

**Excerpt from** *The Quality of Effort: Integrity in Sport and Life for Student-Athletes, Parents and Coaches*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, by Reggie Marra. [Forthcoming in October 2012](#).

### **On Walking a Mile in Someone Else's Shoes:**

*Second*, and this is somewhat more abstract, and ultimately, at least for me, more important. Virtually all of us have heard some version of *not criticizing someone else unless we've walked a mile in his or her shoes*. My experience with this advice is that it's been thrown around by so many people, for so long, and without any authentic investigation into what the metaphor, *walking a mile in someone else's shoes*, might truly mean, it's usually an essentially meaningless, albeit well-intentioned, suggestion.

My concern is grounded in both my own attempts to walk a mile or more in someone else's shoes, and in observing others as they make a similar journey. With very few exceptions, when most of us think we're taking a walk in another's shoes, we sincerely think we're attempting to feel into and understand the other's response to an event or a given set of circumstances by imagining what it would be like to be the other. Inevitably, however, what we do is *imagine what it would be like to be ourselves* in the other's circumstances, and this is perfectly understandable.

Each of us looks at ourselves, others and the world through a unique set of lenses that includes those four areas of concern we've used throughout the book—worldview, behavior, culture and environment; our moods or states of mind; our particular masculine/feminine balance; our personality; and our levels of development across a wide variety of intelligences or developmental lines. When we look at this person in whose shoes we intend to “walk a mile,” we indeed look *at* him or her *through our own lenses*. It is not until we can, with some degree of competence, do the work of identifying and understanding aspects of this other person's unique set of lenses—and *experience his or her circumstances through his or her lenses*—that we are in some small or large way truly walking in shoes that are not ours. We make the move from looking *at* to looking *as* this other person.\*

This is no small task. It's a lot of work, quite complex, and requires the essential first step of learning to look accurately both *at* and *as* ourselves, becoming familiar with our own unique set of lenses. To use one example from recent headlines: imagine if just *one person*—a graduate assistant, coach, athletic director, vice-president or president at Penn State had done the work that would allow him to courageously look *as* a young sexual-assault victim, and then act responsibly in the earliest days of the abuse.

In conclusion, and *closer to home*—whatever *closer to home* might mean for *you* as you read this—as each of us negotiates our respective “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” and our unique experiences of “Triumph and Disaster,” may we do so in a way

that is increasingly better able to look both *at* and *as* ourselves and others, especially, but not only those with whom we come into contact in our roles as student-athletes, parents and coaches. An authentic engagement of and with the quality of effort brings with it a skillful balance of wisdom and compassion whether we're walking in our own, or someone else's shoes.

\*Two ways of looking—looking *at* and looking *as*—have been developed extensively as tools for understanding self and others by Laura Divine and Joanne Hunt at [Integral Coaching Canada](#). For an article that deals directly with these two ways of looking, see Laura Divine's "Looking AT and Looking AS the Client: The Quadrants as a Type Structure Lens" *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*, 4.1 (Spring 2009): 21-40.

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