

# GREAT COACHES BUILD WINNING TEAMS

The CFP National Championship was more than a football game. It was a contest between 'The Process' and 'All In,' the personal leadership philosophies of head coaches Nick Saban and Dabo Swinney.

By Ron Reahard

On Jan. 9, the No. 1-ranked Alabama Crimson Tide met the No. 2 Clemson Tigers for the second consecutive year in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game. Clemson overcame an early 14-0 deficit to upset Alabama 35-31, scoring the go-ahead touchdown with one second left in the game and avenging their championship game loss to the same team a year ago.

Whether you prefer "The Process" followed by Alabama's Nick Saban or "All In," the mantra of Clemson coach Dabo Swinney (a former Alabama player and assistant coach), there is no question these two coaches are dedicated to their personal coaching philosophies. As leaders, there is a lot we can learn from both men. Let's dig in.

## The Process

"The Process" is Nick Saban's way of breaking down a monumental task into small, manageable pieces. In other words, don't think about winning another national championship, think about what you need to do right now, in practice, on this play, at this moment, to accomplish your small piece of that task.

The Process requires nothing more than staying focused on what is directly in front of you rather than envisioning a future that has yet to happen. Worrying about what might or could happen is not only distracting, it's a waste of time and energy.



Nick Saban, head coach of the Alabama Crimson Tide, espouses "The Process," a leadership philosophy that relies on breaking monumental tasks down to small, manageable pieces.



Dabo Swinney is head coach of the Clemson Tigers and a former Alabama player and assistant coach. He and his team are "All In," dedicated to doing their jobs and equipping others to do theirs.

This approach works just as well on the showroom floor. It's easy to set a goal of 300 units this month, \$3,000 average gross profit, or 3% net profit. But how are you going to get there? What role will each member of the team play? What do we each need to do today to get us closer to that goal tomorrow?

Focusing on the task at hand can also help you as you strive to reach those unrealistic manufacturer demands, expectations and stair-step incentives. Even the enormous task of running a dealership becomes a lot easier when you view it as a series of smaller component parts. How can we exceed this customer's expectations? How do I encourage and motivate this team member? How can we close this sale?

Whenever Nick Saban achieves a major goal, he doesn't bask in the glory of his success. Instead, he quickly shifts his focus to the next objective. Whether it's being No. 1 in your 20 Group, acquiring another dealership, hitting the next incentive level, or achieving a 100% CSI score, the same approach will work in your dealership. Don't spend a lot of time thinking about the future or the past. Be obsessed with moving forward from task to task.

In his book, "Saban: The Making of a Coach," Monte Burke relates one of Terry Saban's favorite stories about her husband. One evening, the coach met a friend at a bar. While they were talking football, a man robbed the place. Saban was so fo-

cused on his conversation, he never even looked up. Later, as he stood to leave, he sensed an unsettled air about the bar. He asked the bartender what was up. Incredulous, the bartender asked, "You didn't notice that we just got robbed?"

Just as Saban brings an unparalleled focus to the process of creating a successful football team, he does the same when it comes to building a successful dealership. On the website of his first store, Mercedes-Benz of Birmingham (Ala.), he is quoted as saying, "The 'good enough is good enough' attitude is not what we're looking for, we have got to use every opportunity to improve individually so we can improve collectively."

The Process is about focusing on the journey, not the destination. It's about a commitment to doing the right thing, the right way, every day, for every customer.

## All In

"All In" is not just a catchy slogan Dabo Swinney came up with to motivate his Tigers. It has been his leadership philosophy since October 2008, an "unintended consequence" of being named interim head coach of Clemson following the midseason firing of Tommy Bowden. In an interview with the *Upstate Business Journal*, he recalled the first time he addressed the team after becoming the second-youngest head coach in Clemson football history.

"I know I don't have much of a chance to get this job, but I do have a chance," he said. "For the next six weeks, I'm all in — everything I've got." He then proceeded to spell out his plan for the remainder of the season. "And if you're all in with me, because that's what it's going to take for this to work — for us to turn this season around — then show up to practice at 6 o'clock tonight. Otherwise, no hard feelings." Everyone showed up.

Swinney's leadership strategy is based on his belief that "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." Whether on the football field or in the dealership, leadership is ultimately about serving others. Equip them with the tools, equipment and training they need to realize their full potential. Be bold enough to have a vision for the future and humble enough to recognize it will take the efforts of many people to achieve it.

Swinney believes leaders all have certain things in common: They genuinely care about their teammates. They lead by example. They support and encourage their teammates, but they also hold them accountable. They come early, stay late, and never quit. They choose to stay positive no matter how much adversity they face. And they expect the same from everyone on that team.

The Clemson football program is successful primarily because of the positive attitude, vision and personality of its head coach. In 2015, Swinney promised the Tigers would have the "biggest pizza party ever" if they made it to the playoffs. Swinney delivered — as did Clemson fans, showing up 30,000 strong at Death Valley to celebrate the Tigers claiming the top spot in the playoff standings. Swinney has 16 commandments for Clemson players to follow, but for him, the last one might be the most important: "Have fun!"

As a leader, there has to be a shared purpose, a common goal, a core belief that you build your team and your business on. Swinney's philosophy is "We're going to do it right, and I would rather lose trying to do it right than to win knowing we didn't." In that same interview, Swinney also said, "None of us are entitled to anything. You get what you earn. This program, this university, is bigger than any of us." Your dealership, your dealership's reputation, that core belief is bigger than any one deal or any one individual.

Whether it's coaching football or selling cars, you must create and share a vision everyone buys into. You must have a consistent process that everyone understands and follows. You must give your team the tools they need to be successful and hold them accountable. Finally, you must identify, develop and nurture those leaders within your organization.

Thomas Watson, the founder and former CEO of IBM, once said, "Doing business is a game — the greatest game in the world, if you know how to play it." Just make sure your team has some fun along the way. **ad**



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