



TEAM CULTURE PRACTICE

# COACHES GUIDE:

## INTRODUCTION



**“WE TIP WITH  
EXCELLENCE AND  
INTEGRITY”**

**TEAMWORK. INCLUSION. PASSION.**

## INTRODUCTION

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The materials in these resources are based on 25 years of applied research and development in various educational, workplace, and sport environments by Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D., Vladimir T. Khmelkov, Ph.D., and their colleagues at the Excellence with Integrity Institute. Over the years, we expanded our grounded theory framework, designed new assessment instruments, and developed and implemented a vast range of instructional resources that help leaders develop the strengths of culture and character needed for optimal performance.

We have received feedback from many athletes and coaches who successfully implemented our work in competitive collegiate athletics. We are grateful to all of them for their dedication and contributions to our work. We are also grateful to our talented partners at The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University. Special thanks to Scott Raecker who has contributed to our theory, practice, and assessment since the very first versions of our work. We are especially grateful to Jeff Kluever, whose extraordinary talents and abilities have helped shape these resources.

## OUR APPROACH

*Do better; be better; feel more deeply;  
struggle more intensely for the few things that count.*

~ Dorothy Day

In 1969, the University of Nebraska hired Boyd Epley as the first intercollegiate strength coach. Less than a decade later, the National Strength Coaches Association was formed in 1978. Today, intentional practices for enhancing physical strength are an instrumental part of collegiate athletics.<sup>1</sup> What started with one coach in Nebraska is now the art and science of diverse strength practices that are customized to the athlete, the sport, the style, and conditions of play.

At the Excellence with Integrity Institute, we believe that the science and practice around the formation of character, culture, and leadership has the potential to impact intercollegiate athletics much like the physical strength field has done over the last 50 years. What was once defined by myths, half-truths, and un-truths is now an essential facet for Women's Basketball, having the potential to enhance or undermine physical strengths, athletic ability, and team strategy.

Physical strength and conditioning is essentially the art and science of proactively designing programs to target and develop the strength, endurance, flexibility, and mobility needed to avoid injuries and achieve success. ***Avoid injuries and achieve success:*** these twin goals form the foundation of the work to intentionally shape the art and science of strength and conditioning ***for culture and character.***

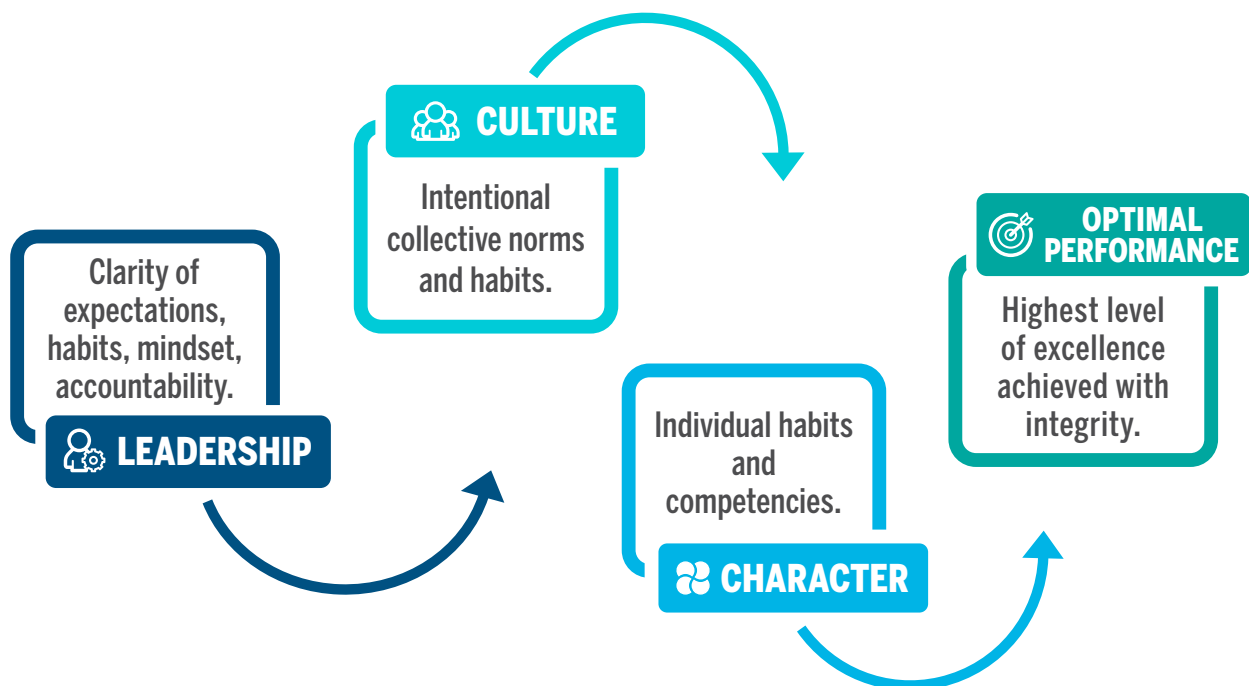
Intentional development of team culture is a strategic intent behind the NCAA Women's Basketball strategic plan. Intentional culture development focused on excellence with integrity is the new high ground by which "winning" is defined. Culture development is the sustainable, holistic performance enhancer that empowers the next generation of female student-athletes to achieve their full potential in basketball and life. Coaches have always known the importance of teamwork, team chemistry, and personal and collective responsibility.

The quest for performance, teamwork, inclusion, and passion is timeless, but the intentional formation of these traits must be timely and calibrated around the capabilities and sensibilities of today's student-athletes, the rigor or today's expectations, and the complexity of today's circumstances. Student-athletes compete more, and

the competition is intense, with more media coverage, public interest, scrutiny, and pressure. That is why coaches need to work more intentionally and deliberately to ensure that their teams and student-athletes have the culture and character needed for the pressure and intensity of today's competition. Intentional strength and conditioning for culture is needed for coaches to maximize the potential of their teams and student-athletes to avoid injuries and achieve success.

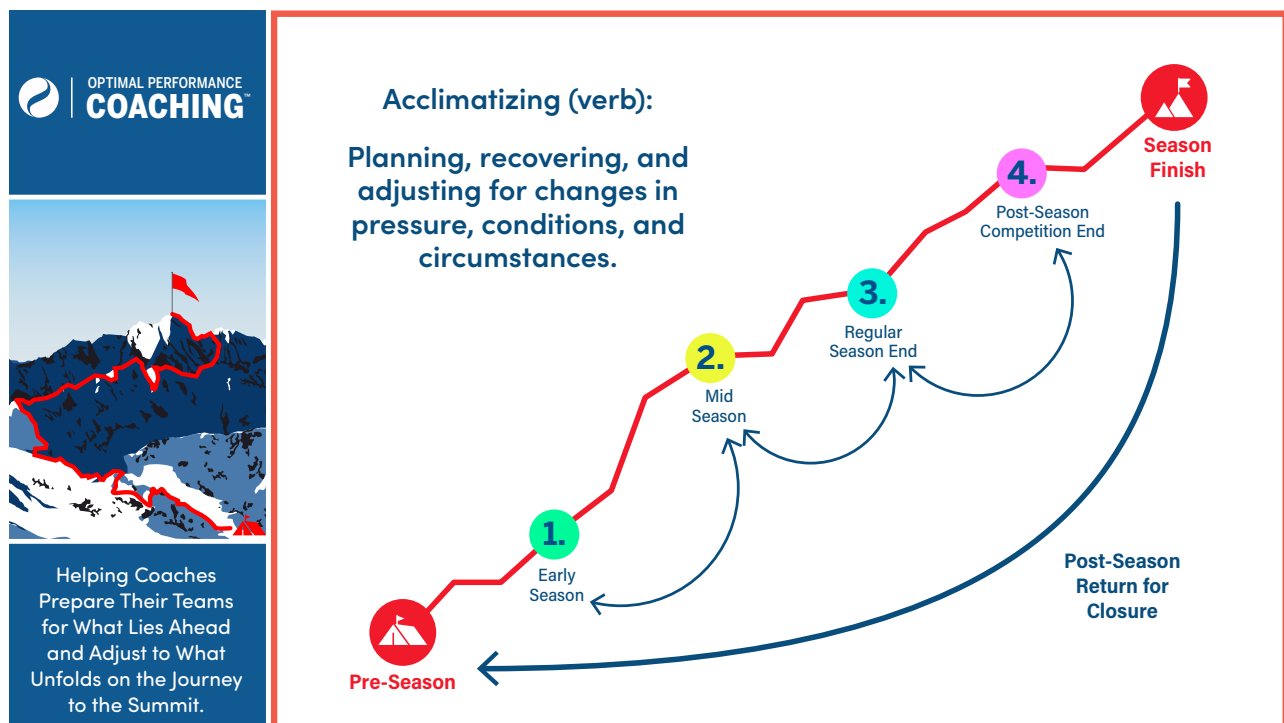
What is culture? In simple terms, culture is your ***collective values in action, your way, your collective norms and habits***. Culture is your values in action—not simply your stated values, but your operational values, what you truly value as reflected in your actions. For example, I can say my team values accountability, but if team members are rarely or inconsistently held accountable for their actions, then our operational value (loose standards and expectations) is more real than our stated value of accountability. Knowledge of your values isn't enough to shape culture; you must practice your values every day. That's how culture is intentionally created and improved.

Leaders shape culture, culture shapes (or corrupts) character, and character drives optimal performance—the highest level of excellence we can achieve with integrity.



This model helps to frame the *what* and *how* of shaping culture and character. But what is also essential is an understanding of *why* and *when*. Why are coaches shaping culture and character in their teams? So that teams and their team members have the strengths of culture and character to achieve their performance goals—and do that without injuries, either physical or psychological. To capture the dual goal of performance and safety we think about a team journey as the process of “acclimatizing team cultures to summit.”

To this end, we understand competitive seasons as a journey from base to summit, from the pre-season to the post-season. Pursuing summits is what coaches and teams are ultimately striving to accomplish. Coaches operate as expeditionary leaders guiding their teams towards new heights, new challenges, uncharted territories—and they have a responsibility to ensure that teams can summit safely—without physical, mental, emotional, or interpersonal meltdowns or breakdowns.



The famous quote says, “It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.” Competitive teams need lofty goals and the challenge of new summits to overcome their weaknesses and forge new strengths of culture and character that will not be developed pursuing only the “low peaks.” Competition means “striving with”—with teammates and with worthy opponents—to bring out new levels of strength and to develop our abilities fully.

So, we develop the strengths (of culture and character) to summit safely by using the journey of a season to continuously prepare for what teams will encounter at the summit: further elevated pressure at the end of a long journey marked by the inevitable highs and lows, victories and defeats that are part of a typical season.

We believe that strength and conditioning for culture comes to life when coaches understand that they are building strengths that can withstand the pressure of competition needed to summit safely. Coaches aren't just doing some good, nice, important work on culture and character. They're developing the strengths of culture and character needed to summit safely. If teams don't have sufficient culture and character assets for the pressures and duration of a competitive season, then breakdowns and injuries are inevitable!

It's not only about developing some nice assets that could help in life in the future; it's about intentionally developing the strengths of culture and character ***needed for*** the journey from base to summit: needed specifically for this team and specifically in this season. If we don't properly target and develop assets like psychological safety, leadership, resilience, self-awareness, accountability, then we should not be surprised when we don't reach our performance goals. More importantly, we shouldn't be surprised when we see breakdowns and psychological injuries within the team and among its members.

There are many nuances to the emerging art and science of shaping culture and character strengths needed to summit safely. But the essence of the approach can be summarized quite simply as the continuous intentional process of balancing ***demandingness*** and ***responsiveness***. On the journey of a season, from pre-season to post-season, coaches must apply pressure sufficient to forge the team and individual assets needed for the challenge.

But, they must be able to temper, adjust, and respond when the demandingness is no longer landing with or working for the team. What was optimal in the pre-season may not be in the middle of the season. What was too demanding in the pre-season may be perfect as we approach the post-season (or vice versa).





Helping Coaches  
Prepare Their Teams  
for What Lies Ahead  
and Adjust to What  
Unfolds on the Journey  
to the Summit.

**ACCLIMATIZING TEAM CULTURE FOR  
OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE**

Coaching that is both

**Demanding** AND **Responsive**

creating

**Team Confidence and Trust**

**needed to summit safely—to achieve**

**Excellence with Integrity!**

Optimal performance coaching, or coaching to summit safely, is the art of balancing demandingness and responsiveness, which requires an ongoing dialogue between coaches and team members. *Demandingness* reflects the coaching practices used to forge a culture of competitive excellence and drive the team towards greatness; *responsiveness* is how coaches listen, observe, and engage the team in dialogue to determine necessary adjustments to the intensity, duration, and tactical effectiveness of coaching practices and strategies. Optimal performance coaching isn't just what you do, it is *how well your demandingness lands with your team*. Coaches ensure their coaching is landing, by being demanding *and* responsive.

***In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities,  
but in the expert's there are few.***

~ Shunryu Suzuki<sup>2</sup>

The development of team culture should be guided by an “appreciative inquiry,” a process where we appreciate the positive aspects and advances of our current approach, while also seeking to inquire into new dimensions of culture. We seek to deepen, expand, and innovate, striving for an even more supportive, responsive, safe, and sustainable team culture. Our ultimate goal is to take our student-athletes’ ability to thrive in basketball and life to previously unimagined levels of excellence.

## ORDER OF OPERATIONS:

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- Read this Introduction document.
- Choose the **TIP** Team Culture Practice that can help your team where you are now or will be soon.
- It is recommended that you read the Background Brief before deciding on next steps.
- Determine the best person to facilitate the Culture Practice.
- Build in time to conduct the Culture Practice.
- Conduct the Culture Practice (split into multiple segments, if needed).
- Choose a Culture Drill and a time to conduct the Drill.
- Aim to do at least one Culture Drill per week after completing the Culture Practice.
- After your team has had time to practice the culture skills, have student-athletes complete the Optimal Performance Self-Study (Studies) included in the materials.
- Self-Studies can also be completed in a 180-/360-degree approach with a coach, or as a team activity. Use the Self-Studies periodically throughout the year to ensure skills are being utilized consistently.
- Continue to revisit topics and tools with your team, connecting the practices to your needs on the journey to the summit.



## GETTING THE MOST FROM THE TIP TEAM CULTURE PRACTICES

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*Teamwork is what makes common people capable of uncommon results.*

~ Pat Summit

### The Materials

There are three Team Culture Practices included in the **TIP** materials, each focused on one of the NCAA Women's Basketball values: **T**eamwork, **I**nclusion, and **P**assion. The three Team Culture Practices are not sequential. They can be done in any order at any time. Each Culture Practice can be conducted in a variety of environments — the court, the locker room, a classroom, a film session, on the bus — as you see fit.

The **TIP** Team Culture Practices feature several research-based Excellence with Integrity TOOLS® as their core content. The culture development EWI TOOLS® distill relevant research, as well as over 20 years of the authors' implementation experience in leadership and culture development, into simple, consistent, and replicable strategies. The EWI TOOLS® will guide the immediate activities presented in the **TIP** Culture Practices sessions and are intended to be used in support of your ongoing team culture development beyond the original practice sessions.

Each Culture Practice includes a Student-Athlete Playbook and a Coaches Guide for the coach, or whomever is leading the Culture Practice. Both documents are fillable pdf's: they can be viewed on a smart phone, tablet, or computer, and they have areas that can be typed into and saved; the documents can also be printed out and used as needed in a paper format.

### Coaches Guide

Each Coaches Guide consists of three main sections: the Team Culture Practice plan, the CHAMP Approach section, and the Background Brief. It is recommended that you read the Background Brief before engaging student-athletes in the Culture Practice session. It will give you key insights that will help you facilitate the Culture Practice. However, if time is an issue, each Culture Practice plan is designed to be used without prep or further reading.

## The Practice

Each **TIP** Team Culture Practice is built around the same framework: Warmup, Practice, Cooldown, and Mastering Culture Fundamentals. Coaching points are offered throughout the script with suggestions for how to best facilitate the session to meet the needs of your team.

The Warmup consists of a ***Compact for Excellence*** and a ***Community Builder***. Creating a Compact for Excellence helps your team reach an agreement about how the team will work together in order to get its best work done and treat each member with care and respect during the practice. The Community Builder engages the team in conversations, builds relationships, and prepares people to think about the Culture Practice topic. Both of these tools and activities will help you create an intentional culture for your team to work well together; you can also use them in many settings outside the Culture Practice: for example, to address behavior in the locker room, or to outline shared expectations during basketball practice, and so on.

Each Culture Practice references a timely approach to the current environment as well as a timeless approach for ongoing application. The Practice section contains an activity designed to help your team intentionally and collectively build the culture needed to maximize the team's potential. Activities are focused on the Excellence with Integrity TOOLS® which will help you engage the team in sometimes challenging, but important conversations around issues of **T**eamwork, **I**nclusion, and **P**assion. Sample worksheets are provided to help you craft guidelines specific to your team.

The Cooldown is a review of practice where the team can ***affirm*** the work that was done; ***clarify*** what they will do better or differently, and discuss ways to integrate the learning going forward; and ***challenge*** what may not have worked well and address how it could be modified next time.

Finally, the Mastering Culture Fundamentals section contains additional activities, or Drills, that will help you continue to clarify, confirm, and emphasize key points for teamwork, inclusion, and passion. Culture doesn't change with a one-and-done conversation. Culture is created and sustained with consistent, on-going, active engagement from each team member, and these drills can help your team build that consistency.

## The Optimal Performance Self-Studies

To be successful an individual usually needs to have command of multiple skills, which they effectively implement in pursuit of their targeted goals amid the challenges of real-world circumstances. No individual would be expected to be equally proficient in all skills, or to implement them with equal effectiveness in every circumstance or situation.

Each TIP Practice is supplemented with one or more ***Optimal Performance Self-Studies***. Self-Studies utilize Optimal Performance Indicators (OPIs) that identify some of the key actions that comprise the targeted skills and act as concretized and contextualized guides for behavior: they help individuals reflect on what, specifically, they can do better or differently in putting expectations into action. An OP Self-Study works best when the reflection targets a specific time period (e.g., this week, this month, yesterday). And, the reflection works best when coaches convey to student-athletes that this is a tool for improvement, not an evaluation used as a weapon. All that matters is for a student-athlete to build self-knowledge about when the skill was put into action and what contributed to or detracted from optimal implementation.

Optimal performance is rated relative to one's capabilities, the goals/expectations, and within the particular circumstances experienced. We're not comparing ourselves to the worst person we know (or the best). We're not thinking about our best day or worst day, or an amalgam of our entire life. We are comparing to our ***current*** capabilities, the ***specific*** performance goals set, and the ***particular*** circumstances actually encountered. So, for example, when you were thrown into a new game situation or into a new role in a very challenging game situation, the optimal performance expectations and ratings would be very different from the time you were in a familiar role and situation.

The most important questions for coaching, regardless of ratings, are: ***What worked well? What do you need to do better or differently the next time you encounter this skill in a similar situation?*** As coaches, we need to understand what student-athletes believe contributed to their success or failure in order to help reinforce or redirect them in their growth. Poor performance (low rating) means student-athletes missed the mark relative to the expectations and goals. Optimal performance means a student-athlete *hit the mark for this skill in this situation, at this time*. They could go from poor to optimal on this skill (I froze up yesterday, but was ready today), or from optimal to poor (I nailed it yesterday, but blew it today).

Building *self-awareness* and *self-regulation* are key, and a coach's job is to create a safe space for drawing forth continuous improvement.

## The CHAMP Approach

Building and sustaining culture requires intentional coaching. The Excellence with Integrity™ CHAMP approach suggests that coaching skills like **T**eamwork, **I**nclusion, and **P**assion requires focusing on four processes that are specific for each **PERFORMANCE** goal identified (each team culture goal targeted in these Practices, or any other team goal). These processes help you coach for *optimal performance*—the best we can possibly do under the circumstances we are in.

First, there must be **CLARITY** about what **T**eamwork, **I**nclusion, or **P**assion looks like for your team, in this [current] situation. Don't assume everyone on the team agrees on what a skill looks like — seek clarity.

Second, everyone on the team must know what the skill looks like and act accordingly, so “do this, don't do this” **HABITS** must be coached.

Third, there must be **ACCOUNTABILITY** to ensure that team members hold themselves and each other responsible to the standards that are set.

Finally, the right **MINDSET** must be coached so that student-athletes understand the deeper *why* behind our habits and expectations and can recover when mistakes are made or obstacles arise.

Sample CHAMP tools are included for each practice, but you should use the blank CHAMP tool provided at the end of this section to think about how you want to coach each aspect of CHAMP on your team. *What Clarity, Habits, Accountability, and Mindset are needed for **your** team to be successful?*

## Background Brief

The Background Brief seeks to provide deeper insights to enhance the core Culture Practice of each module while allowing for expanded application of these strategies throughout your season. The Background Brief unpacks some of the foundational applied research and practice expertise along with sharing additional resources (books, articles, videos, etc.) that you can use to deepen the thinking of your staff and student-athletes.

## Helpful Hints:

- Remind your team that team culture impacts success on and off the court.
- Culture Practices can be divided into multiple segments. If time is an issue, check the Coaching Points for ideas on how to break up a Culture Practice into sessions. It is better to dig deep in small chunks than rush through an entire practice.
- Give thought to the best person to facilitate each Culture Practice and/or Culture Drill. Typically, you are the best person to facilitate a Culture Practice; in some instances, an assistant coach, a member of the training staff, a student-athlete, or even someone else from your campus community may be the best facilitator for a specific Culture Practice segment or a Culture Drill.
- Anyone who is part of the culture of your team should participate in each facet of the Culture Practice — student-athletes, coaches, training staff, and others. There should be no standing on the sideline during the Culture Practice or it risks sending a mixed message (student-athletes may interpret it as important for you, but not “us”).
- Don’t neglect or miss out on the Mastering Culture Fundamentals Drills. These activities will help you sustain and enhance your team culture. You can’t shoot one free throw and perfect the skill, and you can’t have one culture conversation and expect it to stick. Ongoing intentional practice is necessary for mastery of the culture skills in the same way as it is necessary to perfect basketball skills.
- Remember to return to the targeted skills by using Optimal Performance Self-Studies to help student-athletes grow in their understanding of the skills and their self-awareness of how they implement the skills in varying situations throughout the season.
- Think of other ways you can use the tools and strategies to help you sustain your culture. Could you use a Leader-to-Detractor scale in recruiting? Where might the Choosing Our Mindset tool or the Stress Continuum tool come in handy to communicate with parents? How can the Inclusion Continuum be used to communicate on the topic in the community or within other parts of the college/university?

## ENDNOTES

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1. Jason Shurley and Jan Todd, " 'If Anyone Gets Slower, You're Fired': Boyd Epley and the Formation of the Strength Coaching Profession," *Iron Game History*, June 2011, [https://www.academia.edu/3009448/If\\_Anyone\\_Gets\\_Slower\\_You\\_re\\_Fired\\_Boyd\\_Epley\\_and\\_the\\_Formation\\_of\\_the\\_Strength\\_Coaching\\_Profession](https://www.academia.edu/3009448/If_Anyone_Gets_Slower_You_re_Fired_Boyd_Epley_and_the_Formation_of_the_Strength_Coaching_Profession).
2. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice* (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, 2011).

## ADDITIONAL CULTURE PRACTICE RESOURCES

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1. Excellence with Integrity™ Sport Team Culture Assessment and Development Resources: <https://ewii.org/sport-team-culture/>



## ABOUT OUR PARTNERSHIP

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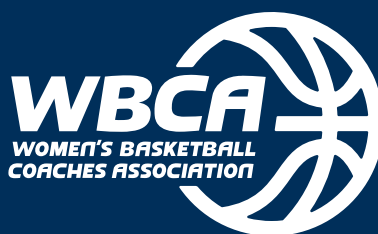
The TIP Team Culture Practices have been designed for the Women's Basketball Coaches Association by the consortium partnership of the Excellence with Integrity Institute and The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University.

**The Excellence with Integrity Institute's** main focus is on research and development of instructional resources, assessment solutions, and tools and strategies for leadership and organizational culture development.

**The Ray Center at Drake University's** main focus is on coaching, training and expanding our collaborative implementation projects to improve civility through character development and ethical leadership.

Together, we pursue strategic opportunities in youth leadership, athletics, education, employment readiness, and organizational development in community and workplace environments.

The TIP Team Culture Practices have been made possible through generous philanthropic gifts from Suzie Glazer Burt and Sandy Hatfield Clubb who believe in the importance of women empowering women for success.



The TIP Team Culture Practices are designed and delivered in partnership by:



[www.ewii.org](http://www.ewii.org)



[www.drake.edu/raycenter/](http://www.drake.edu/raycenter/)

For more information, contact The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center  
at 515-271-1910 or [raycenter@drake.edu](mailto:raycenter@drake.edu).

The TIP with Excellence and Integrity culture shaping resources were initially  
developed as part of the strategic plan of the NCAA Women's Basketball.



The Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) is pleased to provide  
implementation and support strategies for the TIP Team Culture resources.

Please visit the WBCA website to learn more.



#### FEATURING



**TOOLS & ASSESSMENTS**