



Stanford eCorner

The Power of Accountability

Steve Young, *Former NFL Quarterback*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1765/The-Power-of-Accountability>

Young describes how he used accountability to deal with setbacks on the field. Whenever he committed an interception, Young accepted the mistake and looked at ways to fix the problem. He realized that when one was ultimately accountable, others would also take responsibility to improve the situation.



Transcript

One of the worst things that can happen as a quarterback is a throw interception. Not to focus on the negative, but you've thrown a few. That's the great thing about playing long enough. Now what happened is that the guy who replaced me was like "Steve would never do that." I was like "Oh my gosh, it's come full circle. I can do no wrong." When I retired, they were like "You're the greatest." They don't remember anything negative, but I had 202 interceptions in 18 years. That's a lot, not that I count. I remember you telling me after a game "this was years ago" that you threw an interception. Crabbe was coming down on you. I think you even got booed. The next time you came out in the next play, you threw another interception.

Right. Yeah. Sorry to bring back painful memories. No, no, no. You've got to imagine, the safest way to play football is ignorantly. Don't really look up and see the crowd and don't really look at the impact you have on society with football. Whether you like it or not, sports have a huge impact. Being a quarterback, you know that you're in the middle of it all. Like I said, it kind of relates to the previous story about victimization. An interception - if you don't follow football, that's when the quarterback throws the ball to the other team.

I don't know how to liken it in other sports. It's like striking out or, in soccer, kicking one into your own goal. It's somewhat similar in that the rest of your teammates have basically said to you "You're the quarterback. Do something great. Do something really good with it. We trust you. We think you're pretty good." I threw to the other team and then they have this inevitable moment when they look back at me and say "What? Why did you do that? We trusted you. We're working hard for you. Why would you do that?" What do you want to do? There are 60,000 or 80,000 people watching the game. As Stan mentioned, they're muttering something.

There's this moment when the lights are on, they turn to me and they say "Why did you do that?" Human nature is you would want to explain it. It's not like I meant to do it. I didn't drop back and say "Okay. I'm going to screw everything up. I can't wait." You don't do it on purpose, but there it is in front of everybody. You can't fake it. It happened and now you want to explain it. And so I would go on into these long explanations of why this horrible thing had happened. There were a lot of logical things like the receiver turned the wrong way, which he does sometimes. You trust him.

Or you get hit right when you can throw the ball or something like that. I noticed over the years that the guys didn't respond. They would not respond to my explanation of the intervening circumstances that had led to this horrible thing that had happened. I discovered what they responded to after trial and error. That's negotiation too. It's not a science. It's trial and error.

It's trying a lot of different things. When I make a mistake, I think "Okay. What should I do? I've fallen." What they wanted to hear was "Hey, look.

I screwed it up. It was in my hand and now it's in theirs. I messed it up." But that's only half of it. There are a lot of people running around and going "Oh, woe is me. It's my fault. I'm sorry. It's all me." That's the easy part, in my mind. The hard part is "Now we're going to go fix it." That's what people responded to. "I screwed it up but now let's go to the sidelines, let's get a drink of water, we'll rest up, we'll come back on the field and we're going on to win the game. What do you say? I'm going to lead you to do it." Now everyone got energized.

They're like "Hey, we're in this together." In fact, they'd go to the sidelines and they'd go to the coach and say "Coach, what happened was I turned the wrong way." Everyone's accountability came rushing in to this group of people and everybody wanted to be accountable because the guy who screwed it up was ultimately accountable.