

Virtue In Action

A Promise Kept: Notre Dame coach Charlie Weis and the value of integrity.

VIRTUE IN ACTION

FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION

VIRTUES HIGHLIGHTED

COMPASSION

EMPATHY

GENEROSITY

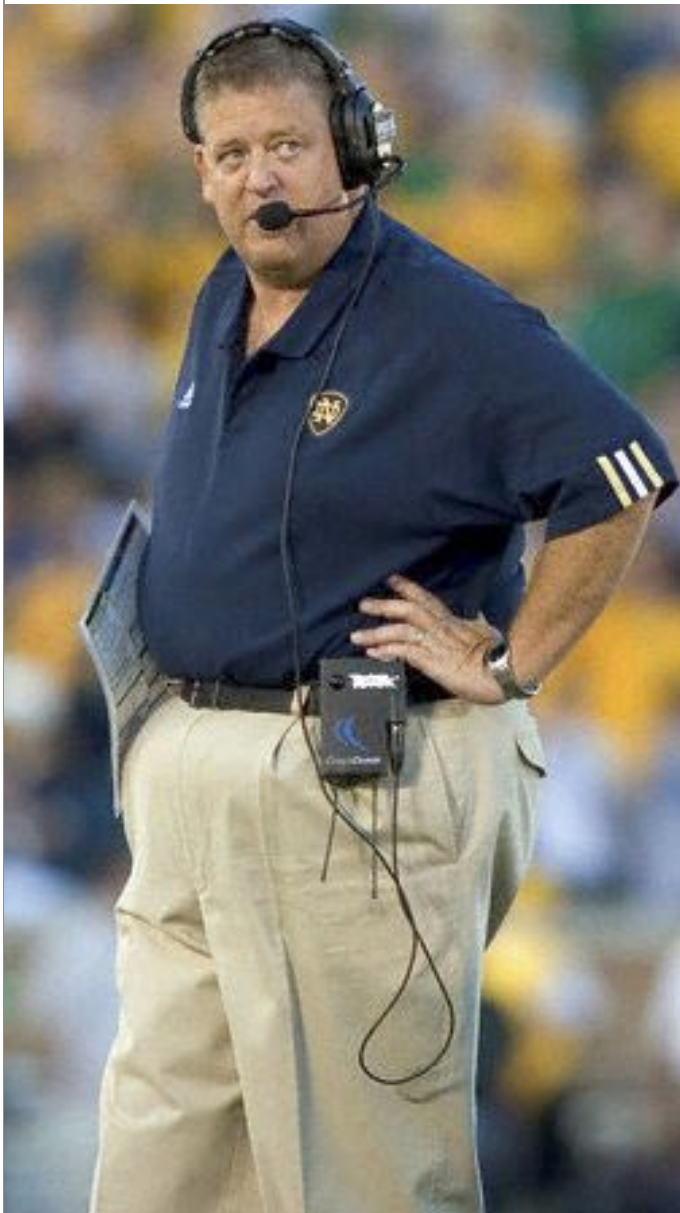
INTEGRITY

COMPASSION AND GENEROSITY: When Coach Weis learned that Montana Mazurkiewicz had an inoperable brain tumor and would soon die, he decided to take time out of his incredibly busy schedule to go and visit Montana at his home.



In the media we often hear negative stories about professional and college athletes. Athletes and coaches do make mistakes, but many are often doing good works and living out the virtues in ways that often go unnoticed. In this lesson we will tell the story of a college coach and team that have lived out some simple yet powerful virtues. The story involves a promise made by a college football coach to a 10 year old boy dying of cancer, and the risks and rewards of keeping the promise.

In Indiana, there are only two major NCAA division I-A football teams: Purdue and Notre Dame. But in Mishawaka, a small town just outside South Bend, there is only one, and that's Notre Dame. That's why it's no surprise that Montana, a ten year old boy from Mishawaka named after former ND grad and legendary NFL superstar, Joe Montana, would grow



up rooting for Notre Dame. What is surprising is how he came into contact with his favorite team's coach, Charlie Weis.

This fall, Weis began his first year as head coach at Notre Dame. He brought with him a lot of high hopes and anticipation from fans. In order to deliver on those expectations, he has dedicated countless hours. A typical day for Coach Weis starts at 5:00 a.m. and doesn't end until 12 midnight or later. During his career, this work ethic has paid off. As the offensive coordinator for the New England Patriots, he was instrumental in leading the Patriots to three Super Bowl titles.

Montana's Plight

When Coach Weis learned that Montana Mazurkiewicz had an inoperable brain tumor and would soon die, he decided to take time out of his incredibly busy schedule to go and visit Montana at his home.

During the visit, Weis made Montana feel at ease, sharing some personal stories about his family, his college days at Notre Dame, and asking Montana questions. He did more than simply make an appearance. Weis engaged Montana, talking with him about his tumor and sharing the fact of his own daughter's brain development delay. He told him stories about rooming with Notre Dame's legendary quarterback Joe Montana in college and the pranks they used to play on each other.

Weis let Montana razz him for his team's only loss up to that time in the season to Michigan State. They joked around together, and after Weis gave a team ball to Montana, his mom Cathy asked Montana to play catch. Weis saw that the boy could no longer lift his arm due to tumor-related paralysis. He climbed onto Montana's lazyboy and helped him throw the football to his mother.

Before leaving, Coach Weis asked Montana if there was anything he could do for him. Montana had already shared his desire to make it through to the next Notre Dame game. He knew he was not going to live much longer. Montana jumped on Weis's offer: he asked coach if he could call the first play of the next game. He wanted to call, "Pass right." Without hesitation, without explaining the possible dire consequences

that could result if the play went wrong, Weis accepted the request.

For a boy named after Notre Dame’s legendary quarterback, it would have been great for Weis to simply stop by, spend a couple of minutes and give him a team ball. Given Weis’s incredible busy schedule, no one would have expected anything more. Coach Weis chose to go beyond normal expectations, demonstrating tremendous generosity with his time and compassion in feeling sympathy for Montana’s illness and desiring to help.

Coach Weis may have been able to sympathize with Montana’s distress more readily, given his own daughter’s illness. Hannah Weis is 10-years old and has global developmental delay, which lessens Hannah’s ability to speak, to use her muscles and to socialize with others. Coach Weis commented, “From a parent’s standpoint, it breaks your heart. For a long time, I needed to know why it happened. I felt sorry for Hannah. I felt sorry for myself. I still need to know -- but for a different reason. I need to know, so it doesn’t happen to someone else’s kid.” Coach Weis and his wife Maura have acted on their compassion by starting Hannah and Friends, a nonprofit



foundation dedicated to providing a better quality of life for children and young adults affected by autism and global delays. Maura explains, “For Charlie and me,

we take the lessons learned from Han and make a difference in the lives of others through Hannah & Friends.”

Keeping the Promise

The next Friday night before the game, Montana Mazurkiewicz (above) died. Weis found out and called Montana’s mother. He assured her that he would keep his promise to call Montana’s play. “The game is for Montana, and the play still stands,” he said.

In the locker room before the game, Weis told the team about Montana, his condition that led to his tragic death, and the love he had for Notre Dame Football. He reminded the players “that they represent a lot of people that they don’t even realize they’re representing.”

Following a fumble recovery, Notre Dame began the first play

from their own 1-yard-line. This was clearly not a passing situation. Most coaches would call for a running play to avoid a sack in their own end

zone giving the other team 2 points. Irish quarterback, Brady Quinn, was concerned and asked Weis “What are we going to do?” Weis responded, “We have no choice. We’re throwing it right.” It’s easy to live out integrity and keep promises when doing so doesn’t present any risk or difficulty.



Our integrity is really tested, though, when living up to a promise is difficult, and in this case presented the risk of losing points in an important game.

Success Follows Integrity

As Quinn stepped back to pass, the line moved left, Brady rolled right... a naked bootleg. Mrs. Mazurkiewicz could not believe it – he was throwing a pass. Would Brady get sacked in the end zone and start the game giving Washington a 2-point safety?

Tight end, Anthony Fasano (above) ran his route... he turned... the pass...CAUGHT! Fasano then leapt over a defender and rumbled for a 13-yard gain. It was as if young Montana was directing the play himself. It was just the beginning of what would ultimately lead to a 36-17 Notre Dame victory.

Again Weis could have left it at that, but in his generous, hard-working spirit, he went the extra mile yet again. Calling Mrs. Mazurkiewicz, Weis told her he had the game ball signed by the team and wanted to bring it to their family the next day.

People expect coaches to make winning choices. In this case, integrity in keeping a promise ended up being both the right and winning decision. However, Coach Weis didn’t know this before hand, and he was prepared to accept the consequences and maintain his integrity even if keeping the promise meant losing points. “I really felt bad that anybody found out that took place... his mother wanted everyone to know... I would have felt just as good about what I did with no one knowing,” Weis said.

Regardless of the outcome of the game, the real winners were Montana and his family. In a time of intense suffering, the compassion and generosity of a coach and an entire football team let Montana and his family know they are not alone, and that others care. ■

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Lesson Goals

- Develop understanding of the virtues of compassion, integrity and generosity
- Inspire students to live out these virtues, especially integrity in keeping promises and commitments made to others
- Inspire students to empathize with others who are suffering and to search for opportunities to assist those who are suffering

Highlighted Virtues

Compassion
Empathy
Generosity
Integrity

Internet Resources

**Hannah and Friends
Foundation Web Site**

<http://hannahandfriends.org>

**Article on Charlie Weis
personal history, approach
to life and balancing his
family and work.**

www.ndsmcobserver.com/media/paper6600/news/2005/04/22/IrishInsider/Charlie.Weis.Family.And.Football-933560.shtml

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think were some of the factors that encouraged Coach Weis to reach out to Montana and his family-- first by taking the time to visit Montana, then agreeing to let him call a play, and even after he died, to then go back and visit the family?
2. Coach Weis keeps the following quote from Coaching legend Vince Lombardi on his office wall: "Winning is not a sometimes thing; it's an all the time thing. You don't win once in a while; you don't do things right once in a while; you do them right all the time. Winning is a habit. Unfortunately, so is losing."
 - What does this quote tell us about Weis as a person, and his efforts in helping Montana and his family? (We hope to encourage a discussion that successful and dedicated people like Coach Weis often don't do anything, including helping others, half way. They put their best efforts forward for all that they do.)
3. Coach Weis's wife, Maura, has stated about their daughter Hannah, "I believe Hannah is an angel and put here on this earth to teach us. She and all children with disabilities are here for that purpose and are some of the greatest teachers on this planet. They strive every day of their lives to become the best they can become."
 - How do you think children with disabilities are teachers?
 - Have you had any personal experiences with children with disabilities where you have learned from them, possibly by gaining a different perspective on life?
4. How do you think Weis would view his decision to keep the promise if the pass attempt had ended in a safety? How do you think the players would have responded?
5. Do you think most star players and coaches realize the impact they have on others? Do you think successful athletes and coaches do enough to be positive role models and to help

others? If no, what would you recommend they do?

6. What are some examples of positive things coaches and / or players have done in society? Do you know of any specific stories you can share?
7. Let's talk about some examples in our own lives, or others, where generosity made a positive difference in the life of another person.

Journal Writing

1. Write about a time in your life when keeping a promise was difficult. Describe the promise, and why it ended up being difficult to keep. Then write about the effects of keeping, or not keeping the promise. With the benefit of hindsight, do you think you made the right decision?
2. Write about a time that you (or someone else you know) were extremely busy and still found the time to do something to help others. How did your actions affect the recipient of your kindness, and how did the experience affect you?

Extended Learning Team Project

Organize the class into three teams, assigning each one of the topics below for a class presentation:

- What is Autism and Global Developmental Delay. Include a discussion of the medical science and also specific examples of how these conditions affect the lives of children and adults?
- What is the purpose of the Hannah and Friends Foundation. Present a review of the foundation's history and their specific activities?
- Present a constructive analysis of the Hannah and Friends Foundation activities. Do you think their activities are, or will be effective in achieving their stated goals. What additional activities would your team recommend to assist children with Autism and Global Delays?