

# The Way of the Champion

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by John O'Sullivan / Tuesday, 14 February 2017

All-American. World-champion. Greatest shooter on the planet. Most Valuable Player...twice. Yes, I am talking about Steph Curry, the all-world guard for the Golden State Warriors. These are the things we all say about him – we all know about him – when the lights are shining brightly. What about the when no one is watching?

A few years back, before most of us heard about Steph Curry, he was invited to the Kobe Bryant Nike Skills Camp, a collection of the top twenty high school and top ten college guards in the country. As camp coach and friend Alan Stein tells it in the video below, even though he was the least well-known player in attendance, there was something special about Steph Curry. Despite the fact that they practiced twice a day, every time Alan showed up to training there was Steph Curry. He was pouring sweat, He was draining shots. If he didn't get it right, he did it again. He was working his tail off before the other attendees had even laced up their shoes.

Curry continued to work throughout each session, seeking perfect form, perfecting footwork, and again, if he didn't get it right, he did it repeatedly until he did. He didn't wait for a coach to tell him; he just did it. As everyone else called it an afternoon and headed to eat, Curry stayed on the court. He would not leave until he swished 5 straight free throws. Swished them! Only then was it time to go home. As Stein concludes in the video:

***“Success is not an accident. Success is a choice, and Stephen Curry is the best shooter on the planet because he has made the choice to create great habits. And the question every athlete has to ask themselves is this: Are the habits you have today on par with the dreams you have for tomorrow?”***

Becoming a champion is not something you become when you win an award. It is not that medal around your neck or the plaque on your mantel. Becoming a champion is a way of being. It is a journey. It is a choice, as Dr. Jerry Lynch says in his coaching bible *The Way of the Champion*. **“It starts now by acting as a champion...committing yourself to the habits and ways of a champion, and choosing to engage in a *lifestyle* that demonstrates such qualities and characteristics on a consistent, daily basis.”**

Many people *want* to be champions. I have coached quite a few of them. They *want* to win the big game, a league title, or perhaps even a national championship. They *want* to represent their state, province, perhaps even their country. They are filled with wants and they say all the right words at all the right times. But wanting does not make one a champion; action does. Great achievements come from excellent habits. Greatness is a lifestyle, not a hobby.

Over the years, I have coached, mentored, met, studied and learned from champions in sport, business and life. My travels take me all over the world, and my passion to meet and study the best of the best is far from being quenched. Here is what these athletes, coaches, and incredible men and women have taught me, which I hope you will use to inspire your own athletes:

1. **Champions know that “Well done is better than well said.”** Ben Franklin said it first; champion's actions say it every day.

2. **Champions possess fearlessness; they are unafraid to come up short and understand that adversity and even failure are opportunities to learn.** Ordinary people are far too worried about what people will say about them when they come up short, so they never really go all in.
3. **Champions have a tenacious focus on the process, the grind, that daily and weekly commitment to excellence.** Ordinary people focus on the outcome and love to point fingers when it does not go their way. Champions find joy in the crucible.
4. **Champions control the controllable.** While the not-quite-champs complain about officials, or field conditions, or bad coaching decisions, or cheating opponents, champions get back to work. They take care of their own house: show up early, stay late, focus on the process, get 1% better every day.
5. **Champions see the opponent as their partner in achieving excellence.** The word competitor is derived from the Latin word meaning “seek together.” Opponents are not to be feared or hated; they are fellow travelers on this amazing journey.
6. **Champions ask not “what can I get from my team” but “what can I give?”** I can give 100% effort every single day. I can give my team a positive attitude, I can give my team a better chance to win not matter what position I play, or how many minutes I earn.
7. **Champions have the will to prepare relentlessly in case their big moment ever comes.** They are committed to being ready when the universe says “it’s your time.” Not-quite champs hope that big moments don’t present themselves in “the offseason.” Everyone wants to do what it takes on game day to win; champions are willing to do what it takes six weeks, six months, even six years before kickoff.
8. **Champions are humble.** Just like the two-time defending world rugby champion New Zealand All Blacks, they “Sweep the Shed” and are never afraid to do all the little things it takes to be at the top. Not-quite- champs, on the other hand, leave the picking up of cones, or carrying the water jug, to the underclassmen and the bench players, because, well, “I have earned the right to not do my part.”
9. **Champions don’t focus on winning; they focus on competing. Every. Single. Day.** They are willing to do, and likely have already done, what others hate to do, and consistently avoid.
10. **Champions understand that excellence is a way of being, not something you do.** Your habits are a way of being. Your attitude, love of teammates, and celebration of the success of others is a way of being. Your joy in play is a way of being. Your mindfulness and accountability is a way of being. You are a human being, not a human doing.

As you can see from the list above, being a champion is not about being on every podium. There are so many true champions who will never be seen on ESPN, or recognized in the way we often think of when we say the word “champion.” Some athletes, and some teams, will never have the physical gifts to be celebrated in this way.

No, being a champion is different. It is living in a way that assures you will become the best you are capable of becoming, and time after time achieving personal best performance on and off the field. It is living in a way that gives you the best opportunity to be on a podium, but also leads to something far greater:

**The satisfaction of knowing that you did your best, that you spent yourself in a worthy cause, leaving you with no regrets, and fully aware that becoming extraordinary is a choice that you have made.**

That is the way of the champion. **Now get to work.**