

“This is a book I could not put down.  
Every parent, coach, manager, and leader should  
read it. I wish I had read it 30 years ago.”

—Lou Holtz

# LEAD... for God'Sake!

A parable for finding  
the heart of leadership

Todd G. Gongwer

“One of the most powerful books I have ever read.”  
—From the foreword by Urban Meyer

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“Very inspirational for my own faith walk. A great message for all who read it!” —**Michael Trainor, CEO, Stratus LIVE; former CEO, Jackson Hewitt**

“I loved the book. [*LEAD . . . for God’s Sake!*] was a big time inspiration to me as a coach. It truly impacted my staff and our families.”  
—**Todd Graham, Head football coach, University of Pittsburgh**

“Incredible book! By far the best leadership book I’ve read in a long, long time. I read it cover to cover within days. *LEAD . . . for God’s Sake!* is so needed for transforming leaders today.” —**Patrick McBane, President, Marketplace Solutions**

“I have finished the book and am a raving fan. Well done! [*LEAD . . . for God’s Sake!*] is a resource that will change communities, families, and lives for the better. Great job!” —**Glenn Repple, President, GA Repple and Company**

“A captivating and profound story that will reach deep into your heart.”  
—**JD Collins, Former NCAA Final Four referee; commissioner, Mid-Central Athletic Conference**

“[*LEAD . . . for God’s Sake!*] is amazing . . . I think it touches everyone in some capacity. It is a must read for anyone who deals with people and is charged with leading others.” —**Tony Alford, Wide receivers coach, University of Notre Dame**

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To see more, visit [www.leadforgodsake.com](http://www.leadforgodsake.com).

# LEAD... for God's Sake!



by Todd G. Gongwer



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**This book was written for**  
Kaden and Kira, and my friends in leadership

**This book is dedicated to**  
my grandfather, Nelson Gongwer, whose love for people, fun,  
and writing greatly impacted me



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## *Foreword*

**I**n the summer of 2011 a good friend of mine, knowing that I was in the midst of a season of reflection, gave me a copy of *LEAD . . . for God's Sake!* After explaining to me the incredible impact the book had had on his life, he assured me I would not only enjoy it, but also be impacted by its message. He was right—in a big way.

From the very start of this captivating parable, I found myself relating to the characters within. By going straight to the essence of leadership and purpose, the story challenged me to reflect upon how powerfully these two areas of life had affected not only my own pursuits and successes, but also the successes of the teams I had led in the past. Leadership and purpose were things I had dealt with a lot as we experienced success along the way. So of course, as the main characters wrestled through some of life's most important questions relating to these two subjects, I found myself doing the same, eventually following their lead to that ever-important question lying at the heart of leadership: *why do we do what we do?*

As I thought back to the whys in my own life, I was reminded of the importance of relationships and how the opportunity to positively impact lives had served as a driving force behind my decision to coach. However, as *LEAD . . . for God's Sake!* continued to unfold and painted a vivid picture of how the pressures to succeed in our culture can attack us from all angles, I was also reminded of how powerfully these

pressures can affect our motives and, in turn, our leadership. Eventually, these pressures entice us to pursue success, many times at the expense of the most important things in life—relationships. In the end, the story took me, as it will take you, on an incredible adventure toward not only a better understanding of leadership and relationships, but also a better understanding of how relationships lie at the center of our purpose both in leadership and in life.

Regardless of where you are in your own personal journey, I am convinced you will be both encouraged and challenged by this book. Its message is clear, concise, entertaining, and understandable for anyone who is receptive to changing their behavior and their relationships with others.

*LEAD . . . for God's Sake!* was one of the most powerful books I have ever read. It gave me an instant jolt of energy and reignited a passion within me to live and lead from my true purpose in life—with relationships at the foundation of all of my pursuits. My hope is that as you read this book, you will open up not only your mind but also your heart to the life-changing ideas and principles within.

Urban Meyer

Husband, father, and former two-time NCAA National Championship-winning college football head coach

## Chapter 1

### *The Need to Lead*

“**L**EAD, for God’s sake!” Coach Rocker yelled, bringing his twenty-minute tirade to an end as he stormed out of the locker room and slammed the door behind him. He was at his wits’ end. This was the Knights’ third loss in a row. And to make matters worse, it had come at the hands of cross-town rival Bishop South, a team they’d owned since the day Coach took over the program just three short seasons ago.

After losing in the final seconds of last year’s state championship game, expectations for the Knights were sky-high coming into the 2007 season, and with good reason. Four of the five starters from that team were back, and as seniors, this was their year. It seemed the stage was set for the perfect season. Instead, the Knights were now sitting on a record of three wins and three losses, and Coach Rocker could feel the pressure of unmet expectations beginning to mount.

As one of the most successful coaches in Kentucky high school basketball history, Coach Steve Rocker was already a legend in the state. The former sharpshooting point guard from Indiana University had taken both of his previous teams to Kentucky state championships, and prior to coming to Franklin North had compiled an overall record of 356–41 in just seventeen seasons as a head coach. Emerging from the

shadow of his father, the legendary Indiana high school basketball coach Pete Rucker, Steve, at just forty-two, was well on his way to becoming one of the all-time greats in his profession.

After experiencing three sub-five-hundred seasons in a row, Kentucky powerhouse Franklin North High School had hired Coach Rucker in the summer of 2005, convinced he could bring the Knights back to the glory days. Never one to disappoint, the fiery head coach had done just that by achieving a record of 14–6 in his first season with the Knights, followed by a record of 19–4, a regional championship, and a state runner-up title in his second season. Clearly, the Knights were back. Coach Rucker was practically given the key to the city, as the people of Franklin adored their beloved Knights and anyone who contributed so positively to their success. Now, in just his third season at the helm, the state championship was clearly within reach, and the standard was set. Anything less than the title for the number-one-ranked Knights would be viewed as failure in the eyes of the Franklin community—and in the eyes of Coach Rucker, too.

Coach didn't bother stopping by his office to lock up or to discuss the game with any of his assistant coaches. Although he'd typically confer with them after a game to determine the team's shortcomings, as far as he was concerned, this was all about team leadership . . . or a lack thereof. There was absolutely no other excuse. The Knights had worked their tails off all summer long. They were running their offense to perfection and, with 6' 9" All-state center David Kelton filling the lane, their defense had wreaked havoc on each of their opponents . . . in the first three games of the season, that is.

Now, for some reason, they weren't getting it done anymore. The Knights looked sloppy on both ends of the floor and

out of sync in virtually every aspect of the game. Something just wasn't right, and Coach Rocker was determined to get to the bottom of it immediately.

Long after most of the fans had left the building, Coach, still stinging from the loss and submerged in his own thoughts, walked down the lonely back corridor adjacent to the gymnasium on the way to his car. As he neared the large, steel door to the outside, a lone voice rang out from behind.

"Hang in there, Coach. There's a reason for everything."

Startled, he turned to see who it was. All he could make out was a short, dark figure standing at the end of the hall, holding what looked like a mop in his hand. Although he wasn't certain, the short frame and the mop made it pretty easy to guess who it was, despite the darkness of the hallway. It had to be Joe Taylor, the school janitor.

Though Joe appeared to be a popular figure among the students, he was usually pretty reserved around Coach, so a relationship between the two men had never developed. Nonetheless, every once in a while, seemingly out of the blue, Joe would say something almost philosophical in nature. It would be brief, and maybe even a little bit confusing; but for some reason, it always seemed deeply meaningful.

"Yeah, right, Joe . . . whatever," Coach answered as he gave a halfhearted wave and turned to finish the walk to his car. "A reason for everything . . . what the heck is that supposed to mean?" he mumbled to himself.

As he made the thirty-minute drive home through the hills of eastern Kentucky, Coach continued to seethe. Questions flooded his mind. What was wrong with his team? Why did his guys not understand how important these games were? Why did they seem so clueless about leadership? Why did they

just not care about winning as much as he did? Was it laziness, complacency, overconfidence?

Whatever it was, there was no excuse for it, and he was determined to make them pay. No team of his was going to lose like this ever again. Besides, they needed to understand these lessons to be successful later in life. *If you don't pursue your goals with passion, how can you expect to ever make it to the top, regardless of what you're striving for?* Deep in thought, he continued the drive through the lonely darkness of the Kentucky countryside.

Eventually, his mind shifted to considering options for the next day's practice. *Maybe we shouldn't even pick up a ball? We'll just get between the lines and run, and do defensive drills. Yep, back to basics. If these guys don't hate losing enough to work harder than they have been during games, I'll teach 'em to hate what happens in practice when they don't!* He'd seen it work before, so he was confident it would work again. He would ratchet the intensity up big time as a wake-up call they all desperately needed to hear.

As Coach pulled up to his house, he noticed Brandon, his ten-year-old son shooting baskets on the dimly lit court off to the side of the driveway. Shorter than most of his friends, Brandon was a true chip off the old block, both in stature and attitude. What he lacked in size he made up for with his determination, relentlessly pursuing his dream of following in his dad's footsteps to become a basketball superstar.

"Hey, Dad! Sorry about the loss . . . Wanna play me in one-on-one?" Brandon asked, hoping to cheer him up a bit.

"Sorry, Brandon, Dad's got to get some things done tonight before tomorrow's practice. You keep working on your game so your team never does what ours did tonight. Bunch

of lazy punks . . .” he muttered, closing the door to the house behind him.

Brandon was used to this answer, so he shrugged it off pretty easily. He knew how important winning was to his dad, so anytime the Knights lost, Brandon normally stayed clear. Not sure why he’d even asked, Brandon went back to his routine of counting down the seconds to the end of the state championship game, dribbling through defenders, and hitting the shot at the buzzer. In jubilation, Brandon would jump around, imagining the fans swarming him while his dad proudly embraced him. State champs at last. That was his dream.

But now, back to reality. Even though his dad’s not spending time with him was tough to take, he knew Coach had to work hard to produce winning teams, so he’d learned not to make a big deal about it. Besides, when Dad’s team won, he was always in a good mood. And since he won most of the time, all was usually well—so well, in fact, that Coach Rocker was frequently being interviewed on the nightly news or written about in articles. People seemed to know him everywhere they went. It was cool having everyone worship his dad because of his basketball success. It was also cool to live in a great neighborhood in a big house. So, despite his disappointments, Brandon had learned that the lack of time with his dad was the price he had to pay for all the other great things that came with his success.

Once inside the house, Coach headed straight for his favorite stewing spot, the den, to begin the breakdown of the previous game’s film. Almost immediately upon settling into his chair with his notebook in hand, the phone rang. It was Grant Steffin, Coach Rocker’s favorite golfing buddy. Grant



lived in a beautiful home just down the street and was the CEO of Cybelcom, one of the fastest-growing companies in the region. Before that, the Ivy League-educated business whiz had founded his own software company, which was eventually bought out by Cybelcom in the late nineties. After just three years as a division president for Cybelcom, the board recognized Grant's uncanny ability to lead and handed him the reins of the entire organization. Grant exuded confidence, and with his athletic build and thick, dark hair, he even looked the part of a leader. He truly seemed to have it all. If anyone knew about leadership or how to win, it was Grant Steffin.

"Hey, Coach. Thought you might be up for a beer," Grant said in his normal upbeat tone. "I know the loss is eatin' away at ya, so I thought I'd offer my counsel . . . along with a cold beverage, of course."

Coach could rarely turn down the opportunity to hang out with Grant, especially feeling like he was. So, despite the late hour, he accepted the invitation, jumped up from his chair, and headed for the door.

"Runnin' over to Grant's for a few!" he yelled, slipping into his jacket.

Kathy, Coach's wife, was upstairs putting Kylee, their six-year-old daughter, to bed. She popped her head out from the bedroom doorway and shot him a disgusted look. Coach knew what she was thinking, but at this point, he didn't really care. He had more important things to worry about than a nagging wife. Shrugging it off, he walked out the door and headed across the backyard, following his normal shortcut to Grant's place.