

# Commitment, the Trinity, striving for excellence – and the value of practice

SPORT

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“The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavour. Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society to work, a civilization work.”

These words are from Vince Lombardi, recognised as one of the greatest coaches and leaders in the history of all American sports. The year after his sudden death from cancer in 1970, he was enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, and the NFL Super Bowl trophy was named in his honour.

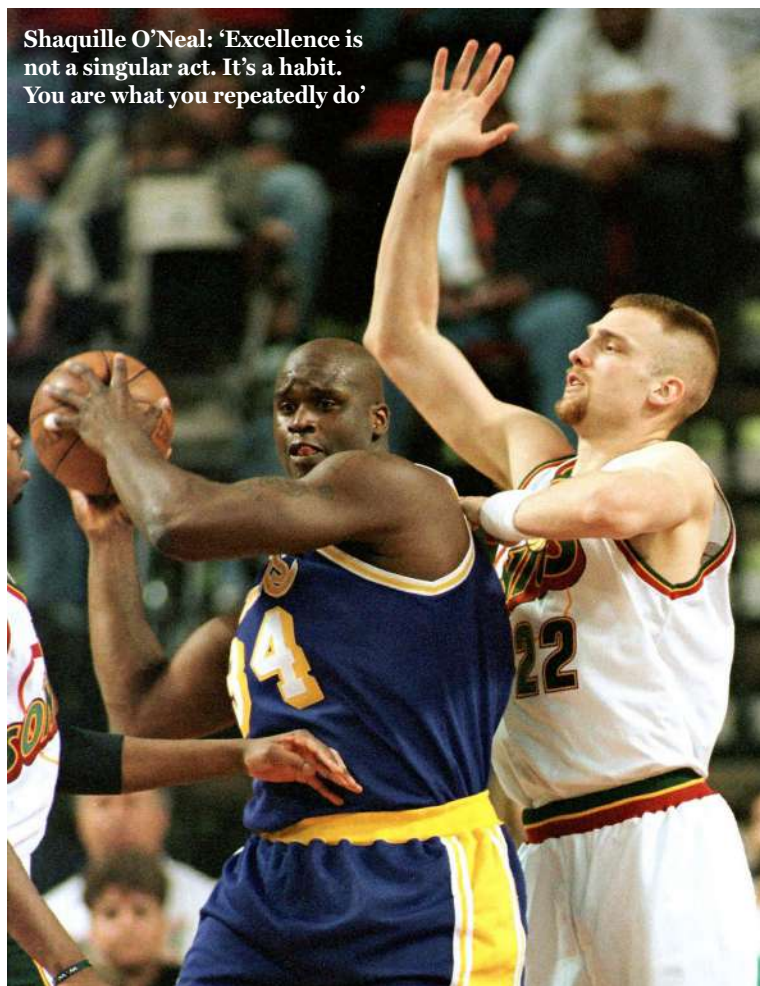
Commitment, derived from the Latin word *‘committere’*: ‘put together or to join’, obligates you to do something. To be all for one and one for all, as The Three Musketeers put it. To live a truly Trinitarian life, we need to commit ourselves to ‘another’ – individual or community – so that the ‘I’ committed to the ‘you’, together generate a subjective ‘we’ and an objective ‘us’: an enhanced community which is better for the common good.

“There are only two options regarding commitment. You’re either IN or you’re OUT. There is no such thing as life in-between,” stated Patrick ‘Pat’ James Riley, an American professional basketball executive and a former coach and player in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

“The vision of a champion is someone who is bent over, drenched in sweat, at the point of exhaustion, when no one else is watching,” shared Albert Anson Dorrance IV, currently the head coach of the women’s soccer programme at the University of North Carolina - with one of the most successful coaching records in the history of athletics.

“I think that the good and the great are only separated by the willingness to sacrifice,” said Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, an American former professional basketball star who played 20 seasons in the National Basketball Association for the Milwaukee Bucks and the Los Angeles Lakers.

David Beckham, inspired by his Manchester United teammate Eric Cantona’s commitment to training, decided to emulate his work ethic – and, thanks to all those extra hours of practice, developed his ability to place the ball accurately at a distance - and bend it when useful. With a reported personal net worth of over \$450 million, David



Shaquille O’Neal: ‘Excellence is not a singular act. It’s a habit. You are what you repeatedly do’

Beckham’s journey from North London to international stardom showcases not just his football prowess but also his entrepreneurial – committed – spirit.

“When people succeed, it is because of hard work. Luck has nothing to do with success,” declared Diego Maradona, Argentine football legend. Widely regarded as one of the greatest football players of all time, he also who knew how to cheat. Remember his ‘hand of God’ goal in the 1986 World Cup?

“Excellence is not a singular act. It’s a habit. You are what you repeatedly do,” stated Shaquille O’Neal. Considered one of the greatest players in National Basketball Association (NBA) history, at 7 ft 1 in (2.16 m) tall and 325 pounds (147 kg), he was one of the tallest and heaviest players ever. (He admitted he was quoting Aristotle!)

When the going gets tough, remember that God is watching you. Some 40 years ago, as head of RE and school chaplain at Cardinal Vaughan Memorial school, the parents of two of our boys, invited me to help drive their family - six

children in all - to their holiday at Sitges, south of Barcelona.

One morning, sitting under an umbrella on the beach, I saw a young lad – 4 or 5 years old - trying to make a sandcastle. And, failing time and time again. I noticed his father watching him - utter concentration. When, finally, the lad succeeded, the father roared with laughter and clapped his hands. That it how I see God looking at me as I mess up so many of my sandcastles. That is why my favourite Psalm is 139, which states: ‘You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways...I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.’

Given our human condition, sooner or later – as married couples will admit (at least to a priest!) – committed relationships pass through troubled waters. To help them sustain their commitment, I remind them that God is the bridge on both their sides. Realising God’s commitment to them, enables them to pass through ‘the seven year itch’

strengthened rather than diminished.

“Never let your head hang down. Never give up and sit down and grieve. Find another way.”

These words are from Leroy Robert ‘Satchel’ Paige, a Major League Baseball pitcher, notable for his longevity in the game, and for attracting record crowds wherever he pitched.

“I start early and I stay late, day after day, year after year. It took me 17 years and 114 days to become an overnight success,” joked the Argentinian footballer Lionel Messi, widely believed to be one of the greatest players of all time.

Virtues make values visible. They are evidence of your character. “You can’t get much done in life if you only work on the days when you feel good,” we were reminded by Jerome ‘Jerry’ Alan West who played for the Los Angeles Lakers of the NBA. His nicknames included Mr. Clutch, for his ability to make a big play in a clutch situation, such as his famous buzzer-beating 60-foot shot that tied Game 3 of the 1970 NBA Finals against the New York Knicks.

Bill Shankly – legendary Liverpool manager – made it clear that “everything is practice.”

“I train as hard as I can every time I train and I do extra training every day and I’ve done that since I was a young boy,” announced Wayne Rooney, the record goal-scorer for both the England national team (since overtaken by Harry Kane) and Manchester United.

As I am 5’ 7” tall, I can identify with Don Zimmer – who spent 65 years in pro baseball as a player and then coach – when he said that “what you lack in talent can be made up with desire, hustle, and giving 110 per cent all the time.” Without commitment, I would not have become Wandsworth under-15 javelin champion, or been able to play for three years in the 1st XI football team at school – Clapham College, actually – or won a few ‘pots’ rowing for Imperial College.

“Work transforms God gives talent into genius,” stated Anna Pavlova, the renowned Russian prima ballerina of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. A principal artist of the Imperial Russian Ballet and the Ballets Russes of Sergei Diaghilev, connoisseurs remember her thanks to ‘Pavlova’; a meringue-based dessert created in her honour, much admired by many even today.

To what – to whom – are you committed? How deeply committed are you as we move on into this ‘new normal’? Why not make your ‘new normal’ a finer commitment to your family, friends and neighbourhood? Remember the difference between involvement and commitment? It is like bacon and eggs. The chicken is

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involved; the pig is committed.

“Be the hardest working person you can be. That’s how you separate yourself from the competition,” announced Stephen ‘Steph’ Curry II, an American professional basketball player, six-time NBA All-Star, he has been named the NBA Most Valuable Player twice and won three NBA championships with the Golden State Warriors.

So, keep on keeping on. “If you want to win, do the ordinary things better than anyone else does, day in and day out,” pronounced Charles ‘Chuck’ Henry Noll, an American professional football player and regarded as one of the greatest head coaches of all time. His sole head coaching position was for the Pittsburgh Steelers of the National Football League from 1969 to 1991.

“As long as we persevere and endure, we can get anything we want,” proclaimed Mike Tyson - and self-styled ‘baddest man on the planet’ who is regarded as one of the greatest heavyweight boxers of all time. He reigned as the undisputed world heavyweight champion from 1987 to 1990. Tyson won his first 19 professional fights by knockout, 12 of them in the first round.

“You win by effort, by commitment, by ambition, by quality, by expressing yourself individually but in the team context,” declared Jose Mourinho, who managed Chelsea, Real Madrid, Manchester United, Tottenham Hotspur and Roma.

“Desire is the key to motivation, but it’s determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal – a commitment to excellence – that will enable you to attain the success you seek,” stated Mario Andretti, an Italian-born American former racing driver. One of the most successful drivers in the history of motorsports. Andretti is one of only three drivers to have won races in Formula One, IndyCar, the World Sportscar Championship, and NASCAR.

“I am a very emotional guy. What I love, I do with all I have,” admitted Jurgen Klopp – and you can see the results of that commitment.

Let’s end, as we started, with a quote from Vince Lombardi: “Most people fail, not because of a lack of desire, but because of lack of commitment.” Beware! Take up a prayer! Then you can succeed.

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**Lionel Messi**