

Trust or Consequences (Teamwork - Chapter 5)

n/a

Ready:

"Never let loyalty and faithfulness leave you. Tie them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will find favor and high regard in the sight of God and man." - Proverbs 3:3-4

"Men of genius are admired. Men of wealth are envied. Men of power are feared. But only men of character are trusted." -Arthur Freidman

Set

Trust is a funny thing. It takes years to build but can be destroyed in an instant. Trust requires honesty, communication, loyalty and proven moral integrity. It is one of the foundational elements behind every great team.

Andy Pettitte knows all about the fragile nature of trust. He has spent his entire life building up trustworthy relationships with his family, his friends, his teammates, the baseball community and the public at large. Yet a single seemingly insignificant misstep can open the door for doubt, which often then results in a certain measure of distrust. In today's society, it doesn't take much for a cynical public (and an even more cynical media) to question one's integrity and chip away at that bedrock of trust.

Pettitte found that fact to be all too true in December 2007 when his name was mentioned in the highly publicized *Mitchell Report*, the written results of an investigation led by former Senator George Mitchell into the prevalence of performance-enhancing drugs within Major League Baseball (MLB). The report and subsequent public statements made by Pettitte revealed that in 2002 and in 2004, Pettitte, in an attempt to recover from elbow injuries, had received injections of human growth hormone.

Even though the use of the human growth hormone was not illegal or banned by the MLB at the time, the onslaught of attention that followed (and the brutally negative reaction by some members of the press) caused the New York Yankees' pitcher to think twice about continuing his career. Was subjecting his family to an invasion of privacy worth it? Was it fair to put his teammates through the media circus during spring training?

Having already signed a contract to play in 2008, Pettitte ultimately had one choice and one choice only. “I felt that [quitting] wouldn’t be a very honorable thing to do; that wouldn’t be a thing to do as a man,” Pettitte told reporters on February 18, 2008. “I felt like I needed to come out and be forward with this. Whatever circumstances or repercussions come with it, I’ll take it like a man, and I’ll try to do my job.”

That’s because at his core, Pettitte is the best kind of teammate. He’s the best kind of husband and father as well. He is a trustworthy man whose lifelong commitment to integrity cannot be shaken by the overreaction of the vocal minority who are always seeking to make mountains out of proverbial molehills. Pettitte understands that there is no such thing as perfection and that whether people trust you or not isn’t always up to you anyway.

Those are just a few lessons about teamwork that he has learned over the years. Originally from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Pettitte’s family moved to Deer Park, Texas, when he was in the third grade. There, his baseball career flourished, and while he was pitching for Deer Park High School, he drew the attention of pro scouts. Although he was selected by the Yankees in the twenty-second round of the 1990 Draft, the towering lefty decided to first attend San Jacinto College in Texas before signing with New York.

Pettitte played in Yankee pinstripes from 1995 to 2003 and was a part of four World Series championship teams. He then spent three years (2004-06) playing for the Houston Astros and led that club to its first World Series appearance in 2005, before returning to the Yankees in 2007.

Considered one of the most dominant postseason starting pitchers in the modern era, Pettitte ranks second among Louisiana-born pitchers in career wins (behind Ted Lyons’s 260) and has never had a losing record.

But long before Pettitte was making a name for himself in the Fall Classic, the star athlete’s education about teamwork began in a much different setting. Although he was raised in what he describes as a “very strong Catholic family,” it was a fateful first visit to the church of his sister’s friend that set the tone for his spiritual growth.

“I was 11 years old when I went with her one night,” Pettitte says. “It was really the first time in my life that I heard about having relationship with the Lord and heard that I needed Him as my personal Savior. That was the night that I accepted Jesus into my heart and was saved. I’ve felt like an absolutely different person since then.”

About four years later, Pettitte began attending Central Baptist Church—the church that he still calls home today. It was there he met his wife, Laura. She was the daughter of the pastor (since retired), and her brothers were active in ministry there as well. Pettitte would eventually serve in various capacities at the church: teaching in Sunday School, singing in the choir, and mentoring teens, young adults and young married couples.

As a young Christian athlete, Pettitte learned one of the most important lessons about teamwork, not on the baseball field, but in his home and in his church, where strong men of faith taught him that trustworthy relationships are built on integrity.

“My dad was a man who always showed me love,” Pettitte says. “It was tough love sometimes, but he always made time for me. If he told me he was going to do something, he would always do it for me. My father-in-law was a wonderful Christian man. He was just

constantly in the Word. When I looked at him, I saw a man who just loved the Bible and was always studying the Word. My brother-in-law worked in the youth department at the church, and I was under him. I was around the Word and I was around Christian people, and these things were just constantly being instilled in me.”

Pettitte also says his openness to the Holy Spirit was a key factor in those earliest inclinations toward a lifestyle of godly righteousness. “I was convicted to not drink,” he says. “I was convicted to not use the Lord’s name in vain. He took all the bad language away from me. I was just extremely convicted of these things at a very young age. I thank the Lord that He’s kept His hands around me and protected me. I’ve had so many people praying for me. I think that’s a huge reason why I’ve been able to live the life that I’ve lived. God’s protection has just been on me.”

Pettitte is especially thankful for his wife, Laura, whom he credits for the desire to pursue integrity and strive to be a faithful, trustworthy man. The couple has been acting as a team since they first met as teenagers and made a commitment to abstain from sex until they were married.

Pettitte truly believes that his wife is a mirror image of the woman written about by Solomon in Proverbs 31 and agrees wholeheartedly with verses 10-12: “Who can find a capable wife? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will not lack anything good. She rewards him with good, not evil, all the days of her life.”

Because Pettitte views his wife as a treasure and a gift from God, he has always been conscientious of any actions that could damage the bond of trust they have forged over the years. While many athletes often struggle with the tantalizing temptations that lurk around every corner, Pettitte says that for him the exact opposite has been true.

“It hasn’t been that difficult for me, because I have kept myself away from certain situations,” he says. “A lot of people put themselves in bad situations; but we’re human, and we’re going to fall, and we’re going to fail. Have there been opportunities for me to screw up? Of course there have. But you don’t jeopardize your marriage and that trust. That’s the biggest thing for me that I’ve always tried to do. Again, it’s because I’ve been involved in the church, and I’ve seen what can happen, and I’ve seen people’s lives ruined if you lose the trust of your spouse. It’s going to be hard to get back, and it’s hard to overcome. I just thank God that I haven’t put myself in those situations where my wife would not trust me or would have doubts about me and my love for her.”

While Pettitte doesn’t hold an official position at his home church, the unofficial ministry he has done gives him a bird’s-eye view of just how devastating those trust-busting mistakes can be on a marriage or in a family or even between friends. He’s found this to be especially true when the loss of trust is caused by sexual activity that is contradictory to biblically sound doctrine.

“I think there are a lot of things that are carried into marriages when those individuals have been involved with other people,” Pettitte explains. “A lot of people come to me, even though I’m not a minister. I think people know that I’ll listen, and they can talk to me. I know a lot of people who have bad stuff going on in their marriages, and it’s from things that happened before they were married. You’re going to reap from some bad decisions that you make in your life. All of us have made bad decisions in our lives, and usually you’re going to reap some of that stuff. That’s why it’s so wonderful being a Christian, because you can ask God

for forgiveness, and He forgives you of it.”

As an athlete equally committed to teamwork and sharing his beliefs, Pettitte has found that the trust between him and his teammates often opens the door for him to counsel them on relationship issues. It’s a direct reflection of the promise found in Proverbs 3:3-4: *“Never let loyalty and faithfulness leave you. Tie them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will find favor and high regard in the sight of God and man.”*

“I have a unique opportunity to reach out to my teammates,” Pettitte says. “I don’t try to judge anybody. I just try to love them and encourage them. I always tell them that when you marry someone, I believe that it’s for life. You should stick with your wife and figure out a way to get through it. I believe that’s how God wants it, and I believe Satan wants every marriage destroyed and to break every family up. So it’s given me a lot of opportunities. As you can imagine, in baseball, a lot of guys are screwing up and doing a lot of wrong things. I try to be as genuine as I can, and I thank the Lord that guys will share stuff with me and open up with me when things happen. I think they just know that I’m going to love them, and I’m going to pray for them.”

But none of these opportunities to share God’s love with others would be possible if it weren’t for Pettitte’s desire to emulate Jesus. He understands and embraces the fact that to be a good teammate requires the same level of trust and respect as it does for him to be a good family man and a good friend. His belief is backed up by what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:37: *“Let your word ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ be no.’ Anything more than this is from the evil one.”*

Says Pettitte, “Whenever you say you’re going to do something, you do it. There are a lot of people in the world today whose word doesn’t mean a whole lot. If that’s where you’re at, then I don’t think you’re showing a whole lot of integrity. Nobody’s perfect, and we’re all going to screw up, and we’re all going to mess up. But that’s how we should try to live our lives. If I tell my children I’m going to do something, I need to be the kind of father who’s going to back it up and try to do that for them.”

This principle carries over to Pettitte’s professional life as well, and in particular is something he strives to maintain when dealing with his team’s upper management. At the conclusion of the 2007 season, the Yankees put a one-year offer on the table for him to return in 2008. Pettitte, who has struggled with elbow issues for the past several years, asked for a player’s option so that he wouldn’t be forced to make a rushed decision but instead make a prayerful, wise choice.

“If I had signed a two-year contract with those guys, I would have felt obligated to come back and play for them,” he explains. “Even if my arm hurt, I would just try to pitch through the pain. Well, they gave me an option, which means that if I felt like I was healthy, I could just activate the option. They trusted my word that if my arm was hurt, they believed that I wouldn’t activate the option just to make the money that they were going to offer me. The Yankees showed a lot of faith in me with that situation, and I would hope they did that because they think I’m an honest man and that I would have the integrity to do the right thing. As a man, it made me feel good that they would say, ‘Hey, Andy, we’ll entrust this to you. We’ll let you make this decision because we know you’re not going to try to pull something over on us.’”

So when the *Mitchell Report* was released a week after he signed the contract, it was no surprise that the entire Yankees organization rallied to support him. When he met with the

media at spring training, he was flanked by manager Joe Girardi and general manager Brian Cashman. Sitting just a few feet away were close friends and teammates Jorge Posada, Derek Jeter and Mariano Rivera.

Everyone in that clubhouse and in the front office knew that Pettitte's rare lapse in judgment was not a reflection of his character. They knew how important it was for him to have his teammates' trust. The same was also true for his wife, Laura, who stood by his side throughout the entire process as he worked to restore any trust that might have been lost.

And for that to happen, Pettitte will do the same thing he did to build that trust in the first place. He will be a faithful, loyal, moral man and will continue to reflect those values in every area of his life—the ball field, the church and, most importantly, his home. That's how Pettitte plans to maintain his standing as someone who his teammates can count on long after his retirement.

"I'm big on relationships," Pettitte says. "I care about the guys on the team that I play with. I want to try to be a positive influence on my team—not just on the baseball field but in their lives. When I'm done playing and I walk away from this game, I hope that I've impacted somebody's life in a positive way."

Go

1. Have you ever made a mistake that caused someone to lose trust in you? What steps did you take to restore that trust between yourself and others?
2. What role does teamwork play when it comes to trustworthy relationships with a spouse, a family member, a teammate or a fellow Christian? Is it possible to be a successful team without trust?
3. Andy Pettitte says that he has "a unique opportunity to reach out to my teammates." What does their openness to his counsel say about the level of trust they have in his moral integrity? Who are some people that you go to for wise counsel? What about their character makes them excellent candidates for such a role in your life?
4. Pettitte tells a story about a time his team's management trusted him to make an honest and timely decision. Have you ever been in a similar situation? How was your word tested? How did the outcome affect your working relationship with those involved?
5. Read Proverbs 3:3-4. How important are loyalty and faithfulness within any given team dynamic? What are some consequences when those values are absent? What are some ways that you can become more loyal, faithful and trustworthy?

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