

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Ayers Institute “My Why” Podcast
Episode 8 – May 2019
Title: *Steve Lindsey*

SPEAKERS

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INTRODUCTION:

RM: For some it is a decision made after a moment of epiphany. For others, they can't imagine a time when they wanted to be anything else. They are teachers. They are leaders. They are life changers. These are their stories.

SL: My name is Steve Lindsey from Lexington High School, and this is “My Why.”

If you were to come up and ask our staff, “What would be the one thing that you heard from Mr. Lindsey on a daily basis?” I'm sure that they would say these are the three things that you're going to hear at some point in time: teach from bell to bell, teach the standards that are being tested, and— last but, for sure, not least— you better make sure that you're developing positive relationships and being able to relate to students on all different levels.

And when you do those three things, and keep all those three things in mind, I have found out the rest of it takes care of itself.

RM: Welcome to My Why: Stories of Inspiration from Educators. This podcast is presented by the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation and brought to you by the College of Education at Lipscomb University, where 21st century educators are prepared to involve, impact, and inspire.

My name is Rachael Milligan.

Today we are joined by Steve Lindsey, Principal of Lexington High School in Henderson County. Mr. Lindsey has both undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Tennessee at Martin. Prior to becoming an administrator, he taught chemistry and physical education and was an assistant coach for nine years as well as head football coach for nine years. He has been a principal at both the elementary and high school levels. He is married to Melissa and has two children and three grandchildren.

Mr. Lindsey thank you so much for being here today!

SL: Rachael, it's a pleasure to be here. And, I look forward to it.

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EPISODE BODY:

RM: What would you say has been the greatest challenge of your career in education?

SL: I tell you, the biggest challenge was the first one that was given to me. I thought I was doing a fantastic job— I think my first year. Of course, this is— at that time— my first year as principal at the high school. I really didn't have a whole lot of background in data. So my first triumph was, at Christmas time my boss came to me and said, "Have you seen your data as far as your Algebra I scores?"

And I said, "I really hadn't paid a whole lot of attention to them." So, that was not the right thing to say.

He said, "You might want to pay attention to them."

So when we did. This is where I really learned how to rely on other people and also just how important it is to sometimes you just you just gotta do a little digging and put a lot of— not pressure— but put a lot of ownership on other people. But we came in during the Christmas break that first year, and we were able from that first year (we were a level 1 school). In the next year, we came back and because of the way we revamped intervention times, the way we set our schedule up, even going back and looking at who was teaching specific subjects, we were able to raise our score from a level 1 school to the next year to a level 3, and then we went to a level 5 the following year. So, within two years we went from level 1 to a level 5 by challenging not only myself but also our other administrators and our entire staff.

RM: So think about that journey and how you you've always gravitated toward coaching. That was something you really wanted to do. How would you say that coaching and teaching are similar?

SL: They're no different.

I know that one of old coaches in West Tennessee is one of the winningest coaches in the state of Tennessee. A gentleman by the name of John Tucker over at Milan. He said that that's the one thing you had to be to be a good coach— you have to be a good teacher. It all gets back down to relating to kids, and that's one of things that we try to stress in the classroom, now. Developing relationships, being consistent with what we're teaching, stay with fundamentals.

RM: I wonder how you being coached as an athlete when you were growing up— how did that help you become the educator you are today?

SL: Well, I'll say this. The gentleman that I came back to Lexington— after I graduated from UT Martin I came back and worked under at Lexington High School— was the same gentleman that I played for for 4 years when I was in high school. And, he also taught here. One of the things— his name was Jim Stowe— a very positive man.

He was about like a second father to me when I was playing ball, and so forth. He was always a simple guy. Yeah, I'll tell you one of the statements he told me one time about neighbors and so forth. He said, "Just always remember, just remember sometimes you best neighbors live across town. They don't live just right beside of you." He kind of stuck with me over a period of time and I could see how he came up with that with that story.

If you really want to get into Coach Stowe, some of the things I saw him do for people. I've seen him go visit with people that were going through difficult times that they didn't even know he was going to go visit. He was a person that would show compassion to his players. Not only to the players but to the other

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students in the hallways as he's walking from class to class. Those relationships were developed. I hope and I'd love give him a lot of credit that some of those characteristics that he rubbed off on me. And I hope that that I'm doing the same thing with somebody else.

RM: Well thinking about that that legacy piece, what would you like students to remember most about you?

SL: I'll say this, Rachael. About a month ago, I received an e-mail from a young man out of Georgia. I hadn't had contact with him in 13 years.

RM: Wow.

SL: And, he e-mails me. He's going through a rough patch in life. And he e-mailed me and just said I want to thank you for showing interest in me and in and preparing me for these bumps in the road. And being a part of that. So, when you when you get those e-mails you feel like you your— at least you're trying to do the right thing.

This past week, we had our senior meeting. And, of course, this is the time of year you want to make sure they don't start kind-of taking things for granted. And one of the things that I stressed to them in our senior meeting: right now is a time to really make sure that we're staying focused. This is when a lot of people like to make decisions that are not the right thing and get involved in a lot of things that are not positive. A lot of things that could that could hinder you moving forward (as far as what schools you're going to; getting involved in events that are not productive).

And I've told them, I said, "Just make sure that when you have things presented to you, all I'm asking is to ask one simple question: 'Is it the right thing?' I didn't say it was the easy thing. I said, "Is it the right thing?" And if you can determine those two— the right and the wrong thing— and make the right decision, it's probably not always going to be the popular decision, it's probably not always going to be the fun decision, but it's going to lead to success down the road.

If you read that book by Nick Saban, it talks about the road to success. If you're making the right decisions, you won't always be popular, you won't always be only on the inside, but you always come out on top when you do that.

RM: And I can tell that drives how you interact with your students. I have one more Nick Saban related question for you, because I don't want to alienate other people.

SL: It better not be about Clemson!

RM: No it's not! It's not.

I have read that Nick Saban, every morning for breakfast, eats two oatmeal cream pies. Now...

SL: That is true. And he also eats chicken salad sandwiches at lunch.

RM: OK. Now the reason why I bring that up is because I wanted to ask you— what daily traditions do you have that drive you?

SL: My biggest one is that I get up every morning between 4:00 and 4:30. That is my daily devotional time. That's how I start my day. I find out my days go much, much better when I have that daily

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devotional time. So from 4:30 to 5:30 every morning, my wife and my dogs and all of the above realize that's my time. And that's my time that— I have my own little man cave at the house— and that's my spiritual time. And my days go a whole lot better when I stay true to that time, and I can tell when I don't use that time wisely.

RM: What kinds of situations have happened in your life as a principal that you can look back on and really see God's plan at work?

SL: This job of being a principal, because it was never in my game plan. The way it was presented, the way it unfolded— I actually, once before, I went and got inquisitive about the principal's job here. And then, the way it all unfolded, I did not receive it. And I actually had a little bit of a bad taste in my mouth at that time. But looking back it was God's plan not for me to be the principal at that time. And that's where he took care of me. It wasn't right timing. And in I didn't know that, but He knew that.

And when I did when I did accept it, it was right time. So, I can look back at becoming the principal of Lexington High School and even having the staff that I've got— that don't come by just by chance. That's a greater power than I have. OK.

RM: Well, thinking about and knowing everything we've talked about so far, Mr. Lindsey, I'd love for you to sum up your “my why” in six words or less.

SL: If you're asking me to sum up my story in six words, it would be to "pray daily and follow God's plan."

There's a book by Rick Warren. And, of course, it talks about “what is my purpose in life?” And I have found out that, you know, we don't wake one morning— and we see it laying there, that this is your purpose and you go through this for the rest of your life. I found out that— in prayer time and putting a lot of thought to it— when we wake up every morning and we're doing the best we can, every morning our purpose is going to be presented to us. It's somewhere down that line, as long as we're doing the right thing and following the purpose as presented to us on a daily basis: our career choices are going to be presented to us, our relationships are going to be presented to us, and with that— that's our purpose. Just to do the right thing and do what God's plan is.

CONCLUSION:

RM: As we close today's episode we encourage our listeners to consider your own sources of motivation. What inspires you to do what you do? What is your “why?” Share your ideas on social media using @AyersInstitute and the #MyWhy. Also, check out the handout including some of Mr. Lindsey's favorite resources, lessons learned, his six-word memoir, and other helpful information. This handout can be found on <http://eduTOOLBOX.org>.

We also invite you to connect with the Ayers Institute on Facebook and Twitter @AyersInstitute.

I'm Rachael Milligan producer and host for the My Why podcast. This episode was directed by Julia Osteen. Forest Doddington handles editing and technical production. This podcast is brought to you by Lipscomb University's College of Education.

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