



## **Success Is the Only Option: The Art of Coaching Extreme Talent**

*John Calipari , Michael Sokolove*

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## **Success Is the Only Option: The Art of Coaching Extreme Talent** John Calipari , Michael Sokolove

Kentucky's charismatic coach shares the secrets of creating one of the premiere programs in college basketball, revealing how he transforms a group of former high school superstars into selfless, cohesive teams—including a remarkable squad last year that fell just one game short of a perfect season.

Kentucky basketball coach John Calipari is known for his unparalleled ability to recruit the nation's best young players, some of whom will spend just one year with him before going to the NBA, and convincing them to commit to the team without sacrificing their personal goals. It is a promise he makes to them: "Fully invest in the present—and each other—and I guarantee it will serve your future."

Here, for the first time, he distills his team-building methods in ways that apply to CEOs, business owners, coaches, teachers and leaders of all kinds—lessons for anyone seeking to inspire talented individuals to reach for their best selves and contribute to a greater good.

A basketball team is an intimate workplace, in which blend is everything and character matters. As such, it is a window into the nature of successful leadership. Calipari views each new team like a startup business—one composed of new players, new relationships, and new challenges. Each season is a series of discoveries as he learns how to unleash the extreme talent in each of his players and mold them into championship material as college basketball comes to a crescendo every spring. While he can't control everything, he is responsible for everything—just like a CEO.

An enlightening look at leadership, management, and team building, *Success Is the Only Option* offers the keys to winning, on and off the court.

## **Success Is the Only Option: The Art of Coaching Extreme Talent Details**

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# **From Reader Review Success Is the Only Option: The Art of Coaching Extreme Talent for online ebook**

## **Daniel Blankenburg says**

Great book, very motivational and great insights into successful thinking process. You don't have to know much about basketball to read this, however, being a fan of Kentucky basketball definitely helps as it is clearly the topic of reference throughout the book. Huge UK fan and I really enjoyed reading this book. Very Motivational!

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## **Andy Sullivan says**

This book is probably more for the business owners, coaches, etc but could also apply to everyday life. I liked it because it chronicled the past few seasons of Kentucky basketball a little more in-depth. If you're interested in a deep dive into the mind of a coach/leader, this book is for you.

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## **Jordan says**

Coach John Calipari is a very successful coach for the Kentucky Wildcats, he has led them to 4 final fours and a national championship in 2012 versus Kansas. In order to have success in the business of coaching NCAA Div. 1 basketball he talks about recruiting extreme talent to his program that will lead the team far in the season and the tournament and eventually going on into the NBA. Coach Cal also discusses the importance of having good character while playing the game and being able to do simple stuff like pointing out one's mistakes, making good decisions, and treating the team like brothers. Coach Calipari faces a challenge every year because his players end up leaving after a year to go into the big leagues and lead successful futures for themselves. Every year Cal has to bring in young new talent that is able to handle the pressures of playing with extreme talent and living up to the KENTUCKY on their jerseys. Coach Cal and his players also have to deal with the NBA and the careers of his players. They will not be in college forever so Calipari wants to make sure that they have a long and successful career for them and their families.

The people who might be interested in this book are people who enjoy reading about sports especially college basketball. College basketball is very difficult and has a lot of moving parts that makes it almost impossible for one to coach a team there. People who are not particularly basketball fans would still enjoy this book because Coach Calipari discusses the inner workings of success and the importance of a leader and what he brings to the table in a business. Coaches and CEO of popular businesses praise Calipari for his success and how he recruits some of the best talent in the country

This book that I have read is one of the best books ever written. I am not saying this because I am a wildcat fan but I truly praise what Calipari has done with the program. This book has taught me a lot about College Basketball and how hard it is to be successful in the business. Coach Cal uses comedy to get his points across and he also uses stories from past seasons that make the reader say, "I remember that" or "that was a great season". Taking a team from the bottom to the top every year with little basketball experience is truly exceptional but sometimes he makes it look so easy. If Coach Cal were to release another book I would most likely read that one too.

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## **Michael Scott says**

### **TODO:**

- + Excellent account of team management, when the team is comprised of elite young talent, and the focus is split between talent development and competing in a closed market.
- + Why young talent matters? Can young talent succeed in pro life? (read in combination with other books analyzing success at young age, such as Boys among Men)
- + How to recruit and retain young talent? A: Focus on development through competition. Talent attracts talent. Understand the next professional step for your talent, and focus on them reaching it. Present a larger than individual goal. Form a team.
- + How to develop young talent? A: plan long-term goals, but focus on current performance. Track performance and discuss metrics and process to improve. Give confidence by focusing on strengths, but strengths useful for the next professional step and not perceived strengths. Expand from core strengths whenever possible, by changing another strength into an elite skill or capability; do not focus on weaknesses much, because they can be masked by the team and will anyway not be converted into elite skill or capability.
- + How to both develop talent and win in your market? A: metrics, focus, ability to tell everyone the truth, ability to decide for the team.
- + Which metrica to use? A: if it exists, a metric easily understood and carried through the entire market (here, wins), plus a metric under your control and that typically translates into external results (effort in practice). Also, detailed metrics quantifying desirable behavior, but also focus on the metrics the industry understand; for the latter, focus exclusively on efficiency metrics.
- + How to address high churn, when young talent develops and are hired to become professionals? A: recruit early, even at risk to have too much talent.
- + Other elements? A: mission in life, projection of strength, pragmatism.

Excellent book, much of which is aligned with my own vision. Calipari has a different market and a domain that is much easier to measure, but also operates in a smaller market. I do not agree with focusing only on today, instead of long-term higher intellectual goals; imo, this would not work in creative markets, where at the top the spark of creativity is the main currency, and is also not what we should do in the academia.

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## **Aaron Menser says**

Excellent quick read on identifying and recruiting extreme talent, getting those individuals to become the best versions of themselves and servant leaders, which oh by the way usually results in final fours and NBA lottery picks. Great read for college basketball fans and business leaders.

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## **Don Hobbs says**

Very good book. Plenty of good basketball insight. Calipari does an excellent job of expressing his vision of the program and how he leads young men.

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### **Roxanne says**

This is a Goodreads win review. This book is about Kentucky basketball coach and how he recruited awesome players and turned them into a high-performance team. He has a special way of turning coaching that really works.

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### **Marty Greenwell says**

Used to like to read business improvement books. Not so much anymore as I am nearing retirement. I did like the way that Calipari used his players to give their say in parts of the book. How you could take great players and look at what they were missing to advance well at the next level. And his disappointment in losing to Wisconsin after going 38-0. If the book is true, he really cares about his players.

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### **Steve-betsy Pollock says**

#### **Insights about helping people**

Coach Cal shares his coaching insights, and his tips translate far beyond basketball. In fact, this is not a basketball book, or even a coaching book. This is a collection of stories about how to help talented people help themselves by helping others. He is right. We are here for a reason, and it is a leader's job to create self-awareness and nurture ownership for pursuing one's passion.

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### **Christopher Lawson says**

#### **I'M LOOKING FOR LIVELY MINDS**

In **SUCCESS IS THE ONLY OPTION**, John Calipari provides us his "pearls of wisdom" on coaching and nurturing young, budding athletes. The title suggests that the coach is bottom-line driven, and will stop at nothing to achieve it--but that's not really the case. This book reveals that the author considers his players a lot more than just a means to an end.

The author takes his coaching job seriously; in fact, he really looks out for the whole life of the athlete--not just his ability on the court: "I consider myself an educator as well as a coach." Each chapter in the book covers a certain theme about coaching. Some are about giving fatherly advice, whilst some are more about career guidance.

Besides what makes a player really good, the coach explains what repels him. A player who only cares about himself won't be on the coaches' list: "I don't recruit anyone who I believe is inherently selfish." The author also really dislikes kids who are disrespectful: "I have red flags in recruiting, stuff that leads me to just walk away. A big one is disrespect."

Another bad sign is a player who won't take responsibility for their actions: "Refusing to accept blame and shifting it to others is about the worst trait you can have on a team or in any work environment."

On the plus side, there are certain attributes that catch the coach's eye. Number 1? "The essential thing I am seeking is passion." He also really wants someone with a positive spirit, who contributes to the esprit de corps of the group: "When I'm recruiting, I'm looking for a kid who's alive. He's got a bounce in his step. A smile on his face. Love for his teammates. . . On the court, among their teammates, when they are off the court and out in the world, I want every one of them to be a person who lifts up others."

In Chapter 8: "Empowering Your Team," the coach talks about building up the team. The coach sets up fundamental principles for the team to work around. These ideas are a small set of easily understood themes that serve as a major focus point.

All in all, I found **SUCCESS IS THE ONLY OPTION** to be an interesting perspective from a great coach. I wasn't surprised to find that the author is really a caring person--not just interested in athletic ability, but the well-being of his team members. Many of his ideas are not extreme or unusual or startling, but still good ideas nonetheless.

I thought this one section sums up the author's philosophy:

"My goal, and one I believe we've been successful in achieving, is to set their sights ever higher and then send them off into the world with the skills, confidence, and poise they will need to succeed in their careers—and as human beings who contribute to the greater good."

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Advance Review Copy courtesy of the publisher.

### **Brent Soderstrum says**

I won this book through GoodReads First Read program.

Coach John Calipari gives you a glimpse into the University of Kentucky's basketball program. How do you balance 12 of the best recruits in the nation in one program? Calipari covers recruiting the star players and the obstacles he faces from other coaches and the recruit's family and friends. Don't feel too sorry for the guy. Despite these "obstacles" he almost always has the top recruiting class in the nation.

Kentucky has become a one and done program with the top recruits coming to Kentucky to play one year and then declare for the NBA. I personally think it is too bad that you don't see many great four year players anymore. It just doesn't make sense for them to play additional years and risk their earning power. Kentucky is a program that gets young men ready for the NBA.

Coach Calipari tries to make his book applicable to leadership of corporations or businesses. That just doesn't fly for me. Any comparison is forced to try and sell books to those who aren't huge Kentucky basketball fans.

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## **Kelly says**

An interesting and easy read for Kentucky basketball fans, but I was pleasantly surprised by some good life lessons, too.

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