”
- Parcells would constantly ask players, “What did you see?” during games.
- “I’m not interested in being a competitive team. I want a champion team. That’s the only goal a guy like me can have. I’m not interested in making a team competitive week-to-week. I’m interested in champions.”
- “I don’t have a crystal ball for anything, but what I do have is a plan.”
- Be careful with your post-game criticism: “the worst thing you can do to a player immediately after a game is to call attention to the errors he just made.”
- “I believe that pressure is the only thing people respond to in any undertaking. When a player deals successfully with pressure during the week, game pressure won’t faze him.”
- At the start of practice, Parcells would sometimes tell his players “I’m turning this clock off out here today, and when I like the way it looks, we’re leaving. Until then, we’re staying.”
- Dealing with a tough situation: “The fact is, they’re not going to cancel the season just because the New England Patriots have yet to collect twenty-two perfect prototype players. We’ve got to play sixteen games, and our owner won’t much like it if we forfeit. We’ll bring in the best people we can, and then I want to hear my staff say, “We’ll just play this guy and get it done with him.”
- Say something to each individual every day.
- The team that makes fewer mistakes will generally get the opportunity to win, even when the opposition has more talent. “On Monday, I’ll talk about a blunder that cost some other team a game that weekend.”
- Parcells’ advice to coaches: give them a good design and get them to play hard.
- “Anybody that has their own agenda that’s separate from the team’s won’t be around long.”
- “The most difficult thing in coaching is to scrutinize the performance the same way whether you win or lose. When you lose, the problem looks like an H-bomb. That’s why your players say the coach is never happy. But a lot of times when you lose, you see more good things than when you win.”

