

Coach Poggi's Golden Rule

Coach Biff Poggi of Gilman High School in Baltimore, Maryland, has a rule for his winning football team that you'd probably never guess: Team members are not allowed to let any boys eat alone—including boys who aren't on the team. "Empathy and kindness for all" is what Coach Poggi demands—even more than winning. But win they do. Nationally, Poggi's team has ranked near the top several times.

Here's what Coach Poggi tells his team: "I expect greatness out of you. And the way we measure greatness is the impact you make on other people's lives."

Poggi cautions his team never to put people in boxes based on race, religion, the neighborhood they live in, the car they drive, athletic ability, level of education, or anything else. He says, "If you let that happen now, then you'll let it happen later." Poggi pushes his boys to break down stereotypes and to remember that every

single person is special and has something to offer. He urges them all to do this:

"[If] you happen to see another boy off by himself, go sit with him or bring him over to sit with you and your friends. I don't care if you know him or not. I don't care if he's the best athlete in the school or the so-called nerd with his head always down in the books. You go get him and you make him feel wanted, you make him feel special."

Coach Poggi tells his players to live by one simple, central question for the rest of their lives: "What can I do for you?" He says, "Not what can I do for me. The only question that really matters is this: How can I help you today?"

He explains, "If we lose every game of the year, go oh-and-ten on the football field, as long as we try hard, I don't care. You learn these lessons, and we're ten-and-oh in the game of life."

After thinking about Coach Poggi's words, write your responses to the following questions.

- What did Coach Poggi say that inspired you the most?
- How can you be more like Coach Poggi in your daily life?
- How would our class and school be different if everyone lived by Coach Poggi's golden rule?
- How would your life be different if *you* lived this way?
- How would our world be different if everyone lived by these rules?

REAL-LIFE CHALLENGE

- » In seventh grade, Natalie Hampton sat alone at lunch every day. She felt lonely, excluded, and sad. After this experience, she decided she didn't want other kids to feel the way she had. So she created an app that would mean no other kid would ever have to sit alone and feel bullied or excluded. Her "Sit with Us" app helps kids find a welcoming table in the lunchroom, with the help of their classmates. What creative ideas can *you* come up with to reduce bullying and exclusion? Brainstorm about them in your journal.