

[What Would Your Law Firm Be Like If It Was Led By Coach K?](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on July 16th, 2012

When I practiced law, my firm included many very talented entrepreneurial lawyers. Our lawyers were extremely successful on their own, but did not collaborate and work as well as a team. Our firm leaders tried, but were unable to change the silo culture at the firm. Perhaps you have the same issue in your firm. You have likely heard the phrase:

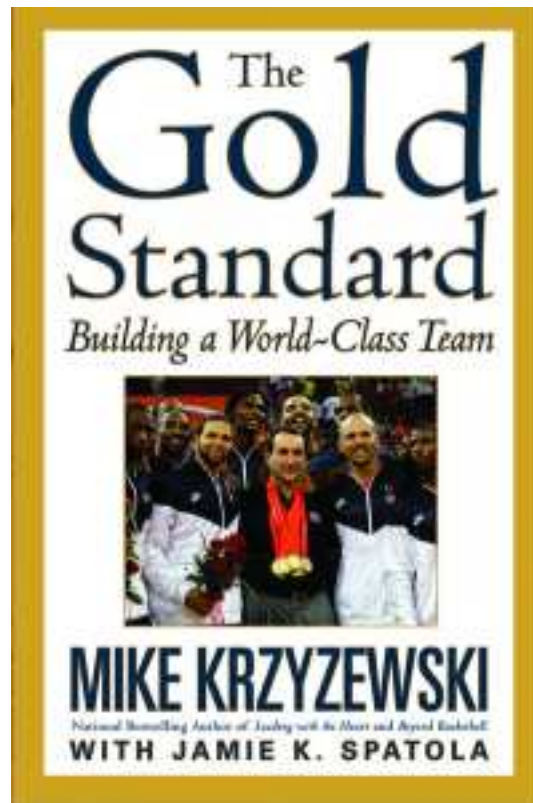
Leading lawyers is like herding cats.

Can leading star NBA basketball players be any different? Certainly their egos are as big as any lawyer's ego.

As you likely know, Coach Mike Krzyzewski will once again coach the 2012 Olympic basketball team. The team was recently finalized and does not include three stars from the 2008 Redeem Team. I read how the team will be different than the 2008 team in a CBS report: [Coach K: 2012 U.S. Olympic basketball team could be better than 2008 squad](#). I hope they can be better. But, one thing is certain: They will play as a team, much like the 2008 Redeem Team rather than playing as a group of talented losers, like the 2004 team.

What was the primary difference in those two teams? The 2004 U.S. Olympic basketball team included just as much talent, but took a third-place bronze medal because they had a "me first" attitude, and were less focused on the basics than the Argentine and Italian teams.

One could easily argue that the major difference was Coach K. He was able to get the 2008 U. S. Olympic team back to basics and teamwork. They approached their task as a team instead of a group of talented individuals. Coach K spent three years molding "The Redeem Team." When they won a hard fought final game against Spain, the entire team showed up for the press conference. Coach K had built a relationship with the players that not only caused them to win for him, but, more importantly also caused them to want to win for each other.



I read once that the biggest difference between business school and law school is that in business school students are taught to collaborate with one another and in law school students are taught to compete with one another. Your law firm will be more successful if you are able to create an environment that causes your lawyers to want to win for each other.

This may be easy to say, but hard to implement. If you want ideas, read Coach K's book: [The Gold Standard](#), or [Building a World-Class Team](#) from Success magazine that includes this Coach K quote from the book:

People want a recipe. Recipes guarantee that if you follow these steps in this order, you will get a favorable outcome. But team building is not about a recipe, it's about taking the necessary time to build this team for this purpose.

You might also read his blog titled: [Coach K, USA Basketball Moving to New Levels Together](#). In it he talks about the importance of collective responsibility. I like that concept. When your lawyers feel

collectively responsible for your firm's success, they will more likely want to win for each other. He says:

We didn't have rules for the team," he said, "we had standards. The players took personal responsibility to the uniform and to each other. There was a standard for how to act in public, for how to practice, for how to compete. We didn't lie to each other, we showed up on time and we didn't have excuses. It was a collective responsibility.

Are you taking the necessary time to build a world class team in your law firm?

Cordell M. Parvin built a national construction practice during his 35 years practicing law. At Jenkins & Gilchrist, Mr. Parvin was the Construction Law Practice Group Leader and was also responsible for the firm's attorney development practice. While there he taught client development and created a coaching program for junior partners. In 2005, Mr. Parvin left the firm and started Cordell Parvin LLC. He now works with lawyers and law firms on career development and planning and client development. He is the co-author of *Say Ciao to Chow Mein: Conquering Career Burnout* and other books for lawyers. To learn more visit his Web site, www.cordellparvin.com or contact him at cparvin@cordellparvin.com.