

Tell the Truth

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Ever since I moved to Los Angeles years ago I've been hearing about a basketball coach named John Wooden. He's everywhere. An athletic club I've frequented has a John Wooden award. Books have been written about him – good books, books people actually read. Recently when I took a seminar at UCLA I heard some more about Wooden there too. This guy's an icon.

John Wooden is the former UCLA basketball coach who won eleven out of twelve NCAA national championships. The most championships that anyone else has ever won were three in a row.

So I decided to read up and see what Wooden did so well. And it looks like Wooden did mainly one thing: He forced his players to be honest and to eliminate rationalization. *Did a player do his best in the game?* That's what mattered. If an individual player did not do his best, he was a loser. Wooden told his players:

- Don't measure yourself by what you've accomplished but by what you should have accomplished with your ability.
- Success is peace of mind that's a direct result of knowing you did all you could to become the best you're capable of being.

His essential message was clear: *Even if you lost and didn't have the most points on the board, if you gave your heart and soul to the game and did your best, you still won.* He wanted his players to be honest in having given their best and in never settling for less than they were capable of.

Because he could inspire his players to be completely honest and give each game their all and eliminate rationalization, his teams kept winning.

Are you honest with yourself? Do you consistently give the most of yourself that you can give—or do you make excuses? Most people make excuses for not reaching their full potential. The average life is littered with excuses about why we fell short, why things didn't work out as planned.

Chances are pretty good that *if you wanted something badly and did not make excuses along the way* there's little you could not accomplish -- CEO of a major company, expert in your field, successful entrepreneur.

Successful people achieve because they set goals and don't make excuses; they put in the effort. When I meet incredibly accomplished people, I'm often struck by how average they initially seem. And, true, they may be average in some ways, but unlike so many others, they refuse to rationalize in the areas of their lives they want to improve. Excuses are simply not part of their vocabulary.

The more you're able to eliminate excuses from your life, the better. Excuses are “softeners” that allow you to feel good about yourself for not reaching your potential.

Think about some of the things you may have wanted to accomplish in your life. Maybe a better job, more friends, greater wealth, more time with your family -- everyone has dreams. But the sad fact is that most people never accomplish these dreams. And the reason they never do is because they've become experts at rationalization:

- “I really would like a better job, *however* ...”
- “I'm really committed to getting in shape, *but* ...”
- “I'd like to take more time off and would *if* ...”

Just about everyone I know is expert at using words like *if*, *but*, and *however*. You probably are too. Think of all that you would have become in your life if it hadn't cost too much time, too much effort, too many resources. Or maybe it was too far, or would take too much time to accomplish.

Most people sit around and never get the results they want from their careers and lives because it will cost them “too much” of something. The people who reach great heights of achievement, though, are those for whom the word *too* is rarely used as it is above. The real achievers realize that the only way they can make the most of themselves is to banish excuses and give the absolute most they can.

Something I'm sure you've noticed—how can you not?—is just whom people choose to spend their time with. Some people spend their time with those who'll make them feel good about themselves and allow them to feel comfortable. Others choose people who'll help them grow. Still others spend time with their peers.

You can usually tell how secure people are by the sorts of friends they have. Insecure people, for example, will generally choose friends who are not their equal, because that helps them feel superior. They're confident they won't be challenged or questioned. Conversely, secure people will associate with people who raise the bar, even if it's demanding or even occasionally uncomfortable.

In a similar vein, some people take jobs that are beneath them. I once knew an honors graduate of Stanford Law School who became a bike messenger. I've seen medical doctors working at fast-food restaurants. These are people who want above all to feel comfortable. They shrink from being pushed.

Working in a job that's below your potential, consistently associating with people who aren't your peers, seeking out situations where you'll not be criticized or stimulated—these are “softeners.” By consistently choosing people who won't question or test you but will allow you to just be comfortable, you set yourself up for a life of mediocrity.

People who are where you'd like to be in your life have not arrived there because they're lucky; they're there because they

chose situations where they didn't accept excuses and gave everything they could to get where they wanted to be.

Some of your greatest enemies won't be the people who tell you what you're doing wrong; rather, they're the people who'll say you're doing just fine when you really are not. They'll see all the mistakes you're making but won't say anything. They'll see that you have a lot of potential—but they won't hold you to that potential. Many of our worst enemies are those who simply don't hold us to a high standard.

Be sure to surround yourself with people who have high standards. If you want to become a good tennis player, try playing tennis with professional tennis players (I'm not kidding). If you want to become a good attorney, try working with the best attorneys out there. You'll become really exceptional at something only if you associate yourself with people who inspire you to reach.

Nothing will ever get better in your life until you admit something's wrong. The difference between winning and losing in life is all an internal game that requires you to tell the truth to yourself. If you tell the truth and don't use softeners, you're going to change and get better. Most people are very good at telling themselves stories about why something didn't work, or why they didn't need to change. But when you stop making excuses, when you're honest with yourself – that's the ultimate game changer.

Read More About Lying or Exaggerating:

- [Never Ever Fib or Push the Truth on Your Resume or Interviews](#)
- [Can You Be Trusted](#)

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