

FINDING  
YOUR PATH TO  
SIGNIFICANCE

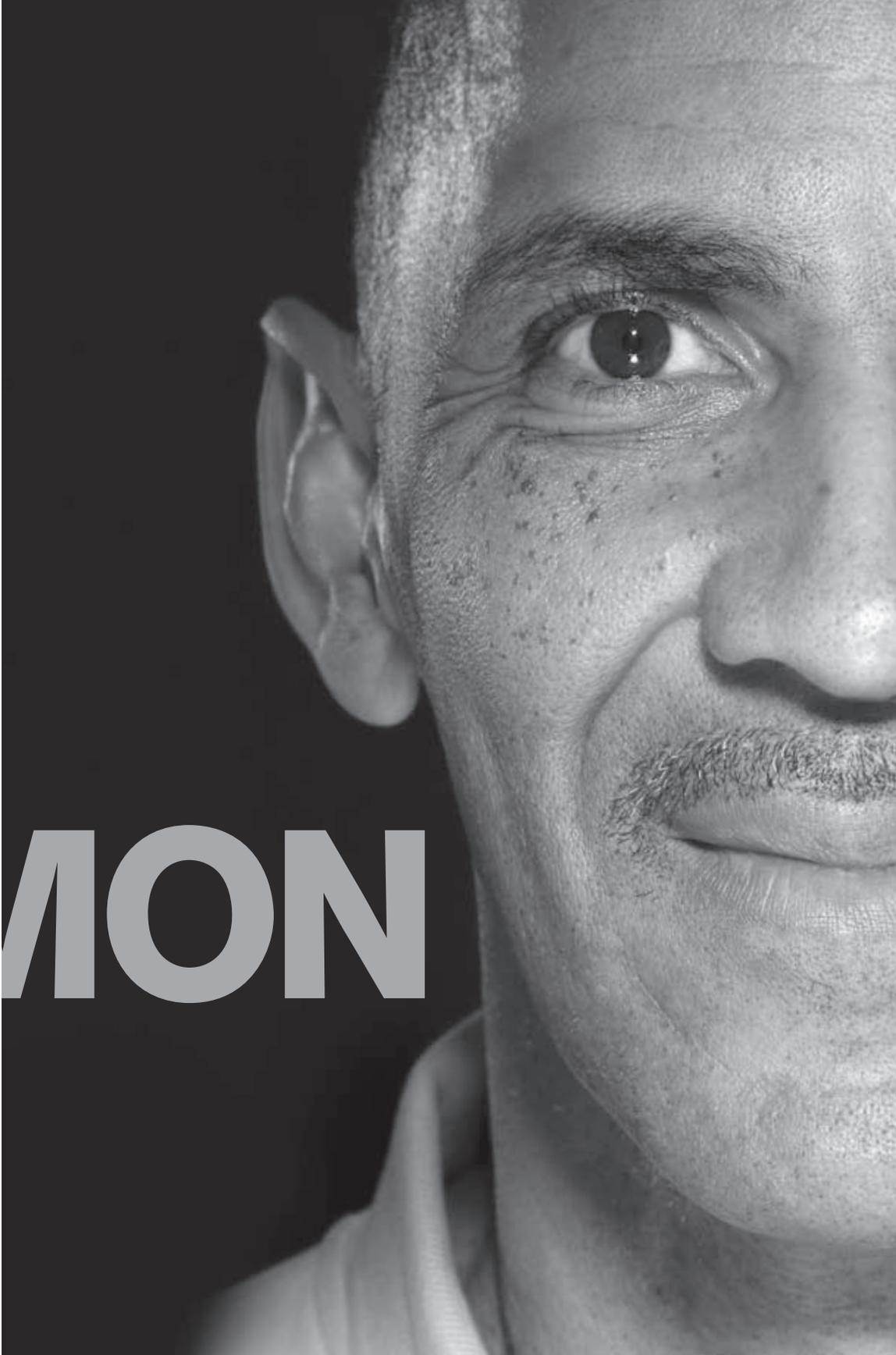
# UN COMM

TONY DUNGY

WITH NATHAN  
WHITAKER



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.  
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A high-contrast, black and white close-up photograph of a man's face. The man has a mustache and is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a subtle smile. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of his skin and the details of his facial features. The background is dark and out of focus.

**MON**

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*To my sons, that they might continue  
on their journey to becoming uncommon men.*

TONY DUNGY

*To my daughters, that they might hold out for  
someday spending their lives with uncommon men.*

NATHAN WHITAKER

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# INTRODUCTION

*Not all those who wander are lost.*

J. R. R. TOLKIEN

SINCE COMING TO INDIANAPOLIS, I have become friends with two young men. Although they grew up fairly close to each other, they were raised under very different circumstances, in totally different environments. Brandon Robinson is white. He grew up in a two-parent home in rural Indiana. Dallas Clifton is black and was raised by his mother in the heart of Indianapolis.

Despite these different backgrounds, however, both boys have a lot in common. Both are extremely bright and articulate and have fun, engaging personalities. Both are good hearted and good looking—the type of young men you hope your daughter will bring home one day. But Brandon

and Dallas also have one more thing in common. Both are in prison—the result of making poor decisions they will regret the rest of their lives.

Sadly, stories like Brandon's and Dallas's are becoming more and more common today. In Marion County, Indiana, which includes the city of Indianapolis, there were 8,949 juvenile arrests in 2007. In other words, an average of twenty-five teenagers were arrested on any given day for crimes ranging from disorderly conduct to robbery and aggravated assault. When I hear these statistics, my thoughts immediately turn to the scourge of gangs or to street kids without positive direction. But through Brandon and Dallas, I've learned that is not necessarily the case.

Dan and Cheryl Robinson raised Brandon in a very quiet neighborhood in Warsaw, Indiana. According to Brandon, they were very loving and supportive, wanted the best for him, and tried to keep him away from anything that might hinder his development. Despite the fact that he grew up in what would probably be considered ideal conditions, Brandon began rebelling against his parents' authority.

Brandon began experimenting with marijuana and alcohol. It all seemed like harmless fun for him and his buddies, and he enjoyed his status as the guy with the fake ID who could get the alcohol for his underage friends. Harmless fun, that is, until one summer night when he was driving the guys home after drinking.

It was just a short ride on a road Brandon knew very well. But that night he failed to stop at a stop sign; entered the intersection at sixty miles per hour in his dual-wheeled, extended-cab pickup truck; hit a car; and killed three people, seriously injuring two others. His actions—and their tragic

effects—were caused by a blood alcohol level of at least 0.099 percent, well above Indiana’s legal limit of 0.08 percent. He was convicted of three counts of driving while intoxicated causing death and two counts of driving while intoxicated causing serious bodily injury. The judge sentenced him to twenty-eight years in prison.

The lives of three people ended that night, and the lives of the two surviving passengers, as well as all the families, forever changed at that moment.

Dallas’s story is different, yet the same. From the very start, Alicia Clifton knew Dallas was special. Dallas’s sister played the piano, and he often imitated her. By the time he was four, he was playing with both hands, and when he started taking lessons, he progressed faster than anyone could believe. By fifteen, he was playing classical music, writing his own songs, and winning numerous talent contests in and around Indianapolis.

Alicia encouraged Dallas to develop his talent, but she also wanted him to stay grounded in his Christian faith. When he began playing keyboards for several local church choirs, it seemed the ideal way for him to do both.

After a while, however, Alicia began to worry about Dallas. She knew he was paid well for his playing, but he seemed to have too much money at times. Where was he getting it? The answer, she later found out, was through gambling.

The gambling started in elementary school when the older kids taught him how to play a game called “tonk.” Soon the penny-ante card games gave way to dice. Craps was easy for Dallas, and he could turn \$50 he received from playing at a wedding into \$150 or \$200 in what seemed like minutes. On top of that, gambling was fun, a real adrenaline

rush when things were going well. Of course, Dallas didn't always win, but he always made up those occasional losses the next time. And the winning made a lot of good things happen—he could help his mother pay the bills and buy some nice things for his sisters. He had money to spend on new clothes and gifts for girls, which made him even more popular at school.

When Alicia eventually found out where this extra money was coming from, she warned Dallas about the decisions he was making and the chances he was taking with his life. But everything was going so well for Dallas, he was sure his mom was worrying for no reason.

Dallas graduated from high school and enrolled in a university in Kentucky, attending on a music scholarship. Early in his freshman year, he returned to Indianapolis during a break in classes and decided to find a dice game to pass the time. He figured he could use a little extra spending money at school, and he missed the thrill of the game. Unfortunately, this day happened to be one of those “losing” days. When he lost about \$200, he borrowed it from one of the other players, feeling sure his luck would change and he would win it back. But this day, his luck didn't change. Now not only had he lost *his* money, but he had compounded his problems by losing the money he had borrowed. Dallas had to head back to school, but the “friend” who loaned him the money expected to be repaid quickly. He told Dallas that if he didn't get the money from him, he would get it from his family, one way or another.

Worried about what might happen to his mom or his sisters once he was back at school, Dallas had a dilemma. Where could he get some quick cash and put this problem behind

him? He could have tried to borrow from someone else, or he could have asked for help from his mother or someone at church. But he didn't. He figured he had gotten himself into this, and he needed to get himself out.

Dallas knew that most people in the underground world of these dice and other gambling games didn't use banks for their holdings, but kept large sums with them. As a result, he got a gun and held up someone who was leaving another dice game. He just needed the money so he could get back to school and stop worrying, but rather than stop the slide, he continued the downward spiral. He knew it wasn't the right thing to do, but he figured it was the only way he could protect his family.

That decision made Dallas one of those Marion County statistics—a teenager arrested. Dallas didn't think his victim would go to the police, but he did. At the age of nineteen, this college student, classical pianist, and church keyboardist was sentenced to five years in prison for armed robbery.

Brandon and Dallas were really my motivation to write this book. Two boys, two different backgrounds, two different upbringings. Both followed the “wide road” and ended up in prison, which tells me that our society today is facing a widespread problem. It's not an inner-city problem, or an economic problem, or even a religious problem. The kind of ideas that our young people are buying into and the pressure to conform are causing our teenagers to follow that path of least resistance.

It's easy to get swept along, borne by the current with no idea where you're headed. Sometimes you find yourself miles out from shore with the lighthouse no longer visible. I've seen it over and over through the years, and I've even felt the pull

myself. There have been plenty of times when I've looked around and wondered, *Now how did I get here? Where is here? And who are these people floating alongside me?*

Unfortunately, that seems to be the path that way too many of us naturally take. We live in a world in which things are accepted as normal without any thought as to whether they should be or whether there might be a better way. Too often we resign ourselves to accepting that things just are the way they are.

We get pulled in every direction by people and society. Everyone has a different expectation for us as men: be a provider, be tough, be sensitive, don't cry, stay home, go to work, change diapers, go hang out with the boys, *don't* go hang out with the boys, and so on.

Young men today are told to demand respect, be a "gangsta," take no prisoners whether on the streets or in bed, look out for number one. Some have said that being a man today means to be sensitive and caring, to be nurturing, quick to comfort, open to talk. Still others have said that we've been created to explore caves and beat our chests in some sort of masculine cosmic rhythm.

But what does it really mean to *be a man*?

I say this: being a man is more than leaving our wives husbandless, our children fatherless, our employers passionless, our families hopeless.

You can be more. You were created to be more—and better. The messages of the world are a cop-out: the messages of sexual conquest, of financial achievement, of victory in general. Not only are these messages not fair, but they also fall so far short of what you can do—and more importantly, who you can be.



In football, we often speak in terms of keys. We'll key on the quarterback or on a particularly dangerous and game-changing running back. The strong safety keys off of the tight end. On offense, the center may use the middle linebacker as his key for determining whom to block, or the receiver may key off whether the cornerback is playing up on him or back, inside or outside, to determine which way he's going to release from the line of scrimmage to run his route.

Sometimes we refer to it as "finding our landmarks." I've always loved that phrase, for all that it says about football and life. Defensive backs in particular have to find their landmarks in order to properly defend their territory. They are charged with being in a certain place that is dictated by both the offense and the field itself. Their "spot" is determined by how far they are from the end zone, how far from the sideline, and what kind of help they can expect from teammates.

I think our journey as men is similar. We live in a world that is fluid: some of us are single, some are married, some have children at home, some have children away at school, and others see their children only on court-prescribed visitation days. Some of us are nearing the end of our time on earth (we assume), while others of us have our entire lives ahead of us (again, we assume!).

The fundamentals, however, don't change: the keys to life, those landmarks that we can use to find our footing and maintain our position and bearings, will always remain. In football, when our team isn't playing well, I might say, "We have to get back to our fundamentals," referring to those basic principles that allow us to play the game successfully—

blocking, tackling, running, catching. Right now, our society also needs to get back to the fundamentals, those basic principles that will allow us to succeed as men. We can be certain there will always be obstacles along the way. However, having those fundamentals to fall back on will help us to overcome those obstacles. We are not only *able* to effect this change, but I think we *need* to.



This book came about in response to two separate but related causes: First, after writing *Quiet Strength* in 2007, I received a number of letters and e-mails from men—young men, in particular—who said that they are struggling with what it means to truly be a man in this day and age. Second, I've watched young men come into the NFL for the last three decades, but lately it seems they're coming to us less prepared and in need of more direction.

I told our team when we assembled in late 2005, "Continue being who you are, because our young people need to hear from you. If anything, be bolder in who you are, because our boys are getting a lot of wrong messages today about what it means to be a man in this world, about how they should act and talk and dress and treat people. They aren't always getting the right message, but you guys have the right message, and you live it, and we need you to continue to do that." I still believe that.

Though I don't pretend to have all the answers, I hope this book will help you think about where you're headed. Often the path isn't clear and the keys aren't obvious. I realize that many of these topics are deep, complex issues. And you'll probably

notice that most of my thoughts come from what I believe the Bible says it takes to be a man. I won't apologize for or shy away from that, because that's the way I was raised, and God's Word has always been the best source of advice for me.

At the end of the day, I'm sure of one thing: accumulating stuff and women and titles and money are wrong keys. Fitting in, following the crowd, and being common are not what we're supposed to do. There's more in store for us.

My football coach at the University of Minnesota, Cal Stoll, often told us, "Success is uncommon, therefore not to be enjoyed by the common man. I'm looking for uncommon people."

That should be true for the rest of us as well. Over the next few pages, I hope we can figure out what it means to be a man.

A true man, one who is *uncommon*.

PART I

# DEVELOP YOUR CORE

+ + +

Experience is the  
name everyone gives  
to their mistakes.

**OSCAR WILDE**

# CHARACTER

*Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.*

ARISTOTLE

IN 1998, THE INDIANAPOLIS COLTS were confronted with a dilemma. Finishing the prior season with three wins against thirteen defeats, they held the first pick in the NFL draft that April. Their selection would affect the direction of the team for years to come, positively or negatively. At the time, I was head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, so I was worried about my team in Tampa, and didn't realize what a huge impact the Colts' selection would have on my life.

Bill Polian, president of the Colts, was faced with a difficult choice between two great talents: Ryan Leaf and Peyton Manning. Both were big players with strong arms: Leaf had set numerous records at Washington State University, and Manning had done the same at the University of Tennessee. In hindsight, it seems like an obvious choice, but at the

time there was plenty of debate. Media analysts and scouts around the league were split evenly, but Bill decided to select Manning. There was no question Peyton had the physical skills to be a great player, but what tipped the scales in Bill's mind were Peyton's work ethic, his love for the game, his approach toward football as a job, and his quiet private life. Ultimately, when faced with the choice that would define the course of the franchise, the Colts based that decision on character, and that choice has resulted in great success for us and for our future Hall of Fame quarterback.

For the Colts, character is a quality that can be measured just like height, weight, and speed. In fact, we put more emphasis on this area than we do on physical tools. Coaching ability or talent cannot make up for a lack of character. In the draft, there are only a few things that will knock a player out of consideration for our team, and this issue of character is one of them. We have a category on our evaluation form that is labeled "DNDC"—*Do Not Draft because of Character*. Every year, many players that we put in that category get drafted in the first round by other teams, and some even go on to become household names in the NFL. But we pass on them because of something we see in their character that makes us believe they are not worth the risk. Most of the time, we're right. And those times when we are make it worth even those times when we're not.

That's not necessarily the common approach today, though. So often there is such an emphasis on results that it doesn't matter how you get them. Moving up is more important than *the way* you move up. It doesn't matter what kind of person you are, just what kind of player you are. It doesn't matter if you follow the rules or break them, just as long as

you come out on top. After all, that's what everyone will remember at the end of the day. That's why we have to have steroid testing in the NFL. That's why medals are forfeited in the Olympics. Competitors have to ask themselves: *Since everyone is doing it, if I want to have a legitimate chance, I have to do it too, right?*

*What you do is not as important as how you do it.* Those are the words that keep coming back to me when I am tempted to choose what is expedient over what is right. People who bend the rules to get ahead usually get caught in the long run. But even if they don't get caught, they will always know how they made it to the top. And at some deep-down level, they'll know that they're frauds and that maybe they didn't have what it took to accomplish such achievements on a level playing field.

The other problem is that, at some point, somebody who *does* care how the game is played—a boss, a board of directors—may well find out. For me as an employer, *how* you do your job has always been more important than *what* you do. Can you be counted on to do things the right way? Do you have the appropriate habits to get you through a tough situation, or are you the type to cut corners and hope things turn out all right? Your character will determine the answer.

When I was growing up, my folks were very clear about the importance of character. “Your word is your bond,” my mom would say constantly. The thought that someone might think of her as unreliable or untrustworthy was the worst thing possible. That's how she taught us to choose our friends—not by where they lived or what their parents did for a living. She wanted us to have friends we could trust.

Today, I have friends of all ages, races, and economic

backgrounds. But my closest friends are people of high character—and I don't hang around with people I can't trust.

My mom believed that a person's character reveals what he or she really believes about life. Is it important to be honest? Is it important to obey your parents all the time, or just important not to get caught disobeying? Is there a God who really rewards good character, or is it okay to do whatever it takes to win?

That motherly guidance has impacted me professionally as well. Because of the premium my mom put on character, I look for it in the people I work with. My style in creating a coaching staff is to hire talented coaches and teachers and let them do their jobs. This means that I have to have people I can trust implicitly, because I'm not going to spend my time checking on them. I don't want coaches or players who are not going to represent us well, either on or off the field.

Character begins with the little things in life. I must show that I can be trusted with each and every thing, no matter how trivial it may seem. By the time I was a teenager, my dad let me stay out pretty late playing basketball with my friends. It didn't happen right away—I couldn't be out at midnight when I was thirteen. But gradually, my parents gave me a little more freedom—and usually with someone they knew would keep an eye on me. By the time I was sixteen or seventeen, they knew that if I said I was playing ball with my buddies in East Lansing or Ann Arbor, that's exactly what I was doing and I wasn't involved in anything that could get me in trouble. They had watched me grow and had given me enough opportunities to test my character that, by then, they knew they could trust me.

“Character may be manifested in the great moments, but

it is made in the small ones,” wrote Phillips Brooks, an American clergyman in the 1800s. Over time, we create ourselves and build our character through the little acts we do.

When it comes to character, the game of football can be a real *test* for our players. During any given season, they will have many moments when their character will be challenged. Will they decide to do the right thing, even when they know doing so will be difficult?

Character can also be *revealed* at those same crossroads: what are the values that guide the decisions these players make in their day-to-day lives? Training camp reveals them early. A person’s reaction to winning, success, fame, recognition, and acceptance reveals character. Would you rather be described as successful and famous or as honest, forgiving, faithful, trustworthy, understanding of others, reasonable, thoughtful, and personally accountable?

Character is tested, revealed, and further *developed* by the decisions we make in the most challenging times. We have to know what is right, and we have to choose to do it. That is how character is developed—by facing those decisions and choosing the right way over and over until it becomes second nature. It’s just how you do things.

Outwardly, character reflects an inner life committed to honor and uncompromising integrity. If we haven’t allowed our players, subordinates, or children to grow into those values and learn to be accountable for themselves, then we have done them a disservice.

Albert Camus once said, “Integrity has no need of rules.” I tend to agree. I don’t have very many team rules for our players. They know where I stand on things, and they know that there are consequences for breaking the rules that we do

have. I try to apply one set of rules uniformly for our team, while keeping in mind that the players are individuals and come from different life experiences. Really, it's not any different from what I do with my children.

Ultimately, character and its growth don't come from rules but from the small actions of responsibility that occur day after day. That's why I believe it's important to give our players a certain amount of freedom—and the responsibility that goes with it—to allow growth to take place. In the end, character is a blend of inner courage, wisdom, and a sense of duty to yourself, to others, and to something greater than you.

In a common world, becoming an uncommon man begins by cultivating uncommon character.

# Q&A WITH COACH DUNGY

## Part I: Develop Your Core

### CHAPTER 1: CHARACTER

1. *When evaluating draft prospects, how do you find out about their character? Do you have a “character scout”?*

We instruct our scouts to ask a lot of questions about behavior and character, not only of coaches but also of teammates, academic advisers, and other staff at the college. We have access to background checks, and our staff also interview the players face-to-face to try to draw our own conclusions.

2. *How do you specifically instill character in your family? How do you teach your children and allow them to grow into honor and integrity and learn to be accountable for themselves?*

This is something Lauren and I talk about a lot with our children. We use examples from the Bible, Sunday school lessons, and life lessons in general. We try to have

our children think about what God would want them to do in different situations.

## CHAPTER 2: HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

### 3. *Have you ever had an experience in which being honest hurt you in the short run but benefited you in the long run?*

When interviewing for head coaching jobs in the mid-1990s, I was often asked similar questions by the team owners: Who will be on your coaching staff? What methods will you use to motivate and discipline the players? Will you treat this job as the most important thing in your life? Even though I knew the answers they were looking for, I wasn't always able to give them, and I know my answers hurt my chances of getting those jobs. But eventually God put me in the right job, with a front-office group that shared the same beliefs I had. With the two head coaching jobs I finally did get, I didn't have to try to live up to anything I might have said without really meaning it.

### 4. *How have you taught honesty and integrity to your children? your players?*

With my children, I try to teach honesty the same way my parents did: by stressing it. By rewarding them when they are honest and punishing dishonesty. By trying to demonstrate honesty myself in every situation. With my players, I always stress that they have to be honest with me. I'm in their corner, even if they make a mistake, as long as they're up-front with me. But if I can't depend on them, or if I find out later that they've put me in a bad position by not being honest, that will have severe consequences.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

TONY DUNGY IS the #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *Quiet Strength*. He led the Indianapolis Colts to Super Bowl victory in 2007, the first such win for an African American coach. Dungy had taken eight of his previous ten teams to the playoffs. With this victory, he joined Mike Ditka and Tom Flores as the only individuals to win the Super Bowl as a player and head coach.

Dungy joined the Colts in 2002 after serving as the most successful head coach in Tampa Bay Buccaneers history. He has also held assistant coaching positions with the University of Minnesota, Pittsburgh Steelers, Kansas City Chiefs, and Minnesota Vikings. Before becoming a coach, Dungy played three seasons in the NFL.

Dungy has been involved in a wide variety of charitable organizations, including the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Athletes in Action, Mentors for Life, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys & Girls Clubs, the Prison Crusade Ministry, and All Pro Dad. He also works with Basket of Hope, the Black Coaches

Association National Convention, Indiana Black Expo, the United Way of Central Indiana, and the American Diabetes Association.

He and his wife, Lauren, are the parents of six children: daughters, Tiara and Jade, and sons, Eric, Jordan, Justin, and the late James Dungy. They live in Indianapolis, Indiana, and Tampa, Florida.

NATHAN WHITAKER IS the coauthor of *Quiet Strength* and a Harvard Law School graduate whose firm currently represents NFL and college coaches and administrators. A two-sport athlete in baseball and football at Duke University, he has worked in football administration for the Jacksonville Jaguars and Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He has also been employed in ministry. He lives in Florida with his wife, Amy, and their two daughters, Hannah and Ellie Kate.