

Moral Courage

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The Merriam-Webster dictionary website defines a captain as “[o]ne who leads or supervises.” I know this because I looked up the definition the summer before my senior year in high school when I was elected captain of my football team. Being voted captain came as a surprise to me because I had spent half of the last season on crutches due to having ACL reconstructive surgery. Because of this injury, I failed to really help my team the season of my junior year. There were several other people who were stronger, faster, and better players than me, and they had all made large contributions to the team the year before. But nevertheless, my team voted for me and I got the title. I was not really sure what having the title of captain would entail, but I decided if my team thought I was worthy of it, then I would be the leader they expect me to be. So I searched the word and found that definition. I was pretty disappointed. I was hoping to find some inspiration, but the internet surprisingly did not have the answers I was looking for. So I went into the season not sure what it really meant to be a captain.

I got my answer in week 11 of the season. Week 11 was the first round of the state playoffs. We were set to play Chaminade Julienne, a private catholic school. Because of this private status, they had the ability to recruit players from all over the state and in a few cases outside of the state. My high school did not have this ability. Needless to say, we were at a bit of a disadvantage because of this. But we were confident that we could exploit their weaknesses and come out on top.

About 3 days before the game, we were feeling pretty good about the game. I got on Twitter, as I do periodically, and what I saw shocked me. One of my friends, who was also our starting corner, made a series of racial comments towards the other team. Their team was mostly black, while our team was mostly white. So I knew that his posts could have some serious ramifications.

But the trouble didn't stop with him just making the posts. Members of their team were looking up my teammates on Twitter shortly after the posts were made and saw them. Obviously, this caused a social media uproar on their part. They began threatening my friend and my team as a whole.

I had to do something, but I was conflicted because I was in a right vs. right type of situation. Should I side with and defend my friend even though I do not condone his racism? Or should I bring it to the attention of my coaches who would ultimately end up sitting my friend, who would play a vital role in the game?

Several paradigms can be used to describe this situation. First, one might say that it is a truth vs. loyalty dilemma. I could have been honest and told the truth to my coaches, or I could have been loyal and stood by my friend. Secondly, the paradigm of short-term vs. long-term could be used. In the short term, I could stand by my friend and preserve the friendship. But he would not learn that what he did was wrong, and in the future he could do something worse. If I thought long-term, I would tell the coach

and put our friendship at risk. But he would learn from his mistakes and there would be a potentially stronger friendship after he realized the folly of his ways.

I had to take several factors into account before making my decision. Using ends-based thinking, I took into account the threats made towards my team and my friend. I decided that I could not let any harm come to them if I could prevent it. I decided to tell my coach. My coach, as I knew he would, sat my friend the night of our game. But before the game my friend was told that as further punishment, he had to walk into the opposing team's locker room, as they were getting ready, and apologize to the entire team and staff. Before he left he shot me a look and I could see in his eyes that he was thinking, "I wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't for you." I was devastated. I started to have second thoughts about my decision, and one of the assistant coaches took notice.

He pulled me aside and asked me what was wrong and I told him how I was regretting my decision, and I didn't want to make my friend face the opposing team alone. He got a very serious look on his face and grabbed me by my shoulder pads. He said, "He is in this because of his own stupid decisions. You did the right thing and brought it to our attention in order to keep it from going any farther. That's what a captain does. When nobody else is willing to do what needs to be done, you step up and you handle it. On or off the field." I finally got my answer. I had learned months after I searched for the definition of captain what it truly meant to be one.

According to Kidder in his book *Moral Courage*, the decision I had to make required moral courage. Kidder states on page 8 of this book that an act of moral courage requires three elements. They are principles, danger, and endurance. My decision falls into each of these elements. For the element of principle, I had to decide whether or not to stand up for my belief in anti-racism to my friend. For danger, I was risking the friendship I had with him by standing up to him. The element of endurance arose from my willingness to stand up to my friend.

We ended up winning the game by several touchdowns. After the game, we were all gathered on the field talking about the game and celebrating the win. I looked towards our locker room and saw my friend walking with his head down towards it. I ran over to him to try to talk to him. He was a very hot-tempered guy, so I didn't expect it to go well, but I had to make an effort. I called out his name and he stopped walking but didn't look up. I caught up to him to find tears in his eyes. He did the last thing I expected and apologized to me. He said he felt terrible about what he had done, and he was sorry for blaming me for his own mistakes. To this day, we are still great friends.

Works Cited

Kidder, Rushworth M. *Moral Courage*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. Print