

# UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

## ***“As Far as You Can See”—Papa Neighbors***

**Papa Neighbors was always big on goals. And just like everything else he ever did with us grandkids, he did it through teaching lessons rather than some academic method of instruction. It was real. It was inspiring. And it's been memorable and useful for over 30 years.**

**When it came to one of us kids setting goals, he always said to set the goal “AS FAR AS WE COULD SEE.” He would make us describe in detail what the goal looked like. What it smelled like. What it felt like. Once we could do that, he would then go about helping us get there.**

**As an 8th grader I became obsessed with being able to dunk a basketball from watching Dr. J and David Thompson on TV. In my small hometown we also went to every high school game and I got to sit on the front row to watch the Ducharme brothers from Greenwood wow the crowd with their dunks in pre-game warm-ups. And when Joe Bob Wise came to town with his red, white, and blue basketball from Fort Smith Southside people got there an hour early just to watch him dunk.**

**I could totally describe the feeling of flying through the air, hanging forever, jamming the ball home just like my idols. At 5'6, 122 pounds without a hint of muscle tone or natural jumping ability, I think most kids Papa would have simply said “pick a different goal, boy.”**

**Instead, I woke up the next morning with an old bike rim nailed to a telephone pole about 8 feet off the ground. There was a volleyball under the goal where my basketball usually was. Papa said, “Let's see ya dunk that there volleyball through that bike tar.”**

**Chuck Taylors laced tight and Sidney Moncrief jersey untucked, I took flight. Even though I could palm the volleyball unlike a regulation basketball, I didn't have the hops to get it over the rim. In fact, it barely grazed the bottom of the rim. Disappointed I was afraid to make eye contact with Papa. When I did, he motioned me over and said “you can't jump high enough.” Well, no duh, Papa... “We'll try again tomorrow,” he said and we went off to the rest of our day. He had decided we were going to paint the inside of his car workshop so we needed to move everything outside. About an hour in I noticed I was always the one walking backwards and bending down to pick the heavy ends of things. When I asked if we could switch for a while, I was met with a very stern glare.**

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By noon everything was moved outside and Gee Gee was waiting with sandwiches and sweet tea. But before we could finish the last bite the skies began to cloud up and Papa said we had better get the stuff back inside before the rain came. Guess who was back on the heavy end of things walking backwards. That night when I laid down the front of my legs hurt like they had never hurt before. The next morning when I tried to dunk the volleyball it didn't even graze the bike tire simulating a rim. I had gotten even worse at dunking overnight!!!

I was expecting another day of moving things out of the workshop to prepare for painting. But he had changed his mind. We were going to rearrange his hub cap collection that lined the back wall of the shed. He had 100's. He had decided that he want them to hang around the entire shop so he handed me a hammer and some nails. He grabbed a stool to stand on and pointed to a spot on the wall just barely out of my normal reach. I asked him if we could lower it a little so I could reach it easier. He made up some excuse about them needing to be hung at a certain height and I knew better to argue. After hanging about 10 hub caps, I wondered if maybe I could get the other step stool to use. Denied. By lunch time today, my back of my legs (I would later learn they were called calves) burned like the front of legs were. After the last hub cap was hung, I could barely walk.

When it came time for the next morning dunk attempted, I don't think my feet left the ground.

The next few weeks involved many chores of the likes. Slowly the soreness left my legs and each day I began to get closer and closer to dunking that volleyball. Finally one day near the end the summer, BOOM!! I dunked a semi-flat volleyball through a bicycle tire nailed to a telephone pole. You would have thought from my reaction that I had just accomplished the impossible. I couldn't wait to tell my mom and my uncles. I also couldn't wait to show them the next day when everyone was coming over for a BBQ. Instead I woke up to find the "rim" had been raised about six inches and the volleyball was replaced with a junior sized basketball. While my older cousins and uncles enjoyed a dunk contest, I was quickly learning what my Papa was up to. He was helping me learn that once you get as far as you can see, you need to look a little further!!

I also learned all the walking backwards and calf raises from chores had developed the leg muscles responsible for making you jump higher. (You children of the 80s will know I had experienced Wax-on, Wax-off training like the Karate Kid) Those chores had built my quads, hamstrings, and calves. No weights. No box jumping. Just work.

Fast forward to the first game of my sophomore year. My vertical jump had increased from about 8 inches to 39 inches. Full of adrenaline, with Van Halen's JUMP crackling through the make shift sound system of Greenwood High School gym, I dunked for the first time. It wasn't anything worth of ESPN Play of the Day, but it was a dunk.

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**Too many of us don't know what to do once we reach our goals. Coaches and teachers spend hours talking about setting goals and reaching goals, but most don't take it any further.**

**48 Days ago, I reached another life long goal of becoming a Division I Basketball Head Coach.**

**It was a 10 year plan that took 17 years to execute, but every step along the way was reached because of the lessons I learned from Papa and that tire rim. Each step was at one time or another AS FAR AS I COULD SEE. If I would have not had the experience growing up that I did with that, I might have become complacent as head coach at Bentonville High School. Or as a Director of Ops at Arkansas. Or as a non-recruiting coach at Tulsa. Or...**

**While I am sure many Newsletter Coaches are already in their "dream job" or "As Far As They Can See", I am often times asked for advice about exploring new opportunities. I have sent out several pieces concerning some of the aspects to the group before... TRUST.TALENT.TIME and MOVING UP THE LADDER... Those were all pieces about how it worked for me and for friends of mine. The intent of this piece is to make sure coaches are aware of some factors I encountered that would hopefully be of benefit in deciding IF it's worth it all. Again, there are SO many ways to go about reaching your goals. This is *not* a blueprint or playbook. I hope it serves as a CHECKLIST before you make the ultimate decision to go further than you can currently "SEE".**

**Once this head coaching opportunity arose for me, I took a few minutes to reflect on the situation and these are the 4 things I came up with. You members know I am obsessed with simplicity and usually try to keep lists to things of 3. But I just couldn't combine or eliminate any of these.**

- 1) Enduring Unanswered Prayers**
- 2) Watch the beginning of the movie**
- 3) Over worked and Under Paid**
- 4) Be prepared to do the Job, Not just Get the Job**

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## UNANSWERED PRAYERS

**I have a two boxes under my desk this very second. One is full of notes from former players, fellow coaches, fans, and other well wishers. This is my “paycheck” box. The other box contains the 122 rejection letters I got in the mail when I was high school coach applying for every NCAA, NAIA, JUCO, DIVISION II, and DIVISION III that came open in a 20 hour radius of the state of Arkansas between 1996 and 1999.**

**There was a human resource law at the time that required notification to each applicant who sent a resume for a position. I saved every one of the rejection notes.**

**(Ironically when the 123 position came open, they never even asked for a resume!)**

**I wanted every single one of the jobs I applied for. Each resume was specific to the position and college for which I was applying. I can’t calculate the amount of money I spent on ink cartridges, resume paper, and postage. I can’t estimate the number of hours I spent searching for the jobs, preparing the resumes, and then following up on each. Going to the mailbox each day was full of anticipation and ended in disappointment.**

**Rejection didn’t stop after I got my foot in the door. Two years ago, I was told no on a head coaching job I wanted desperately. Last season, another of my 4 dream jobs opened and I could not even get a phone interview.**

**Enduring the unanswered prayers is without a doubt the number one thing you must ask yourself if you are willing to go through. I know very, very, very, very few people who break into college athletics without having these. Most don’t have 122, but I’m sure there are coaches out there with more than me too.**

**I hear about young coaches giving up after 2 or 3 rejections. I get emails from coaches who have been trying for 2 years to get their foot in the door. I speak with coaches all summer that want more responsibility at their current job or want to move up to a BCS conference from mid-majors. They all share the frustration that things haven’t worked out already. They quickly realize I am the WRONG person to be selling that story to. It rarely happens as fast as any of us plan, hope, or dream. It’s great for those that it does.**

**You must be able to “check” YES to this one before you proceed any further.**

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## **SEE THE BEGINNING OF THE MOVIE**

**I know full well friends of mine (good friends) reacted to hearing the news that I was named a head coach by saying... Hell, if he can do it ANYONE can. And I totally agree with them. Anyone can. Just make sure you understand that being named the head coach is the “end of the movie”.**

**The “beginning of the movie” is what you need to see. There was no press conference when I was hired as a DOBO at the University of Arkansas. There wasn’t even a press release. I didn’t even make the team picture until the 2nd season.**

**Going from being a high school head coach and running every aspect of my program to being Gary Blair’s Diet Coke getter probably didn’t deserve a press release. Nor did, turning in the player pass list, inventorying the spandex pants, sending Fed Ex tapes to other teams, picking up assistants dry cleaning, organizing camp, sweeping the floor before practice, not traveling to road games...**

**Even as a full time assistant coach a few years later the movie was much more glitzy. Breaking down film, running individual workouts, not being able to leave campus to recruit, still running camp, still sweeping the floor, now driving the van to the airport, paying for my own cell phone, laundry on the road...**

**I was ten years into the profession before I was even close to doing the amount of actual coaching that I had left behind as a high school coach. So when people ask me about making the jump into college coaching, I only ask them one question.**

**I ask them, “What’s the favorite part of the day you have right now?”**

**90% of the time they answer by saying, being on the floor coaching my team. That’s when I tell them to keep the job the have!!! It’s not meant to be a trick question but it seems that way.**

**If you are in a position right now where coaching is the part of the day that makes you happiest, you should probably stop reading now.**

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## OVER WORKED AND UNDER PAID

**Well you turned the page. So at this point you have decided you can endure rejections without becoming discouraged. You have decided that you are willing to accept roles that might be of lesser responsibility than what you have now. You're half way there!!**

**This one is the great separator.**

**Are you willing to work for less money. And in many cases WAAAAAAAAAYYYY less money.**

**The average Division I entry level position is about \$32,000. Of the 979 Division assistant positions, I would guess that 400 of them do provide a vehicle or a small vehicle stipend. 600 have some cell phone plan.**

**This is the main reason these positions usually go to someone young or inexperienced. Coaches with experience of 8 or 10 years at a level have developed a style of living. Many have families to support. Most are probably making more money than that in their current position.**

**Regardless of the salary or the level, let me assure you that you will be OVER worked and UNDER paid.**

**Just for fun I calculated my hourly wage my first season in college basketball. It was less than half of minimum wage.**

**Now for some good news. That can and will change if you do your job. As you rise the coaching ladder, the money will improve and your responsibilities will become more about basketball. If you have a plan in the long run the salary can make up for early set-backs.**

**Thanks to the Freedom of Information, you can look at coaching contracts for public institutions. And I think if most coaches were honest they would agree late in their career they are OVER paid for coaching basketball!! I would hesitate to say UNDER worked, they certainly have more control of their schedules and their duties so it seems plausible to say that equation totally flips around.**

**If you can check this one off your list, then you are ready for the last page...**

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**ONCE YOU GET THE JOB, MAKE SURE YOU CAN DO THE JOB**

**This one takes some deep inner searching.**

**You work so hard for so long to GET the job, you don't spend nearly as much trying to determine if you can DO the job.**

**But you had better.**

**If you aren't sure you can DO the job, don't take it. You won't be happy. You won't be successful. And in a very, very short time you will be wishing you HAD the job you had before. (and might be over qualified now!!)**

**If you can do it, take it; then start setting a new goal AS FAR AS YOU CAN SEE!!**

**This is just one story. It's not meant to discourage. In fact, hope it encourages!!**

**Coaching is the most rewarding profession I know of that doesn't require putting your own life at risk to save another.**

**All the hard work and sacrifice is absolutely worth it. It's one I hope we can keep the best of the best in.**

**Whether or not you have a Papa Neighbors in your background, you can certainly look around at people doing the jobs you dream of doing and learn from them. Talk to them. Email them. Write them. I would be shocked if they don't reply, if they don't, do the research yourself.**

**I wish my Papa Neighbors would have lived long enough to see me reach this goal. But I can still remember the smile on his face after that first pre-game dunk and I can only imagine this one would have been bigger.**

**And for the record, yes, I have set a new goal out AS FAR AS I CAN SEE...**