

First Down Faith

Danny Woodall

The Green Bay Packers dominated the NFL during the 60s, and at the helm was legendary football coach Vince Lombardi. Not only did Lombardi never have a losing record as an NFL head coach, he also led the Packers to an impressive string of three consecutive NFL championship titles from 1965-67. Incorporated into Lombardi's winning coaching philosophy were three basic building blocks: repetition, confidence, and passion. Each of these blocks helped to build the others.

It all began with repetition for Lombardi. During the summer, while the players were drenched with sweat, Lombardi would still bark out orders. Each one had to get it right. Sometimes after practice, he might pull a player aside and go over the play with him. With Lombardi, it was consistent and endless repetition.

The "Packer's Sweep" was the key to Green Bay's offense. They practiced the play at the start of practice, during practice and at the end of practice. The play was built on execution instead of deception. Late in the season, on the frozen turf of Lambeau field, the Packers would line up, and each player knew exactly what he was supposed to do. They had it down to how much the ball was turned on the snap. The guards would pull, the tackles would pop a defensive end, and the center would make a cut-off block. Lombardi wanted his players to be able to run the play in their sleep.

This repetition played into the second building block, confidence. Because they had gone over the play so often, they had confidence in their assignments. When it was third and three, the players didn't have to think about their assignments. There wasn't any hint of hesitation; usually it was four yards, a cloud of dust, and a move of the chains.

This confidence led to the final building block, passion. Because they knew what to do and had confidence in doing it, they could play with true passion. It wasn't the phony excitement of a player jumping up and down trying to draw attention; instead it was the controlled fire of a player knowing he had done his job. The guard would run over to the runner after he had made the first down. He would help him up, give him a pat and hustle back to the huddle. Lombardi's Green Bay Packers played with machine-like precision.

Spiritual Translation

If we apply Lombardi's building blocks to our faith, we can become champions for Jesus Christ.

Repetition is always the first building block. Our faith grows when we read the Bible, pray, attend church, etc. Even Vince Lombardi wasn't all football; he attended mass daily. He was crazy about football, but he still practiced his faith.

The second building block is confidence. Knowing what God wants us to do will give us confidence to face the challenges of life. Our confidence, however, isn't in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:12 says, "*In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence*" (NIV). Like the Packers, we can act without indecision. When we put our faith in action, we see results.

This leads to the last building block, passion. The world isn't looking for an emotional rollercoaster. Romans 10:2 says, "*For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.*" Paul is writing about those who had zeal or passion, but were without knowledge. The Packer's Sweep wouldn't have been successful if the players didn't know their assignments, no matter how hard they tried. Without sound doctrine, our passion will fade away. We will be left wondering what all of the excitement was about. The world is looking for someone who has an intense internal fire of faith; the kind of fire that burns on the fuel of sound doctrine. They are not interested in a faith built on spiritual steroids, but a faith that moves the chains in life.

The Blocks in Action: Future Judge Learns About Life

Judge Brad Burnett learned about the chain-moving faith, which can give a person a new start in life. After earning All-State honors as defensive end in high school, Burnett went to Texas A&M to play football for the Aggies. Before his sophomore year, Burnett was in an industrial accident that left him in traction for three months. His football hopes and dreams were crushed.

While his father had helped him to achieve football success, his mother helped him learn about the spiritual building

blocks. Burnett learned that the constant prayers and masses he attended while he was young would serve him in his time of trouble. They would help him gain confidence in his faith. This, in turn, gave him a passion for life.

Burnett recovered and eventually was elected as Justice of the Peace in Jefferson County, Texas. He now serves the Mid-County cities of Port Neches, Groves and Nederland.

One of his favorite books is the biography of Vince Lombardi, *When Pride Still Mattered*, by David Maraniss. Judge Burnett still relies on the same building blocks. He is constantly reviewing the law. Like a coach breaking down a play, Burnett studies previous cases to see how to apply the law. This gives him confidence in his decisions. Seeing how his decisions can help people gives him a passion for his job. In fact, during this interview, the Judge leaned forward and said, "The key to the building blocks is persistence. You can't ever give up. Without persistence the building blocks become stumbling blocks."