

# Wisdom That Leads to Soul Rest

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## Learning to Lose

My wife has given me a lot of relationship advice, and yes, that has multiple meanings. Her advice taught me something about soul *rest* I needed to learn. I call it learning to lose. Some lessons you master easily, but some take a lifetime of practice. You might say learning to lose is my lifetime achievement badge.

There has probably been no more important lesson for me. Growing up, everything was about competition, and sports were my life. I dreamed of playing for the Dallas Cowboys but fell short of that goal when I maxed out at 5' 10", 150 pounds in high school. Technically, I was on the roster at a higher weight, but I wore ten pounds of ankle weights during my physical. Unfortunately, I was one of those bad winners and bad losers. Don't ask me how long it took me to outgrow this behavior. It was immature and embarrassing.

Susan and I were married in 1991. Early on in marriage, Susan wanted help with the kids and the house. I wanted to spend my time at work and return to school. I somehow thought a verbal disagreement was normal and sometimes entertaining. In my mind, when two people disagree, you make your arguments, and the logical person is the winner. She is more emotional, and I'm more logical, so the deck was somewhat stacked in my favor under these rules, allowing me to win and win and win.

### Spousal Jiu-Jitsu

One day, Susan and I were debating, and I mopped the floor with her poor logic. I was winning. That's when Susan hit me with a trick question out of nowhere. She asked, "**Do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?**" Full stop. *What just happened? What did you say?* "Do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?" That's tricky. No one had ever used this logic during a debate. Was that even allowed? I was thinking, *well, I want to win. Can I take a day to think about it and get back to you?* But thankfully, I didn't say that.

At that time, I was so competitive a part of me wasn't sure which one I wanted more. For the first time, I realized how my drive to win was taking a toll on my marriage, and that got my pea-sized brain thinking about how it might impact other relationships. I might be happier winning in the short run, but I was picking up a hint this might come with a long-term price.

I'm a typical guy, and my emotional intelligence was a little behind the curve. It's kind of funny now but thank God I listened and learned to stop winning at any price.

That one lesson blessed our marriage and later became integral to my management style and relationship mindset. I stopped debating for sport and trying to always win, and started thinking win/win (gasp, win/lose?).

This was a eureka moment for me when I realized sometimes, I would feel like I was losing. This subtle shift in thinking will save you a lot of emotional turmoil, strengthen your relationships, make you more likable, and help you find *soul rest* and peace, rather than competition and pride.

### **Watch and Learn, Grasshopper**

A few years later, my wife took the lesson to another level. I was nitpicking about things like getting places on time, and Susan was nitpicking about things like picking up clothes on the floor. It was the small papercuts of everyday life.

I got this genius idea from a book, the radio, or somewhere. Instead of complaining about minor daily grievances, we should write them down, make a list, and then present it to the other person on Wednesday at 7:00 a.m. We both agreed Wednesday at 7:00 a.m. seemed like the best day and time to dump seven days' worth of complaints on each other.

That week, Susan started complaining about something, and I said, "Stop! Put it on the Wednesday List. It can wait." I felt so good saying that. I laughed the second time I said it. Then she did something that made me want to attack, and she said, "Stop! Put it on the Wednesday List. It can wait."

This went on for six days. I kept track in my head, and I thought, *she might have had more dirt on me than I had on her*, but I didn't write it down. On Wednesday morning, I woke up and rushed around. Crap. I forgot to write out my list, I needed to leave for work, and I literally couldn't remember anything. I saw her note on the table. She had made a list the night before on an 8.5 x 11 piece of paper folded in half. On the outside, the title was "The Wednesday List." On the inside, my infractions? I opened it. It said, "I love you for providing for this family. I love you for working so hard. I love you for ..."

I read a list of all the reasons my wife loved me, and that was our first, last, and only Wednesday List. Not only was it the last Wednesday List, but the nitpicking seemed to dissolve into thin air at the same time. Yes, I married up!

The beauty of her list was she took a solution that might benefit many marriages and made it exponentially better. Consolidating our complaints wasn't a bad idea. But Susan made a list that would never win an argument, had no logic, and gave me all the power; **she was losing on purpose**. Her letter elevated me rather than dragged me down with my

shortcomings. She wrote a letter that took the debate to a spiritual level. It's the most beautifully kind and ingenious lesson I learned about losing.

When I first learned this lesson, I supervised about thirty employees. None of them were physicians, and only a few were leaders of leaders. Later in my career, I was responsible for over 1,500 employees, many of whom were physicians or leaders of leaders.

With experience, I noticed most broken relationships had one person in the relationship who was a winner, like I used to be. They unconsciously pushed and pursued victory so hard they ignored the relationship costs.

I remember working with one particular physician who had a history of broken relationships. He came into my office to discuss an issue, and it was like a perfectly crafted legal argument, complete with supporting documents. He wasn't wrong, but we could have addressed his concerns three months earlier on multiple occasions; however, he wanted to ensure he won. He wanted to be the smartest person in the room.

That's when I shared my wife's advice and added my own summary I had coined. Susan's advice was, "Do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?" Bret's application is,

**"If you win every debate, you lose every relationship."**

I went to school for many years to obtain fancy degrees and credentials, but my wife taught me a life hack you don't learn in a classroom.

Sometimes in relationships, we feel like we are compromising or even losing. By all means, always strive for a win-win outcome. I'm not suggesting there needs to be a loser. Just know, sometimes your emotions may lead you to believe you are losing, and that may be precisely what is necessary for the sake of the relationship.

## **People Business**

Part of having strong relationships, whether with coworkers or spouses, is appreciating and respecting what others bring to the discussion. Every person has unique experiences, knowledge, talents, and abilities. They bring all those personal traits to the table when making a decision. You can show how much you respect and appreciate their opinion and unique characteristics by giving them a substantial voice.

Employees and co-workers feel they have a substantial voice when they are listened to, and their ideas are included in the solution. For the ultracompetitive person, you may sometimes feel like you're losing on purpose. It's okay. In fact, it may be the humility your employees need to see in their leader. This is a crucial lesson because we are all in the people business. Therefore, relationships are the key to enjoying life and big accomplishments. You may not think you're in the people business, but if you work with a boss, a customer, or a coworker, or even live with or socialize with another human being,

you are in the people business. If you are accomplishing big things, you are undoubtedly working with people.

Would you like to have better relationships? Let other people win. Let someone else's idea be the winning idea. You will develop those around you and have stronger relationships.

Losing doesn't mean compromising your morals or your standards. It doesn't mean running meetings like a democracy where everyone gets an equal vote. It doesn't mean announcing, "I am going to let you guys have your way." It means some issues aren't worth debating, and some battles aren't worth winning.

If you have an ultracompetitive personality, you might be inclined to "win at all costs." However, those costs often include strained relationships, sleepless nights, ruminating thoughts, and adrenaline-fueled arguments.

Winning is great. Win/win is even better. If you're someone who can't bear to let others win, you'll find yourself caught in an energy-draining and relationship-damaging cycle. If you work or live with this person, make a copy of this chapter and give it to them. Learning to lose on purpose and choosing your battles wisely might be the energy hack you need to find *soul rest*. Those around you will benefit, and ultimately, so will you.

Note from Bret: I hoped you enjoyed this chapter. This is a good example of my writing and storytelling style. I talk about money, parenting, scarcity, grace, trauma, gratitude, and a host of other topics that could be stealing your peace or your energy. If you want to learn more or buy the book, go to [https://sabbaticaltaker.com/wisdom\\_that\\_leads\\_to\\_soul\\_rest/](https://sabbaticaltaker.com/wisdom_that_leads_to_soul_rest/) and check out the website.