



### Social Media

I neither grew up with Social Media nor do I personally use it now. I still have my beliefs about it though. Beliefs and the Truth (capital T) are often different, though. Therefore, I appreciate that the following beliefs may very well not be Truth, but they are *my truth*, and I would like to share them nonetheless. BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front): my belief is that although social media has some benefits, we would be far better off, far happier, without it.

A coach once told me that social media is helpful because of the videos that can be shared concerning social injustice issues and critical societal matters. Certainly, I believe that to be true and incredibly important. I believe those issues cannot be overstated and must be at the forefront of our consciousness. This is one of those benefits of social media I referenced earlier. However, we must understand that a 30-second video tells the story of a moment 30 seconds in duration. Regardless of our feelings about the video, it may not accurately portray the entire story, and it is vitally important for us to be aware of it. My belief is that many are not, and therefore, it often does more harm than good. More importantly, videos and photos create much greater emotional responses than words. On social media, screaming and yelling or treating fellow users disrespectfully who do not share similar beliefs has become the social norm. This behavior might



make an antagonist *feel* good, but it, unfortunately, doesn't help either party gain a better understanding of the other's perspective. To do that, we must read, study, experience, and reflect upon varied and differing opinions from an equally varied and different number of sources. This requires us to interact in a civil manner, not yell and scream or belittle each other. Gaining a better understanding of each other's truth allows us to grow closer together despite our very different perspectives, experiences, and beliefs. Social media facilitates the opposite.

Second, I believe social media can be very effective in building our *brand* or our "reputation." This isn't necessarily unimportant or *bad*, especially if it is how we support ourselves or our family, but never forget that reputation is what other people think of us. Character is who we are, and only we know who that is regardless of how many airbrushed pictures we have posted to social media as we attempt to portray our "perfect" life while building our brand or reputation. Instead, let's focus on developing our character. To do so does not require social media. It does require study and self-reflection. It requires seeking and receiving feedback from those we trust and love and who, in return, trust and love us. Most importantly, I believe that building our character requires discipline, hard work, and sacrifice. A strong character, unlike a brand, helps ensure we are the best spouse, parent, friend, family member, teammate, and leader we can be. Admittedly, I have not always made that commitment. And I regret it incredibly. I hope my son and daughter don't live with that same regret.

Finally, in my work interacting with thousands of coaches, athletes, and business leaders, I am often told that they *have to* be active on social media for various reasons, including recruiting and revenue generation. Famously, a major tennis star recently said the same despite a significant deterioration in their mental health due to "social media trolls" commenting on not only their tennis "game" but physical traits too. I, of course, feel bad for the tennis star, but my belief is that none of us *have to* be on social media. Outside of essential life-sustaining functions (eat, sleep, drink, etc.), everything we do in life, including our use of social media, is a choice. We don't *have to* use it. We are responsible for our choices, not victims of them.

However, if social media is mission-critical in achieving success in our professional life, we still have choices. We can hire, or leverage, another person not mentally or emotionally attached to our reputation or brand to be responsible for it. They are called Brand Managers. Second, just as users choose what to post, users can also choose not to read the comments! After a recent Program podcast, my son asked if we could go online and see how many "likes" the podcast had. I understand and appreciate that despite my beliefs (and this Letter on Leadership), social media is not going away, so it is also my belief that I must teach my children about it.



Following is what I teach (and how I responded to my son): “No, we are not going to see how many “likes” the podcast has. I tried my very hardest, and if some people think that my performance (i.e. in this case, The Program podcast) is good, that’s great. If they don’t, then that is ok too. What matters to me is that although I know that I can always do better, I gave my 100%, and I *like* myself because of it. And if I *like* myself first, and then if you, your sister, your Mom (especially), and a few dear friends *like* me too, that is what truly matters to me!” That is what matters most in my life, NOT the number of *likes* I have from people who neither know nor truly love me, be they supporters or trolls. If it matters to my son how many people *like* him on social media, it will also matter to him how many don’t (unless he is a narcissist). That will be unfortunate. It will be disappointing. It means the opinion of people who do not know his character will matter to him. It and they should not.

My wife and I know this will be a challenging lesson for both of our children to learn, especially in their adolescence. As a child, what other people thought about me mattered to me. Thankfully, I am now (finally) an adult, and I understand that it doesn’t. I understand that although the opinion of people who do not truly love or care about me may be *important* (i.e., without a strong brand, The Program goes out of business), it doesn’t truly matter. As an adult, I know what matters is if my wife, children, and a few dear friends *like* who I am. We hope to raise our children to be adults who feel the same.

For us, that means we do not provide our 10-year-old child with a smartphone and the means to be on social media prior to being old enough to appreciate the lesson stated above, which we reinforce daily. When my wife and I were children, it was much easier for parents to control from whom, when, where, and how often we were receiving the opinions of others. A smartphone disallows or severely limits a parent’s ability to do so now. Second, it means that we are unrelenting in our communication with them about social media. We discuss it often. Third, it means that my wife and I do not have a social media presence as we do not want to model behavior that we do not wish in our children. I lack moral authority if I tell my son that Instagram is a waste of his time, but I then spend 2 hours every night on Facebook. It means I would be asking him to do something I was unwilling to do myself. That is poor leadership.

Most importantly, we focus on developing our character and challenge our children to do the same. Of course, we make mistakes. Of course, we fall short, but we try. Doing so will make us the best teammates and leaders that we can be on all the teams we are privileged to be a part of. It is my belief that if we all made that commitment, we would be far happier in the relationships of which we are a part, at the schools we attend, on the athletic teams for which we compete, in the companies we work for, and the country we live in. And ultimately, that is my greatest hope



for my son and daughter (and all of us); happiness. A strong character helps ensure it. It is my belief that we should commit to developing it, not the number of our “likes.”

Attack!

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