Excerpt from *The Quality of Effort Workbook*

The following is an excerpt from *The Quality of Effort Workbook* by Reggie Marra. The *Workbook* is being officially released on January 22, 2013, along with *The Quality of Effort: Integrity in Sport and Life for Student-Athletes, Parents and Coaches*.

From January 22 through January 31, 2013, 20% of profits from national and international online sales of both books and Kindle editions will be donated to two funds on behalf of Newtown CT (details about the books and the donations are available at [http://qualityofeffort.com](http://qualityofeffort.com)).

This particular excerpt is offered as part of our ongoing conversations about and substance abuse, irresponsible sexual behavior and cheating in the world of sports. Chapter sections not excerpted are indicated by “…”.

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**DELAYING GRATIFICATION:**

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE, SEXUAL ACTIVITY AND CHEATING**

The first edition of this book addressed these topics in two chapters. I have chosen, in this second edition, to reframe this approach in order to focus more on what I believe is foundational to substance abuse, irresponsible sexual activity and cheating, and less on the specific details of these three issues. In essence, the desire for immediate gratification combined with the inability to delay gratification provides fertile ground
for anyone—especially, but not only, children and adolescents—to engage the chapter subtitle’s three components.

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My words then and my writing now were and are not intended as snide swipes at these parents. As were the parents who supported the policies (remember “A Breath of Fresh Air,” in Chapter 6), these were good people who loved their kids, and were exploring that wonderful owner’s-manual-less experience of parenting.

While I better understand the myths and truths about drugs, sex and alcohol now in my fifties, and I realize that my adolescent behaviors were grounded in a mix of naiveté, myth, fact, self-respect, and fear, I still encourage student-athletes not to use tobacco, alcohol and recreational or performance-enhancing drugs, and to avoid sexual intercourse until they understand and can handle the full range of responsibilities inherent in their behavior. My reasons now are not naïve, puritanical or based in myth. I know that many will engage these substances and behaviors for understandable reasons, from human development—natural biological functions tied to the invincibility and immortality of adolescence, to coping with a scary world, to lots of opportunities and bad examples, to some parents who lack the ability to command or even demand respect from their children. Addressing these issues while acknowledging the developmental and legal differences among elementary, middle, high school and college students is essential, and beyond the scope of this book.

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All of these substances, in varying degrees, alter the user's heartbeat and/or perception of the physical world, depress or activate the central nervous system, and are addictive or habit-forming. Each of them has its own unique effects as well, and depending upon the particulars, either gradually or quickly, directly or indirectly has killed people. Though usually considered in a different light because of historic profit-incentive, legal-status and social-acceptance issues, alcohol and nicotine remain popular tempters of the young, as does marijuana, albeit without the profit incentive, legality and social acceptance, at least not publicly stated—some of which is changing as I type, especially with regard to the use of marijuana for medical purposes.
Since the first edition of this book was published in 1991, tobacco companies have been sued and have paid billions of dollars to families whose members have smoked and gotten cancer, emphysema, cardiovascular and other diseases, and died due to the effects of smoking. The payments were made not just because the cigarettes led to illness and death, but because tobacco executives had empirical evidence that nicotine is addictive, suppressed it, and lied about it for years. Now tobacco companies run advertising and post websites that discourage young people from smoking, while still marketing their products nationwide to adults, and even more aggressively in developing nations—developing a new generation of smokers who will suffer the same health issues. Globalization at its worst.

One of the defenses that the tobacco companies used in these cases is that everyone who smoked did so of his or her own free will, despite the package warnings and the long list of sick and dead people. On that count I believe they are exactly right—not in the sense that those who smoke get what they deserve, but that each of us has as much of an ethical obligation to take care of his or her health as the tobacco executives have to tell the truth about the addictive nature of their product—especially now with the abundance of readily available information. When my father, who smoked for seventy years, began smoking around 1924 at the age of seventeen, medical doctors were recommending cigarettes as a way to relax. To paraphrase the 1970s commercial that celebrated the branding of a cigarette for liberated women, “We’ve come a long way, baby.” The word is and has been out—cigarettes can kill you.

Companies that produce alcoholic beverages also use television and online advertising to discourage driving while intoxicated and underage drinking. In 2013, by the time an average student in even a mediocre school district reaches eighth grade, he or she has been educated on the dangers of smoking, drug abuse, alcohol consumption, and (not in all cases yet) unprotected underage sex through a variety of curricular and co-curricular programs—programs that did not exist during my 1967-1968 eighth-grade experience. And still, a significant percentage of each new generation of student-athletes, and young people in general, will smoke, use recreational or performance-enhancing drugs, and/or drink, and become sexually active while in middle school and high school. And we know why.
The student-athlete chooses to engage in these behaviors for the same reasons that anyone else does: to fit in with a peer group; to create and display a desired image; to enjoy the immediate effects of the substance or activity; to temporarily “escape” the difficulties of a scary world; to overcome boredom; to experience the thrill or challenge of a forbidden act; to alleviate physical or emotional pain; and in the specific case of performance-enhancing drugs, to find an illegitimate, high-risk path to better performance—something we’ll look at more closely at the “intersection” of substance abuse and cheating. One way to summarize these motivators might be “to feel better about myself right now, even if it’s temporary,” and that summary can be translated into, “I’ll take some short-term pleasure—or even reduced pain, if I can get it.” Is it just me, or do the older folks reading this realize that that translation, the temptation of short-term, immediate pleasure in whatever guise, is with us throughout our lives? What changes is our ability to respond to it.

Three familiar factors are in play here:

- **Immediate gratification, which is attractive, especially, but not only, during childhood and adolescence.** Who doesn’t prefer what’s pleasurable as soon as it’s available?
- **The developmentally appropriate adolescent “belief” in invincibility and immortality, and/or, paradoxically, in an overwhelming sense of vulnerability and mortality, especially for those young people who have experienced alcohol-, drug-, and violence-related deaths in their families or among their peers.**
- **An underdeveloped ability to delay gratification.** Directly related to these first two bullet points is an inability or disinclination to delay gratification. I want it now, I can have it now, I can handle whatever happens, and people die when they’re old; or, again, paradoxically, as above: the world is so dangerous, I’ll probably die young, so I’m going to get what I can while I can.

These behaviors do not continue because of a lack of information or an inability to understand it. Whether from parents, schools, friends or the media, student-athletes have heard, and many continue to live, the stories: unwanted pregnancy; abortion or teenage motherhood (rarely, fatherhood); sexually transmitted disease; AIDS; alcoholism; injuries and fatalities caused by drunk drivers; drug addiction; drug-related violence; and the familial, emotional, financial and spiritual upheaval that each of these brings with it.
Throughout the book we’ve been referring to four areas of concern—individual mindset or worldview; behavior; culture; and environment. Each of these plays a role in a student-athlete’s decisions around alcohol and drugs, and each of these, as we’ve seen in earlier examples, influences and is influenced by the others. Even though the choice seems simple—to engage or not to engage in a specific behavior, the contexts within which anyone makes a decision about substance abuse or sexual activity are quite complex. Here’s one oversimplified, fictional and stereotypical example that nonetheless makes the point:

At fifteen, Alicia has received, and for the most part embraced the views that her parents, teachers and coaches have espoused about alcohol, drugs and sexual activity. She both understands and believes it is in her best interests to avoid these at her age.

Over the course of her fifteenth and sixteenth years, she consistently hears some of her friends and teammates talk about how much fun they have at certain parties. They tell their funny stories about some alcohol-induced behavior in which no one got hurt, their laughter is contagious, and she finally attends a party at which alcohol will be available.

The choice to drink or not (and this would apply equally to smoking, other drugs, or sexual activity) occurs within the following contexts, among others: her behavior will result from the choice she makes, based on her adolescent worldview (thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings), which emerge not in a vacuum, but in the clash between her friends’ and her parents'/coaches'/teachers’ cultural values, all within an environment/social system that provides ready images of and access to alcohol and drugs for anyone who wants them—at the same time it provides warnings against their use (this “environment” includes television and the internet, the school and its surrounding neighborhood and transportation system, and the home and neighborhood in which the student-athlete lives).

Assuming that not all her teammates are at the party, or if they are, that not all of them will drink, her choice—no matter what she chooses and how she feels about it afterward—will impact (reaffirm or call into question) her individual beliefs, her relationships with each individual and the sub-cultures on the team, and her perception of her parents'/teachers'/coaches’ values.
Yikes. This leaves us, as parents, teachers, coaches and student-athletes with a responsibility to hold in our awareness—to be aware of—the interrelationships among these four areas of concern to the fullest extent that we can in any given moment, and to act in ways that are informed by and reflect this awareness. This extent will not be the same for everyone—something we’ll look at more closely in Chapter 10 when we explore developmental aspects of motivation.

A final note: Two very broad perspectives often face off in dialogues and debates around alcohol and drug abuse and sexual activity among the young. One side argues that these issues persist due to a combination of undisciplined adolescent drives, thoughts, feelings, and values, and improving those interior elements—thus stopping the “demand,” will change the behavior and end the problem. The other side argues that the issues persist because of exterior elements—the literal infrastructure of our society, including local law enforcement, border patrols, the courts, school systems, millions of people without access to healthcare, poverty-stricken neighborhoods, an ample supply of substances to be abused, and sexually explicit images and information. If the “supply” were stopped, and the dealers were jailed, public education were better, and everyone had healthcare, the problems will end. Who is right?

Of course, they both are, and any attempt to solve the problem that does not address both aspects—what goes on within us and what happens out in the world—is doomed to local, partial, short-term successes if we’re lucky, and long-term failure.

CHEATING

Too many people cheat. I’m not suggesting that there is some acceptable number of cheaters above which we shouldn’t go. Simply put, people cheat and they shouldn’t. In the mid-1990s, as reported in Men’s Health, a survey of business executives found that 86% selected “loyalty” as the trait they preferred in their subordinates; 3% selected “integrity.” Also during that final twentieth-century decade, Dr. Jeffrey Wigand firmly established himself in this 3% through his integrity-based disloyalty to the tobacco industry. His integrity required loyalty not to a particular company or industry, but to the dissemination of truthful information that affected the health of millions of people worldwide.
Ultimately, we are all loyal—what changes is the level of integrity (fullness, completeness) that informs the loyalty: am I loyal to myself, only; to a specific group (family, team, school, nation, etc.); to all of humanity; to the entire planet; to the universe? What *I think* is my honest answer to that question may be interesting, but my truly honest answer is not in what I understand or think; it's found in my behavior—what I do.

Cheating shows up in various guises in sport, and is almost always characterized by an unhealthy self- or team-based loyalty. Athletes, through laziness, cheat themselves and their teammates. Through performance-enhancing drugs, they cheat themselves and their opponents. Athletes cheat academically in order to earn and maintain eligibility.

If coaches or teachers advocate or tolerate grade changes or course selections that result in below-average grades for a high school or college degree that is nothing more than a slightly upgraded elementary school experience, they cheat. The administrators who allow this and the students who think it’s in their best interests cheat as well. I’m not suggesting that students take courses that they are not prepared to take; I’m suggesting that secondary and higher educational institutions respectively offer an appropriate range of high school and college courses.

Coaches cheat when they violate recruiting guidelines. This may entail prohibited contact with a prospective student-athlete or an improper inducement to attend a school—gifts, money or empty promises. When a coach tolerates inappropriate behavior from a student-athlete—assault, drug or alcohol abuse, vandalism, sexual harassment, public nuisance—you name it—he or she cheats.

This list is illustrative, and not exhaustive. Cheating often shares the common desire for immediate gratification with student-athletes’ drug and alcohol abuse and underage sexual activity. An immediate result (pleasure) is more attractive than the possibility of a future consequence (pain). Whether the pleasure is intoxication, physical intimacy or an academic or athletic “shortcut,” delaying gratification—taking a longer time to attain the desired result—is an acquired skill.

* * *
LACK OF EFFORT

A talented athlete chooses not to work at his or her skills, and relies on natural gifts throughout his or her career. Whether this career ends in high school, college or professional sports, this athlete will never know how good he or she may have been, and if involved with a team sport, how his or her choice affected the team.

After the publication of the first edition of this book, I had a conversation with a former NCAA Division I basketball player about her experience. She had attended college on a four-year athletic scholarship, but admitted that the level of commitment and amount of work required was more than she was willing to provide—she just didn’t want it that badly. So, although she played all four years, attended practice, played in games, was a sometimes starter, and graduated on time, she had not given all she had as an athlete and a basketball player. She did her academic work and involved herself in other valuable co- and extra-curricular activities during her four years. Right now, how do you feel having read that?

Your response to the question is just that—your response, and it is important that you recognize and attempt to understand how you feel, based on the values you hold. If we polled readers I’m sure we’d hear from some who feel that her choice was fine—in fact, as a student-athlete, she probably worked harder and received a more integrated education through those other involvements than did some of her teammates; and we’d hear from plenty who feel that she let her team down—she received a four-year scholarship, and she had an obligation to fully commit to her team. I offer this example as a reminder that student-athletes, parents and coaches can and do hold their own and each other’s athletic involvement in different perspectives and with different intentions.

In an individual sport, one argument goes, if athletes choose to underachieve and the lack of effort affects no one else, it’s the athletes’ business, period. If the athletes have the right to gauge their efforts according to personal aspirations, can they also have an obligation to fully develop their natural gifts? And who gets to define what “fully develop” means? Do individual athletes have obligations to their opponents—that is, each other —providing a mutually beneficial incentive to excel? From the athletes’ perspective, there are no simple answers to these questions,
and again, well explore some of the underlying issues further in Chapter 10.

From a coach’s standpoint, the obligation does exist to demand excellence from each athlete—to encourage a quality effort rather than to tolerate a minimal one. As we discussed in Chapter 7, the minimum will satisfy the underachiever if the coach is willing to tolerate it—if a quality effort is never demanded, no one will ever know how this athlete would have responded to such a demand. The coach owes him- or herself and the athlete the opportunity to find out.

The situation changes with a team sport in which a lack of effort directly affects teammates. In Chapter 3 we acknowledged that some athletes are talented enough to successfully compete with minimal practice and preparation. If such individuals are not intrinsically motivated to improve, convincing them that such improvement is necessary, or at least desirable, may be a monumental task, even within a team framework.

While young athletes are often and understandably motivated by concrete, relative results, the concept of personal excellence—each individual’s potential as the primary focus of competition, remains an essential concept. Why worry about improvement as long as they can already defeat everyone on the block, the team, or in the school? The relative answer is that tomorrow someone better may move to the block, join the team, or enroll in the school, or the school may compete against an opponent whose every player is superior. The absolute answer, again, is that the best athlete evaluates performance according to personal potential, and not according to the performance of others.

At any given point in time, the words, “there’s always someone better” ring true for all of us. At various stages of their careers, the likes of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Jack Nicklaus, Edwin Moses, Wayne Gretzky, Jackie Joyner-Kersee, Martina Navratilova, Jerry Rice, Pelé, and Joe DiMaggio (I’ve selected from among the “elders” for this example), among many, many others, have earned the title, “best.” If these gifted individuals saw fit to work hard at their respective sports, the rest of us would be well advised to do the same—especially, but not only, when our efforts affect our teammates’ chances for success.

**Performance Enhancement Through Drugs**
Performance enhancement and recreation are the two primary motives for drug abuse among student-athletes and professional athletes as well. We’ll address performance enhancement first, and look briefly at recreation in the following section. Drug abuse for either motive cheats the athlete, the opponent(s), and in team sports, the teammates.

An athlete’s decision to attempt to improve performance through the use of drugs is related to Chapter 4’s exploration of winning, losing and competing. For the steroid (or other performance enhancing drug) user, the drug is either an ill-advised shortcut to a level of performance that in the athlete’s mind would have taken too long to achieve, or it is an illegitimate means to a performance level that the athlete has no business attaining—a level of strength, size, or speed that is available only through the drug.

In either case, natural competition and the quality of effort have been shunned in favor of a desire to win at any cost. Again, the desire to excel and to win is normal, healthy, admirable and to be encouraged—it makes sense to enter any contest prepared, and with the intention of winning by honorable means. Drug use indicates that this honorable desire to win has regressed to a dishonorable need to win by any means available. Some (very few) athletes and trainers have begun to voice the opinion that drug-enhancement, from blood doping to steroid use, is just another means of training—no less “natural” than any high-level aerobic, anaerobic, flexibility or skill training. Until and unless a majority of athletes and the governing bodies of amateur and professional sports adopt that view, it will remain an after-the-fact rationalization for folks who choose to break the current rules.

Student-athletes and professional athletes who use drugs cheat themselves in several ways. While they are artificially enhancing their performance, they cannot know their natural potential. Whether the performance is to be measured as a function of speed, strength, appearance, or some sport-specific skill that is enhanced artificially by the drug, the deceit is the same. The sprinters, weight lifters, body builders, football players, baseball players—whoever uses the drug—are faced with the following:

- If they are victorious in the particular event, game, tournament, season or throughout their career, they will never know if
they would have achieved what they have without cheating through drug use.

- The users know that their victories are drug-enhanced, not natural, and essentially not legitimate. As mysterious and uncomfortable as it may be for those who do not cheat to acknowledge, such illegitimacy does not bother some athletes who cheat—who, developmentally, see through a worldview in which "win at all costs" is their reality—for them, what they are doing is not wrong, but simply the way the world is.

- The physical and emotional issues that can arise from both the ingestion of the drug and the conscience of those who do feel guilty about having cheated, are not worth the risk.

Perhaps the most obvious issue though is that performance enhancement through drugs cheats the opponent. Even if a drug-enhanced victory is eventually reversed and the rightful winner is acknowledged, some results of the cheating are irreversible. The world of track and field is a powerful, but by no means the only, example of this.

When a sprinter wins a close race with a drug-enhanced performance, the second-place finisher (who, for the sake of this example, we’ll assume is drug-free—although that’s not always the case) crosses the finish line second, is not acknowledged as the winner, receives a second-place medal, trophy or ribbon, and stands publicly on the second-place podium during the awards ceremony. Subsequently, after the drug tests have been completed and the winner disqualified, the second-place finisher becomes the winner, but a winner who has been denied the experience of crossing the finish line first and of being properly acknowledged at the awards ceremony. This is an irreversible injustice whether it occurs at the World Championships, the Olympics, a high-school dual meet, or a local youth-sport race (where, admittedly, the odds of a drug-induced victory occurring are low).

Regardless of the particular sport or event, a drug-enhanced victory is not a victory at all, but rather a theft. The thief's booty may include a medal, a ribbon, a trophy, even some financial earnings from endorsements for professionals, and it always includes an irreversible experience in the life of the genuine winner.

RECREATION THROUGH DRUGS
Recreational drug abuse also cheats the abuser, the competition and the teammates. Unfortunately, some elite amateur and professional athletes are so gifted that even their drug-influenced performances exceed those of their drug-free opponents. In fact, many high school and college athletes who read this section may scoff at these words since they know they’ve used their drug of choice and still performed well enough that no one was any the wiser—and they would be exactly right. They performed well enough, and they didn’t get caught: if that’s their personal standard, then the larger lessons that sport can teach may have already passed them by.

From a competitive standpoint, the argument is twofold. First, if you’re serious about competing, why would you intentionally do anything that might undermine your ability to compete? Second, none of your true competitors wants to compete against an opponent (you) who has a built-in excuse. Sure, as we argued in Chapter 4 and alluded to above, the real competition is the self—your own potential, but head-to-head competition is a healthy and integral part of most athletic events, and an opponent can inspire and push you to greater heights. Win or lose, neither of you wants an excuse.

* * *

**ACADEMIC CHEATING**

Children and adolescents, under real or imagined pressure to pass tests, complete homework, achieve certain grades, or excel, sometimes choose to cheat. The pressure may come from parents, peers, teachers, or the students themselves, and the cheating may take the form of copying homework (or giving it to be copied), getting copies of tests before they are administered, copying or giving answers or using cheat-notes during a test, or plagiarizing reports and papers—whether purchased or received free of charge.

The desire to “succeed” often prompts this behavior, as do the desire to do as little work as possible and the fear of failure. These desires and fears are so powerful because of two major misconceptions that many of us have about school. Too many of us, from kindergarten through graduate school, are conditioned to believe that the report card—doing well with grades at any cost—or that getting a good job, is the primary goal in school. Who cares if we remember or understand anything as long
as we get good or passing grades, go on to the next step, and eventually take home a good paycheck?

Should we be surprised then, that some coaches and student-athletes who have been educated in this way cheat academically in order to do well on their athletic report cards—final scores and won-lost records? Disappointed, yes; surprised, no. Far too infrequently do parents, teachers, coaches and counselors remind students that they are in school to learn—to develop intellectually, emotionally, physically and socially, and in more and more cases, spiritually as well. Ideally such development will empower them to learn to learn, to learn to understand, to learn to apply what they understand to everyday life, and to always remain open to learning something new.

On an institutional level the problem falls into at least two broad categories. In the first, coaches, schools and athletic associations do enforce reasonable academic eligibility standards, and some student-athletes cheat in order to meet them. In the second category we find coaches, schools and associations that either have no standards or that choose to enforce the standards they do have inconsistently, unfairly, or self-servingly, if at all. Both of these categories share certain characteristics:

- **Athletic participation and/or performance is implicitly more important than academic or personal integrity.**
- **This implication becomes part of the student-athletes’ education. In the former case they learn that they can cheat, play sports and still get a diploma. In the latter, the coach or the school’s or association’s administrators demonstrate that it is all right to ignore or break the rules for the sake of sports success.**
- **The student-athletes will not have legitimately earned any diploma they receive.**

My bias here is in the direction of taking a close look at all four areas of concern in every student-athlete’s life—worldview, behaviors, culture(s) and environment, getting him all the help he needs, requiring him to take responsibility for choices, and enforcing whatever guidelines and sanctions exist at the appropriate time—ongoing lessons in delaying gratification, among other lessons. My experience here is that while my bias will serve many students very well, there are cases in which the very thing a student-athlete needs—the thing that will allow her to stay in
school, enhance her sense of self and not give up or drop out—is a shot at immediate gratification. Let her play, provide every opportunity for her to succeed, and unequivocally demand her absolute best, every day, in every aspect of her life. Of those three steps, it seems, the last two summarize what coaches and parents strive to do for every student-athlete anyway.

In *The Road Less Traveled*, the late M. Scott Peck described four tools in the toolbox of discipline: delaying gratification; dedicating oneself to the truth (i.e. “reality”); taking responsibility for one’s life; and *balancing*, which he defined as the *ability to discipline discipline*—to be flexible with those other three tools. This flexibility or balancing is a sophisticated and important tool that empowers us to avoid becoming obsessive as we delay gratification; to recognize that as we learn and develop, our maps of what is true or real change; and to grow into the subtle wisdom that allows us to competently discern what is and is not, in fact, our responsibility.

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Finally, although most of us begin to speak very early in life, very few of us make our livings as professional speakers. Even though we learn to write in elementary school, and even if we have an inclination toward complete sentences and coherent, unified paragraphs, very few of us make our livings as writers. The talented, enthusiastic, hard-working student-athlete likewise cannot count on earning a living playing the game that he or she loves. Very few human beings make their livings as paid professional athletes, and this message, regardless of how many times or by whom it is delivered, does not ring true for those wide-eyed competitors who dream of careers playing the games they love.

It is the job of coaches and parents to encourage those dreams and prepare the student-athlete cognitively, emotionally, physically, socially and spiritually for the day that this message becomes real, when a primary activity other than sport is appropriate—whether at high school or college graduation or at the end of a professional career (not all professional athletes are adept at coaching, sports management, play-by-play, or product endorsement). The student-athlete who receives only playing time and notoriety from his or her schooling is being cheated.

**RECRUITING VIOLATIONS**
In Chapter 6 we listed the governing organizations and associations that oversee intercollegiate athletics—providing guidelines for recruiting as well as behavior, academic eligibility and other areas. The recruiting guidelines exist, depending on one’s perspective, to protect prospective student-athletes from an endless barrage of phone calls, visits and other communications from overzealous coaches or boosters, or to prevent the most talented, “big-money” student-athletes from simply being bought by the institution with the most money and least control or integrity. The theory is that if all the schools play by an agreed-upon set of rules, the student-athlete will choose a school based on the overall academic, athletic and social offerings of the institution and not on who provides the best entertainment, food and gifts.

Of course many student-athletes will choose a school based on the athletic program’s, or a particular sport’s, reputation and success, or on the overall approach and image presented by the head coach and his or her staff. Problems arise when coaches make promises they can’t keep or when they or other representatives of the school, authorized or not, offer inappropriate incentives to entice the student-athlete to attend. Such incentives may include travel reimbursement, meals, clothing, footwear, cash or other goods or services provided directly to the student-athlete or to his or her family.

Arguments can be and have been made that these incentives genuinely help some very needy families, but these arguments are invalid since such help is rarely, if ever, the intent. Such help does not continue when the student-athlete chooses another school, even though the family still needs assistance. The incentive is a bribe and not a commitment to help a needy family.

CURRENT EVENTS NOTE: During this revision process the Penn State University sexual abuse scandal that on June 22, 2012 found former defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky guilty of sustained sexual assaults against young boys over a multi-year period was in the news. The Freeh Report, an independent investigation by former federal judge and head of the FBI, Louis Freeh, was published on July 12, 2012. The scandal exposes failure, cowardice and complicity at virtually every level of the university—from janitors to football coaches to the university president—in addition to the sexual assaults themselves.
The 2007 *Mitchell Report* on steroid and HGH use in Major League Baseball, along with Congressional hearings, and explorations of performance enhancement in other sports and in high school and college settings is another example, among many, of institutional failure in sport.

An ongoing story that is in many ways hidden outside the world of basketball, is that of Jonathan Hargett. Almost everything that could have gone wrong did go wrong in this gifted athlete’s life. Hargett, who turned 30 in August 2012, was considered by some to be good enough to become the first point-guard to play in the NBA directly after high school. His is a heartbreaking story that includes both personal and institutional missteps. In the August 18, 2012 *New York Times* Hargett is quoted saying, “I can’t blame nobody, I’ve got to blame myself.” Those words seem truthful and will serve him well moving forward, but they let a lot of people off the hook.

Outside the world of sport, the “financial meltdown” that began in 2007-2008, and has been melted further with remarkable idiocy at JP Morgan (among others) in 2012 is one more example of some of the dangers when unhealthy versions of the “it’s all about me” or “it’s all about us” worldviews act out in the world.

Within the broader context of delaying gratification, these topics deserve and require more than the space provided here, and are indicative of the interactions among individual worldviews, behavior, cultural values and social structures that both include and go well beyond the world of sport. One insightful look into these interactions and how and why individuals and institutions fail to heed warning signs is a book entitled *Willful Blindness: Why We Ignore the Obvious at Our Peril*, by Margaret Heffernan.

With the weight of this chapter and the above stories upon us, I’ll come to a close with an offering of perspective, provided by the stark contrast between these stories and a synopsis of Bill O’Brien's story as father, husband, former student-athlete and the new head football coach at Penn State—in that order.


* * *
Remember the questions:

1. Is there anything in this chapter that brings up strong feelings of agreement or disagreement? What is it that brings up a sense of resonance or aversion for you?

2. What is it about you—about who you are and how you experience the world—your values, beliefs and experiences, such that you respond to this chapter as you do?

Questions and Exercises for Chapter Eight

Remember that thinking about these questions may generate some insight, but writing your responses down, whether here in the workbook after each chapter, or in a journal or device of your choice, is a proven approach to providing a more powerful exploration. Often, the question will be posed very generally, and then focused further with follow-up questions and suggestions for how to get started. Work with the questions in the way that serves you best. Freewrite. Don’t edit or censor yourself.

This is a long chapter and it covers a lot, so we’ll keep the questions general, and you can take them in the direction that makes the most sense for you. Skipping the questions is always an option, of course, and entirely up to you. Ahem.

1. The underlying theme of this chapter might be summarized as follows: substance abuse (including alcohol), irresponsible sexual activity and various manifestations of subtle and not-so-subtle cheating share the allure of immediate gratification—in the sense of providing some short-term pleasure “right now” or an illegitimate shortcut to some desired end.

I invite you to explore your own relationship with immediate gratification, or put differently, your ability to delay gratification, whether within the three broad topics in the chapter’s subtitle, or in any area of life that is relevant to you. Examples of “in any area of life” might expand the idea of “substance abuse” to anything you tend to overdo—whether too many hours online or in front of a television, too much junk food, too many unfinished (or never started) projects or conversations, or too much or too many of
whatever you turn to when you’re bored or attempting to avoid, deny or escape something.

Freewrite as many responses as you can to each sentence completion below. Each pair is designed to guide you in identifying both areas you may be able to leverage and areas you may want to improve.

An efficient and effective approach for working with sentence completions is to set a timer for 3-5 minutes and come up with as many responses as you can for the first sentence. Once you run out of either responses or time, reset the timer and engage the second sentence, and do the same for each subsequent sentence.

a. I tend to need or move toward immediate gratification when . . .
b. I tend not to need or move toward immediate gratification when . . .

This second pair explores the same terrain, but with different language and emphasis. Where a) and b) explore your need for and tendency to move toward immediate gratification, c) and d) explore your ability to delay gratification. The difference is subtle, but each pair may bring to the surface something that the other does not.

c. My ability to delay gratification is strongest when . . .
d. My ability to delay gratification is weakest when . . .

2. Begin with either the most surprising, or what feels like the most significant, insight that the sentence completions brought to your awareness. You’ll have the opportunity to explore everything that surfaced, but it makes sense to start where the juice is. Continue your writing by exploring the insight through the four areas of concern below. You need not do these in any particular order—begin with the area that makes most sense to you.

a. Your worldview or mindset – Reflect on your personal values, beliefs and states of mind. What is it in how you view the world that leads you to delay gratification or move toward immediate gratification as you do? Do you see any
way that working with a particular value, belief or state might be beneficial?

b. Your behavior and experience – Reflect on your past and current behavior—what you’ve done and do, as well as on experiences—things that have happened to you.
   i. Is there any behavior you can change that would positively impact this particular gratification issue?
   ii. Is there any way you might reframe an experience (i.e. work with current worldview or mindset about the past) in a way that is both honest and more beneficial than how you currently frame it?

c. Your culture and relationships – Reflect on the “group” influences in your life, where “group” refers to you and at least one other person. As we use the word, culture includes you and your best friend, or you and your significant other (each is a “culture of two”), and extends, as mentioned in Chapter 2, to your family, neighborhood, school, team(s), clubs, religion, ethnicity, town or city and nation, among many other groups. Cultural influence operates “invisibly” for most of us most of the time, impacting our worldview or mindset so that what is really a specific cultural belief or view seems to be “the way the world is.” To make this “invisible” force even more interesting, cultures can and do evolve, albeit very slowly (see Appendix for more on this).
   i. Is there anything in any of the cultural influences of which you’re aware that might be impacting your relationship with gratification (remember Alicia’s fictional example, p. 101)?
   ii. Freewrite a list of the cultural influences of which you’re aware. Now add to it any magazines, e-zines, newsletters or other groups to which you subscribe, and any websites or physical locations (mall, store, library, restaurant, public park, theater, river, woods, arena, etc.) you visit regularly. Are there any previously hidden cultural influences that underlie or emerge from these subscriptions or regular visits?

d. Environment – Regardless of where you are right now, look up from your reading and check out your environment. Use as many senses as you can—look, listen and feel, smell and
taste if it’s appropriate. Did you intentionally choose this place in order to read, or is this where you need to be, and you’re taking some time to read now? Does the environment encourage you to stay focused and read, or does it provide distractions? Once you have a sense of this place, explore these two questions.

i. Are the environments in which you typically engage the specific gratification issue you’re working with helpful or not helpful to you? How so?

ii. If it’s possible to influence or even create the environments in which the gratification issue arises (e.g. arrange your office or other room, adjust the temperature and light, keep the junk food out of the house or apartment, turn your phone on or off, etc.) do you do so? If so, great. If not, consider exerting some influence in service to yourself.

3. Step back and take a look at your responses to questions 1 and 2—surprising and/or significant issues around gratification, and how worldview, behavior, culture and environment show up in and influence these issues. Do you see any comfort or discomfort, preference for or avoidance of any of the four areas?

Take a look at your responses to Question 1 from Chapter 2 (pp. 29-30). Are there any discoveries there that shine a light on or clarify your current exploration of gratification here?

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