Team Code of Honor
The Secrets of Champions
in Business and in Life

by Blair Singer

Introduction

The Code of Honor

On January 3, 2003, the Ohio State University football team met the defending national champion Miami Hurricanes in the Fiesta Bowl to determine a new national champion, in what became, according to sports analysts, one of the most exciting games in the history of college football. And while this introductory story is about two specific football teams, it could be about any two teams in sports. It could be the Boston Red Sox in the ninth inning of the fourth game of the 2004 American League Championship Series in which, being down three games to none to the New York Yankees, embarked on an unprecedented comeback to defeat the Yankees in the series and go on to win the World Series of baseball.

It could be the 1983 Australian America’s Cup yacht racing team, down three races to one in the best of seven races as they stormed back to beat the undefeated Americans by a margin of only forty-two seconds over six days of racing.

It could be the group of amateur hockey players that comprised the U.S. Olympic Hockey team that went on to beat the heavily favored world champion Soviet team in the 1980 Winter Olympics and ultimately win the Gold medal.

It could be the design and marketing teams of Apple computer as they began their battle back from the brink of extinction in 1997 with Steve Jobs at the helm in one of the biggest business comebacks in recent history.

It could be you and your business team breaking into a new line of business...Your family facing the obstacles of a tough economy...

As a spectator at the game that I began to describe earlier, and as a former student manager for the Ohio State team, I could not help but get caught up in the tension and excitement of the game. Yet beyond the game itself, there was a very powerful lesson. There is one thing that the winners in each of these situations have in common as you shall see.

Let me describe the scene briefly.
Two great teams had taken to the playing field. The energy was incredibly high. The prognosticators had made their predictions. The crowd was on the edge of their seats. For weeks every fan had known that the season was leading up to this clash of titans.

The talent on both sides of the field was impressive. The strategies, tactics and game plans were simple but powerful. From the very beginning of the game, each player seemed to play to his fullest potential. Each team made mistakes, but neither team was fazed by them. The game ebbed and flowed, and with each passing moment, the crowd’s excitement built higher and higher.

For the players, fatigue seemed to disappear as the game wore on. No one panicked. No one broke ranks. The years of practice, discipline and focus came down to the waning minutes of the game. Who was going to win? The favored defending champions? Or the scrappy underdogs? The teams battled to a tie. The game went into overtime. Both of them scored. It then went into a second overtime. The fans were now going wild. It seemed that these two undefeated teams had met on the playing field to see which was the team of “destiny.”

In watching this game as a spectator, I began to smile. The longer the game wore on, the more certain I became about the outcome. Why? Because in my years of working with great teams I have found that the great champions in sports, business and families have one thing in common. It is legitimately their secret weapon.

It isn’t a strategy. It isn’t a plan. It isn’t technology. It isn’t a trick play or twist on an old theme. And it definitely is not luck! It is something that lies deep in the genetic code of winning organizations. It is something so ingrained in the hearts and spirits of the players that it is sometimes unconscious. Yet its presence is undeniable.

It’s something that shows its face when the pressure is high, when the stakes are critical and when everything is on the line. You see it in families when there is a crisis. You’ll find it in businesses when the cash runs tight. It shows up in each of us when we are put to the test of having to deliver or falter. It’s called the Code of Honor.

In the waning moments of that second overtime, the undefeated defending national champions were positioned inside the ten-yard line with four downs to score a touchdown. Ohio State, a fifteen-point underdog, was faced with having to defend against the most powerful team in college football.

Two teams of destiny. Which would win? Almost as if by magic, Ohio State successfully kept Miami out of the end zone each successive down. The crowd was out of its mind. The noise was deafening. Yet when the smoke cleared, Ohio State had held on and won the national championship.

Was it luck? Was it talent? Was it strategy? I have always been intrigued by how teams in sports emerge as winners even against the odds. I have always pondered how a person who has little
talent and few resources can become rich. How does a floundering business all of a sudden shoot to success from obscurity?

I found that it is the same thing that holds families together under pressure. It is a tool that is common with all great teams. It is the Code of Honor.

It is a set of simple, powerful rules that govern the internal behavior of any team, organization, family, individual and even nation. These rules determine how we behave toward one another within the team. They are its heart and spirit. They are what people are willing to stand and defend—and be accountable for.

They’re rules like never abandoning a teammate in need, and being personally responsible for all mistakes. Yet what I’m talking about goes even beyond rules, because many teams have rules. It is the unwavering discipline of the team itself to enforce those rules. Not to rely on bosses, coaches, regulators, parents or ministers to enforce them, but to have the team spontaneously support each other in adhering to the code. It’s repeated, practiced and drilled so many times in so many instances that it becomes unconsciously embedded in the hearts of the players. The code builds trust, cohesion and energy.

In building a championship team in your business, in your family or in your group, there is a difference between good and great. It’s the invisible magic that shows up when pressure is high and challenges seem insurmountable. That magic is the Code of Honor. It pervades every part of the team, every statement, every action, every heartbeat. It is a statement of who you are and what you stand for.

It’s more than values. It is your values extended into real, physical behavior. These are the rules that set the standards of conduct and performance.

The good news is that you can create this code for yourself and your team. It is Rich Dad’s secret for building great teams. No matter where you go or what you do it will be present. If you know how to build it, maintain it and protect it, you will attract only the best players and you will experience the repeated magic of championship results whether it’s in the arena of money, health or even love.

In Robert Kiyosaki’s CASHFLOW Quadrant, he talks at great length about the differences in attitude, mindset and behavior of folks in the B-business quadrant as opposed to the E-employee and S-self employed quadrants. The number-one skill in business is the ability to sell. In the book SalesDogs, we demystified this issue about negotiating and communicating for what you want. Everyone sells in every area of life whether you are in direct selling or not. It’s Rich Dad’s number-one skill.

But as important as the ability to sell, what distinguishes business owners from self-employed folks is their ability to build a great team. As a practitioner, service provider or one-man band that trades time for money, you work hard, but have little leverage. Those who understand the
secrets found in this book will catapult their way to wealth in the B quadrant by learning how to surround themselves with the right people and how to ensure that they are on the same track. Building teams is not “happy camp” and it’s not what we have been trained to do most of our lives. For some it comes easily. For others, it takes challenging yourself and your beliefs about others, and a clear understanding of the Code of Honor.

It’s not rocket science, but it requires a test of will. This book will walk you through the process so that you can create championship results any time and in any place.

Ohio State won the game with a great team. Yet the difference between the two teams became revealed in the moments of challenge. It was the set of rules that they had long before adopted that set the standards of performance. The rules of the winning team instilled a confidence, discipline and magic that under pressure made them calmer, more focused and ultimately, winners. Each team had a code, knowingly or not. But the rules in those codes were different.

You will learn how to spot those differences and correct them.

In nearly every interview in which the players of championship teams are questioned about the motivation that inspired them to win, no matter what country, what sport, what language, they say the same thing. When coaches and players are asked, they all say that they played the game for each other, for their teammates. It was not about stardom, not about beating the other team. It was about supporting each other. That comes from a very specific type of Code!

John Bertrand, the 1983 America’s Cup winning Australian skipper, summed it up well. He said, “The Americans had a team of champions, but we were a Championship Team.” They had a powerful code and set of rules that were significantly different from those of the American team.

How all these teams pulled together to win is what you will learn by the time you finish this book.

This book is dedicated to you having all the championship teams in your life that you so richly deserve. It is your right to be happy, to be rich, and to surround yourself with great players who share your vision and spirit.

**WHY the Code?**

I speak all over the world and have worked with thousands of teams and hundreds of thousands of individuals, helping them increase their incomes through sales and team building. Everyone seems to want a “silver bullet” solution that will attract the best players and produce extraordinary results from their teams. Parents seem to want some magic answer to managing their kids and handling their households.

There have been thousands of books written on teams, peak performance, child-rearing and how to get rich. And most of them repeat similar principles and lessons. Yet most of them
ignore this incredibly powerful component. The idea of a Code of Honor isn’t a new one. It’s always been there. But like most things, we take it for granted until something bad happens.

Throughout the 1990s it seemed that everyone was on the path to learning how to get rich quickly. If you invested in an Internet business you were considered a genius.

Yet in the spring of 2001, the beginning of a major shift in how we all looked at business, and life, started to take place. The dotcom bubble popped. Markets took a dive. We all kind of took a blow to the chin. Business owners and individuals started reassessing their priorities when it came to spending and investing. With pressure to show profits, some turned to alternative and questionable means for reporting their results in order to continue to attract investment funds.

Then, on September 11, we took a major blow to the midsection. The greatest and most horrific act of terrorism we have ever known was played out before our eyes, over and over again. With the terrible events that day, priorities took an even bigger shift.

Until that awful morning, we thought we were invincible. We thought nothing could touch us. But we were wrong. It came to many of us in a flash that nothing was safe—not our offices, not our government, not our airplanes, not even our mail. It was time to get serious about what really mattered in life, because it was actually possible that we might not have tomorrow. It wasn’t just about how much money we made, it was about the people in our lives and assessing what was really important.

Corporate scandals, one after the other, eroded our hope that the people we worked for, or invested money with, could be trusted. The list of questionable business practices, like those in Enron, WorldCom or even revered institutions like Arthur Anderson, just kept growing. Now we wonder, where is their Code of Honor? It has become painfully clear that either none existed, or nobody enforced it, or it was not a Code of Honor but a code of deceit.

My point is this: In the absence of rules, people make up their own.

Those differences can become catastrophic in the heat of the battle, particularly where stress is high and confusion is prevalent. Those who are successful have a very clear Code of Honor that is easy to understand and is not negotiable or subject to multiple interpretations. It’s a strong set of rules that everyone around them agrees to and it’s part of what makes everyone around them successful as well.

But it’s not enough to just have a code. If all the players on a team don’t know the rules or don’t interpret them in the same way, the team can’t win. The players on your team have to understand the code, and commit themselves to respecting it.

The heart and soul of every team is its Code of Honor. Rules like being on time, practicing, showing up, attending training sessions, committing to personal growth or never abandoning a
teammate in need. These rules not only ensure success, they make the game a lot more satisfying to play. Great relationships don’t happen by accident. There is usually a common understanding and set of rules holding you together.

A Code of Honor is the cornerstone of the culture of any organization because it is the physical manifestation of its thoughts, ideals and philosophies. People talk about creating culture in organizations. I have been part of several large culture creations, revitalizations and change initiatives with clients. The core of the culture and the number-one tool used to establish, refresh, broadcast and demonstrate the culture is the Code of Honor.

Developing a Code of Honor creates accountability and a feeling of support and is a powerful statement of who you are and what your team stands for. It defines you and your goals. It’s that important.

So how do you develop a Code of Honor that all team players will respect and adhere to, whether it’s in your business, your family or your community? That’s what you’re about to find out.

**Team Tips:**
- In the absence of rules, people make up their own.
- Successful people and groups have a very clear Code of Honor that is easy to understand and is not negotiable.
- Developing a Code of Honor creates accountability and a feeling of support and is a powerful statement of who you are and what your team stands for.

**Team Drill:**
1. Discuss with your team examples of close games, great comebacks and championship results in sports and business. Talk about what you think made the difference, beyond talent.
2. Cite examples of organizations that had rules but didn’t follow them. Have the team discuss their opinions of those organizations.

**Chapter One**

**Why Do You Need a Code of Honor?**

In the absence of rules, people make up their own rules. And some of the biggest collisions in finance, business and relationships occur because well-meaning people are simply playing by different sets of rules. By the same token, the most miraculous results come from “like-minded” folks who band together under some invisible bond to achieve greatness.
By experience and default, we all formulate our own sets of guidelines, rules and assumptions. That’s natural. But when we start coming together with other people, organizations and cultures, we sometimes have a tough time figuring out why “those guys” don’t understand, or how they could so blatantly turn their back on our feelings, our way of doing things and our rules. In most respects, “those guys” feel the same way about us. Why? Because we assume that certain basic rules are the same. Bad assumption.

This book is about revealing the process for eliminating one of the biggest causes for financial loss, frustration and heartbreak. It is about surrounding yourself with folks who subscribe to the same sets of rules and how to establish them so that you can ensure peak performance, fun and incredible results in all you do.

For about twelve years now, I’ve actively studied teams, looking at what makes them successful and how they are able to operate at peak performance. And after all this time, I can tell you this: You cannot have a championship team, in any facet of your life, without a Code of Honor.

**Team Tip:**
Sometimes the easiest way to avoid upset, collisions and disharmony in any group is to take the time to make sure that everyone is playing by the same rules.

If you are interested in building a great relationship, whether it’s with your business, your community, your family or even yourself, there have to be rules and standards for the behavior that will ultimately achieve your goals. A Code of Honor is the physical manifestation of the team’s values, extended into behavior. It’s not enough to have values, because we all do.

What’s so crucial is knowing how to put physical behavior into practice to reflect those values.

Let me illustrate what I mean. When I was in high school in Ohio, I was on the cross-country running team. Typically, any human being of the male sex living in the state of Ohio was expected to play football. But if you could see my size, you’d realize that I was just not built to go up against a two-hundred-pound linebacker, even though I love the game. Cross-country was more my style.

What a lot of people don’t know about cross-country is that there are typically about five to seven runners per team racing at the same time. Usually there are several other teams running at the same time. The only way your team can win is if the whole team finishes relatively close together close to the front of the pack of runners. In other words, having a superstar who runs ahead of the pack and places first doesn’t do the team any good if everyone else is all spread out across the field. Cross-country is a low-scoring sport, meaning that first place receives a point, second receives two points, and so on. The idea is to get the whole team to finish near the front, so your team gets the lowest score possible. If we could get fourth-, sixth-, seventh- and ninth-place finishes, then even if another team got a first, second, twelfth and eighteenth, we would still win the meet.
So for the entire two-and-a-half-mile race each of us would push the others on, encouraging, threatening, supporting, and yelling with each gasping breath for air. With muscles burning and body strength faltering, it was as much a race of emotional endurance as it was physical. We pushed each other both on and off the course. If someone was slacking, you can rest assured the rest of the team would be on him quickly to pick it up. It took ALL that each of us had for us to win. Whatever it took for us to cross that finish line close together, that’s what we did. In other words, part of our code was to do whatever it took to support everyone to win.

We won most of our cross-country meets, or placed very high, even though we had very few superstar runners. We were a championship team. It was my first experience with teams, at the most basic, physical, gut-wrenching level, but the lessons it taught me remain the same today. I have always surrounded myself with people who would push me that way and who would allow me to push as well. It serves them and it serves me. As a result, I have always been blessed with incredibly great friendships, success and wealth. I have also observed that it is in times of pressure, when the stakes are high, that people are transformed. I’ve NEVER seen a great team that didn’t come together without some type of pressure. It could be from competition, from outside influences, or it could be self-induced. We knew in those cross-country meets that every person, every second, every step counted toward a win for our team, and it bound us together. We knew that the success of the team took precedence over our individual goals. No one wanted to let the others down. It drove you as hard as the desire to win. We had a code that said we stuck together no matter what. And in those really important moments, we came together and did what we needed to do to be successful.

**Team Tip:**
A Code of Honor brings out the best in every person who subscribes to it.

But when pressure increases, sometimes so do emotions. When that happens, intelligence has a tendency to drop. People revert to their base instincts in times of stress, and that’s when their true colors come out. Sometimes that’s not such a pretty sight. Have you ever said something to someone when you were upset that you wished you had not said a few minutes later? I thought so. That’s what I mean about high emotion and low intelligence.

I’ve seen teams that work well together day to day, but when things get tough, they revert to “every man for himself.” A crisis came along and everyone ran for cover, because there was no set of rules to help them see their way through it. Judgments based upon heightened emotions became their guide, which may not turn out to be the best choice for all concerned.

For example, more than half of all marriages end in divorce. In times of stress, the people involved are unable to negotiate their differences. No common code of honor or set of rules holds them together. It is the same issue in the case of a business partnership dispute that has no rules or guidelines. Both situations can get nasty.

It isn’t that people don’t want to work out their differences. The problem is that without rules and expectations mutually agreed upon up front, they act on instinct, particularly when
emotions are running high. Each does what he or she thinks is best based upon his or her feelings at the time. Decisions made in that kind of setting may not be the best ones.

Now I know you’ve never been under any kind of stress, right?

Of course you have. You know that when you’re upset, when you’re under a deadline, when you’re angry at a family member or a coworker, it is impossible to try to negotiate terms. Why? Because you aren’t in your right mind! THAT’S why you need a Code of Honor.

You must create, in a sane moment, a set of rules for your team that tell everyone how to operate when the heat is really on. That way, in those moments of high stress, the rules legislate the behavior, rather than the emotions. The Code is NOT just a set of guidelines to be used only when it’s convenient. These are rules that must be “called” when breached.

The needs, tasks and problems of a team determine how rigid its code is. The Marine Corps has a code that holds its teams together under fire. When bullets are flying, life and death may have to take second place to logic and team play. Repetition of their code and its rules conditions the team to come together as a cohesive, trusting unit rather than just running for individual survival.

Having a Code of Honor doesn’t mean that everyone on the team is happy 100 percent of the time. Sometimes things get messy. A code can cause upset, create confrontation and even put people on the spot. But ultimately, it protects every member of the team from abuse, neglect and breaches of ethics. A Code of Honor brings out the best in every person who subscribes to it.

You can NEVER assume that people know the code on their own. It isn’t something that’s necessarily intuitive. You learn it from others—parents, coaches, leaders or friends. Someone has to “show” it to you. And everyone involved must agree to it. This is true for any relationship, be it with your business, your family or yourself—any relationship with an interest in its own happiness and success.

Currently about 50 percent of the gross domestic product of the United States comes from small businesses, and of that, about half of those businesses are sole proprietorships or home-based businesses. I tell you this to emphasize a point: The average person has much more power than you think. The way you conduct your business affects the lives of many others.

**Team Tip:**
Your code is a reflection of you and will attract those who aspire to the same standards.

Your reputation, your income and your longevity depend upon your consistency of behavior internally and externally. The future of the country is in the hands of those who drive the economy, the markets, our businesses and our families. That’s you! Your significance may seem minuscule, but never doubt your influence on others. Your code is a reflection of you and will
attract those who aspire to the same standards. How you conduct your business may have a bigger impact than the service you provide.

Decide here and now that you will create a Code of Honor for yourself and for the teams you’re a part of. What do you stand for? What code do you publicize to the world? How tight is your team? How happy do you want to be?

My purpose here is to give you steps, motivation and insights to building a great team that will give you and those you touch the wealth, satisfaction and joy that you all deserve. So let’s talk about who’s on your team.

**Team Drill:**
1. Discuss great teams that you have been on. What was it like? What were the rules? How did it feel?
2. What would be the benefits to having a code for your business? Your finances? Your health? Your family?