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JON GORDON's ONE WORD 2013: SIMPLIFY

Award winning author and noted motivational speaker, Jon Gordon, probably merges the business management section of Barnes and Nobles with the sports section better than anyone. Many of his stories have application to what we do as coaches. The Energy Bus, Training Camp, Seed, and Positive Dog have been the blueprint for many successful organizations and teams. If you need a women's basketball coach to validate his impact, contact Jose Fernandez at South Florida who had Jon speak to his team throughout this season that saw his Bulls come within an OT session of advancing to the Elite 8.

I also highly recommend his books. They are short, fascinating reads with powerful messages.

But, what I speak of here came from one of his weekly blog posts. Each year, Jon challenges people to find ONE single word to define their year. Of course most people do this around the normal New Year's resolution time. As a coach my year revolves around a different calendar, so I always try to choose mine as one season is ending and another one is beginning.

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Last April, following a loss in the third round of the WNit, I choose the word SIMPLIFY. I chose it based on the first season we had at the University of Washington. The transition from Xavier was full of new challenges and new relationships to build. It was clear to me that a key to year two would be my ability to help SIMPLIFY things.

I began to research the topic. It was very evident very early that Steve Jobs was widely considered a prime example of a successful visionary who believed in simplicity. I read as many pieces on how his philosophy developed over time and ultimately how it helped make APPLE the most valuable company in history near the end of 2012. The book INSANELY SIMPLE written by Ken Segall was probably the best single source of information that I came across. If you don't want to spend a single dime, just google/bing search, STEVE JOBS SIMPLE and you will get thousands of articles to read.

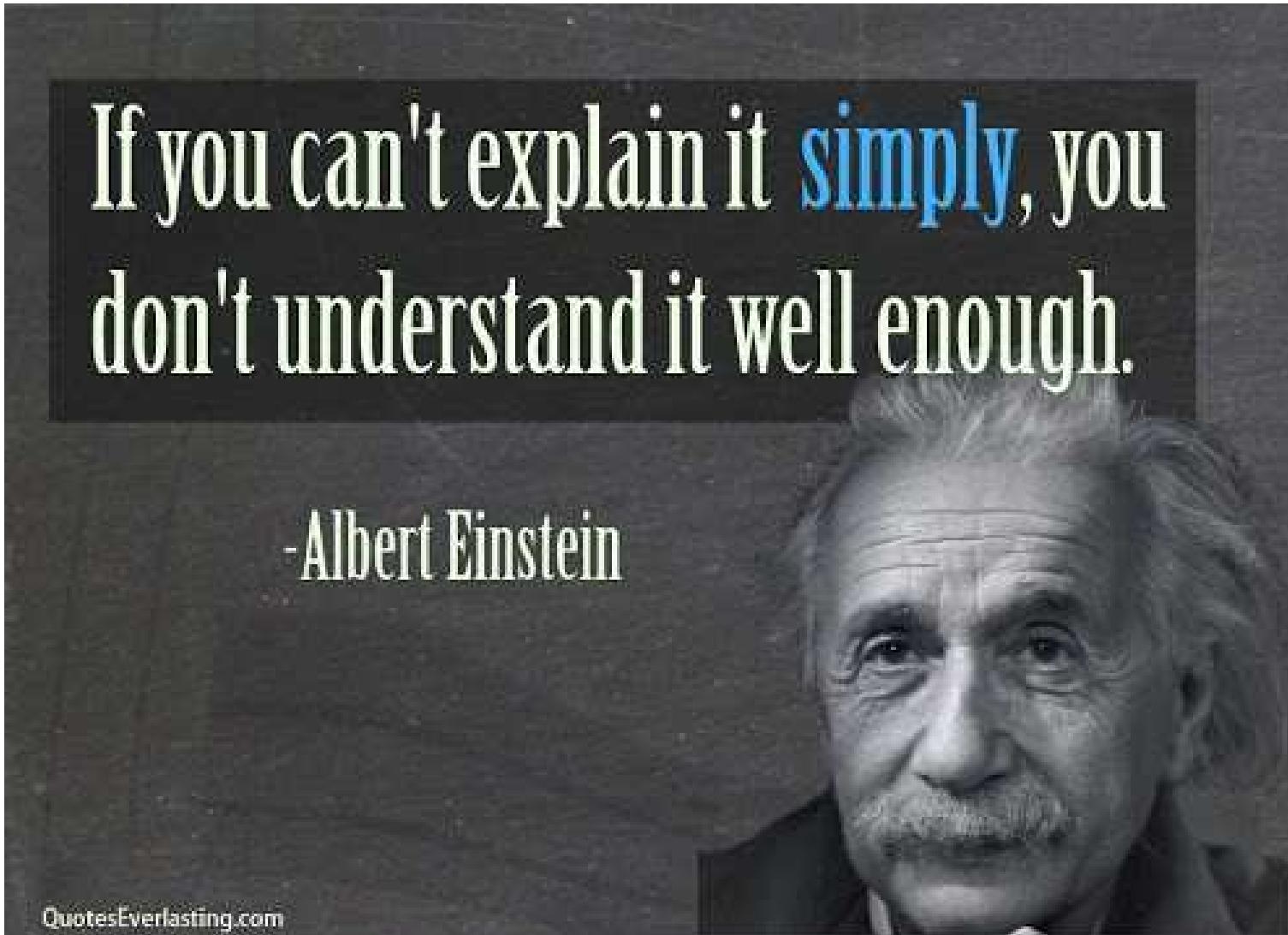
I will let you read the book and draw your own conclusions. But there is one story I want to share and believe we benefitted from the most this season. Steve Jobs was notorious of walking into meetings and after a quick scan of the attendees, kicking out at least one if not ten people. His rule was the least valuable in the room didn't really need to be there. As badly as that might have stung from time to time, every single employee understood why and in the long run usually appreciated not having to be there and wasted their time. Jobs wasn't being mean. I wasn't mean in how he kicked them out. He was being SIMPLE. How many meetings have you WISHED you could have been kicked out of around your basketball office because you didn't have anything to do with the agenda. Academic meetings when it wasn't about one of your players? Compliance meetings to discuss new football legislation? Facilities meetings when you can't even name the facilities?

John Maeda's Laws of Simplicity was a great follow up read if the one on Steve Jobs gets you.

Be sure you don't mistake being SIMPLE with being EASY. It is not. Simple is very hard. Breaking things down to their very core message requires a lot of time and effort on your part. At times, being simple sounds fast. It is NOT faster. While it certainly may save time over the long haul. SIMPLICITY requires a LOT of time. Would you agree if you are only able to emphasize one word, that that word had better be a well thought one?

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I am a huge quotes guy. I have a Mount Rushmore of quotes (meaning I try to have no more than 4 faves) but I have thousands to choose from. I have made a poster of a few of them here:



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"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication."

- Leonardo da Vinci

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**Anyone can make the simple
complicated. Creativity is making
the complicated simple.**

– Charles Mingus

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In keeping with the topic of ways these things helped win games, I will mention a few here:

- We were better at fewer things. Rather than try to solve ALL the deficit areas we had in year one, we focused on fewer things. Some of them were the most important. Others though were further down the list of importance but were moved higher because we felt we had a better chance at achieving them. In being SIMPLER in our approach we made drastic improvements that allowed us to win a few games that on paper we shouldn't have.
- Players were more informed about opponents when we forced ourselves to be more simple in our scouting. The language we used was more simple. Eliminating basketball jargon that sounds good to coaches but not so much to players. Being specific in what we wanted them to remember and in what wasn't as important.
- Everything from travel procedure, to film session, to pre-game shoot around, to pre-game warm ups was simplified. This clarity allowed coaches and players alike to be more focused, relaxed, and confident.

The concept forced our staff to communicate with each other effectively to make sure we were sending the same message. When your message is only a few points, they must be the correct points. When you have thousand messages floating around your program, one off message can't damage things. When you have three... One could!!

Being focused on being SIMPLE forced us to SOLVE PROBLEMS and look at problems... If you haven't seen MONEYBALL there is a classic scene that is been repeated 100s of times around our office this season. It starts around the 8:00 minute mark and runs for about 5 minutes...

I am obviously Brad Pitt and McGuff is Jonah Hill...

Okay, I'm not Brad Pitt. But the fact that SIMPLIFY was my word for 2013 certainly helped me do my job as an assistant better than I had ever done before and the benefits helped us win a game we might not have otherwise.

