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THE BUSINESS of BEING THE BEST

Inside the World of Go-Getters and Game Changers

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The Business of Being the Best

INSIDE THE WORLD OF GO-GETTERS AND GAME CHANGERS

Molly Fletcher

with Justin Spizman

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To our daughters, Emma, Meg, and Kate
May you always be your best

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Preface

For almost two decades, I have been a sports agent and worked with many of the biggest—make that legendary—names in sports. I didn't play professional baseball, or coach college ball, or even compete in a PGA Tour event, but even without those personal accomplishments on my résumé, I've succeeded at becoming America's leading and most recognized female sports agent in a male-dominated field.

Throughout my successful twenty-year career, I have worked with some of the most outstanding talents in the sports world. From baseball to basketball to golf and broadcasting where the elite play, I have been. I have helped lead my clients to success, and along the way, we've shared special moments on and off the field. They have become my friends, we've attended each other's weddings, many visited me in the hospital when my daughters were born, and we have shared our lives with one another. Having the opportunity to call world champions, future Hall of Famers, and headlining All-Stars my coworkers and friends has provided me with insight into the business of being the best.

I've had a successful career thus far, and CNN has even called me "the female Jerry McGuire," but I still feel I have much more to learn and achieve—and even more to give. I have never rested on my laurels. I take the same advice I give to my players every day: "No deposit, no return," just as it says on soft drink cans. What this phrase means is that you will get out of it what you put into it: make a big deposit, and you get a big return. Put in little effort, and you will find yourself with nothing. My clients have made huge sacrifices and deposits into their work to ensure that they achieve the best that they can. And I work hard to maintain the competitive edge that has allowed me to build a client base of over 150 clients and a team of agents.

For more than two decades, I have negotiated, directly and indirectly, over $500 million worth of contracts and pushed my clients to reach peaks even they could not have imagined. Working with the best day in and day out has helped me understand how they reach their full potential and maintain their place at the top of their respective arenas of business. I have shared the journeys of developing athletes, young coaches, rookie broadcasters, championship coaches, and prominent commentators. I have been exposed to a world of uniquely wonderful situations and have had a platform to connect with the world's best brands, best companies, best CEOs, and most successful executives on the planet—both in and out of the world of sports and the sports business.

The best can be any age and work in any profession. Certainly they are all very different, but they nevertheless carry a similar set of characteristics that push them to be top in their fields. By no means am I implying that any one of them

is perfect—or even close to it. But they do share a common denominator that we can use to measure success: they measure their success by looking at their peers and their competitors. They work diligently to ensure that they are at the top of their respective industries. When it comes down to it, the go-getters and the game changers work to be considered one of the best by their peers and society at large.

At the heart of this book lies the fundamental idea that the best share a common set of traits and qualities that can be studied, copied, and instilled into your own life. There are individuals in our own lives whom we might call the best. The best teacher. The best boss. The best parent. Clearly, that is subjective. Some would argue that Michael Jordan is the best basketball player ever, but that also is subjective. So my goal is to share with you the less subjective side of what makes someone the best. In this book, I explain why the best do what they do, how they do it, and how you can learn from them, in the process transforming your professional life and joining the business of being the best. From the locker room to the boardroom, the playing field to the field of dreams, there are important lessons to learn.

Once you understand how the best view and approach their careers and their professions, you too will learn how to up your game, improve your business, and be your best. When you're at your best, not only do you define why you do what you do, but you also increase the success of those around you. People will naturally be attracted to you and to your mentality, ability, skills, and talents. In fact, not only will they want to work with you; they will also want to be around you.

In this book, I focus on some of the most important skills you will need to master in order to reach the top of your game. Whatever your industry may be, you will almost certainly find value in understanding how the best negotiate, relate to others, use their coworkers' strengths effectively, carry themselves, and maintain a high level of excellence throughout their careers.

The famous American journalist Marylin Vos Savant once said, "To acquire knowledge, one must study; but to acquire wisdom, one must observe." And from this point on, that is exactly what we will do. I have had the opportunity to not only study and observe the best but also to interview a cross-section of some of the most respected and accomplished athletes, coaches, businesspeople, philanthropists, and success stories. And through their stories, their experiences, and their insights, you will see what it takes to be the best.

I have kept the chapters in this book simple and tactical to ensure that you clearly understand how to implement these skills to improve your best traits. My goal is to help you succeed beyond your wildest imagination and reach goals you didn't even know you were capable of reaching. I want to help you create clarity and design a road map to reach your potential and navigate your way to extraordinary success.

No one becomes the best overnight, but when you read the last word in this book, you will have gained the knowledge you need to join the top 1 percent of go-getters and game changers in the world. You too will officially be on the road to being in the business of being the best.

Atlanta, Georgia Molly Fletcher
October 2011

The Business of Being the Best

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The Quest to Become the Best

Success is a journey, not a destination.
—Ben Sweetland

From the locker room to the boardroom, the practice field to the field of life, and the highlight reels to the business deals, the best are those who excel, succeed, and win both personally and professionally. They share a common set of traits and characteristics laced with passion and persistence that drives their success and fuels their inextinguishable flame. The best never stop striving for something far greater than the goals they have already reached. They never rest on their laurels, and they aim beyond the finish line. The finish line represents an end in sight, but the best see far beyond it to new possibilities. They understand the rapidity of change, and no matter how good they are, they always see room to improve.

What that tells us is that a critical core of a strong foundation, work ethic, intellect, persistence, and attention to details promotes a standard of excellence. Those who succeed

in becoming the best work for every inch of success and accomplishment. An inch can be the difference in winning a game or losing it, and it is the same in business. The inches add up to the difference between where you are and where you want to be.

It is not luck or coincidence when you see a Major League Baseball (MLB) player hit a game-winning home run that sails over the outfield wall, a PGA golfer sinking the tournament-winning putt on the eighteenth hole, a coach leading his team to a world championship, or a CEO build a successful and profitable company out of his garage. These accomplishments are the result of diligent practice, dedication, and the hard work and determination it takes to get to the next level. The people who achieve these feats value hard work, are constantly fine-tuning their skills, and recover from adversity quickly. Their results come from consistently working hard at their trade.

Defining Your Own Version of Extraordinary

People who are the best in their field are relentless in their journey to become extraordinary. They have a strong desire to excel and succeed at what they do—selling, negotiating, hitting, kicking, throwing, or hosting. Why? They are competitive and love to win. And they want to win over and over again.

Through managing and working with the best, I have observed strong and experienced people fall from greatness, and I have seen newcomers rise to the pinnacle of record-breaking success. Although everyone has a unique path to achieving greatness, their stories, many of which I share in this book, are inspirational. We have all been told to try our

hardest and do our best, and we all have our own definition of greatness. But it is possible to outperform even your own expectations and redefine your personal greatness to something more than you ever imagined. It is only by changing the way you think about success that you can fully embark on the quest to become the best.

In order to redefine your idea of personal greatness, begin by considering these questions:

- Why do you want to be the best?
- What does "being the best" mean to you in a year? Or in five years?
- How can you become the best?

Answering these questions will help you start your journey to becoming the best. The answers to some of these questions will come from within. Only you can decide why you want to be the best or what your inspiration is to improve and grow personally and professionally. But the stories surrounding the go-getters and game changers in this book will help you answer the question pertaining to how you can make it happen. Each of them has worked hard to become the best, and their insight and experiences will help you reach heights you have only imagined thus far.

Before you can hone your skills and refine your abilities, you have to build a strong foundation, so let's focus on the foundation that the best share. Through my work with successful executives and athletes, I have learned that all people who achieve extraordinary success in their field carry a set of similar qualities that enables them to put the rest in place. And

the good news is that it's possible to learn from the best and apply their lessons in your own life and career. With a full understanding of these skills and characteristics, you will be able to grow into a successful businessperson, coach, community leader, entrepreneur, authority, doctor, lawyer, or future leader of your generation and generations to come.

We'll start this book by taking a look at what makes the best the best.

The Best Kick It Up a Notch

Being great means finding the top, and then kicking it up one or more levels. If you want to achieve greatness, you can't see ceilings, obstacles, or limitations as roadblocks. The best do not allow themselves to feel safe and comfortable; rather, they use every day as an opportunity to become a trailblazer and redefine success and the cutting edge. The most successful people in this world, no matter what area they are in, have a unique outlook on how they run their business, manage their employees, carve out niches, and manage their careers. Tom Izzo, head basketball coach of the Michigan State Spartans, missed an important free throw during his youth, and as a result, his team lost the game. To this day, Tom often finds time in his schedule to shoot and make fifty free throws a day. This kind of grit and intensity

Being great means finding the top, and then kicking it up one or more levels.

translate to success on the court and in his profession. Tom is now among the elite in his industry: he has won a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championship, six Big Ten regular season titles, and two Big Ten tournament titles.[1]

Tom's dedication to being the best was clear in his behavior after his team won the national championship in 2000. Once the horn sounded the end of the game, he was cutting down the net, doing a media conference, and celebrating with his team and fellow coaches for hours. But he didn't bask in the victory for very long. The next morning he was already strategizing ways to persuade a recruit to come to Michigan State the next year. Tom could have relaxed and celebrated his success for a while, but he knew that if he was not focused on success in the future, his competitors would be. Kicking it up a notch means having a sense of urgency. Tom clearly has that.

Tony Conway, founder and owner of A Legendary Event, an award-winning special events company, said, "To be successful in business you need to have a taste for the unexpected . . . and an unending desire to make people happy." Tony has flourished and prospered as one of the leaders in the catering industry because he has a vision that few others have. He believes in the power of making people happy and that the most important part of his job is to create lasting and memorable experiences for his clients. His driving desire to be a groundbreaker in his industry is demonstrated in his attitude toward every event he puts on, and he has over twenty-five hundred of them every year. He believes that every guest who attends one of his events plays a vital role in his success. If he impresses each of them with his attention to detail and unexpected surprises, he will have one more sales rep pushing