

## SEEKING THE EXTRAORDINARY

# Ep 4 - The Bonds of Basketball with Nikki McCray

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**[00:00:00] Lisa:** **[00:00:00]** Seeking The Extraordinary is sponsored by the Colony Group, a national wealth and business management company that seeks the extraordinary by pursuing an unrelenting mission of providing clients with peace of mind and empowering new visions of tomorrow. Visit the [colony group.com](https://www.colonygroup.com) to learn more.

**Michael:** **[00:00:28]** Welcome fellow seekers of the extraordinary, welcome to our shared quest. A quest, not for a thing, but for an ideal. A quest, not for a place, but into the inner unexplored regions of ourselves. A quest to understand how we can achieve our fullest potential by learning from others who have done or are doing exactly that. May we always have the courage and wisdom to learn from those who have something to teach. Join me now in seeking the extraordinary. I'm Michael **[00:01:00]** Nathanson, your chief seeker of the extraordinary.

Today's guest has a life resume that goes on for pages. After an exemplary college basketball career at the University of Tennessee in which he was an All-American twice and let her team to four NCAA tournament appearances. She was an American basketball league, MVP and champion. She played eight seasons in the WNBA and was a three-time WNBA All-Star. She won two Olympic gold medals and a world cup gold medal. She coached basketball as an assistant at Western Kentucky and the University of South Carolina, where she won a national championship, and as head coach at Old Dominion, and now the Mississippi State women's basketball team, which is currently ranked number six in the nation. A member of the women's basketball hall of fame, who was personally selected by President Clinton to serve on the president's council on physical fitness and sports. Please welcome **[00:02:00]** the extraordinary Nikki McCray.

**Nikki:** **[00:02:02]** Thanks, Michael. I'm excited. Excited to join the podcast.

**Michael:** **[00:02:06]** Well, I'm very excited to have you. You have, as I said, your resume truly does go on for pages. It's quite extraordinary. So, this is a show about seeking the extraordinary and about understanding what it is that happens in people's lives or ways of thinking that people have, that have helped them achieve the extraordinary.

So I want to begin with some exploration and I'd like to actually begin with the days that very few people know about you, and those would be your pre University of Tennessee days. So our producer David Yas just pulled up the the video of Pat Summit participating in inducting you into the hall of fame, and she tells a story about you wanted to play basketball with a bunch of boys and your mother came out there and said you're going to play with Nikki, or you're not going to play at all. **[00:03:00]** And maybe you could just tell us a little bit about your formative years and and tell us specifically about things that you think were important in making you who you are today.

**Nikki: [00:03:10]** Well, first of all, I grew up in a small town, right outside of Memphis called Collierville, Tennessee. One road in, Poplar, is the name of the street and one road in one road out. So that's how small it was. Christmas, you have the fare on the square. You have Christmas where you have the Christmas parade.

Everybody knows everybody. I could walk in his store and everybody knew who I was just because it was such a small community, but I grew up small town, a big family. My grandmother had 13 kids, and so my cousins and my, they became my best friends, so that's who I hung out with the majority of my childhood and they, most of them were guys and they challenged me a [00:04:00] lot.

They're a big reason why I am so competitive today because that story that you just said yes, pet inducted me into the hall of fame and I'll never forget I was outside playing, or they were outside playing basketball. And I will tell you, my first love was track. It was not basketball.

I wanted to do the next Florence Griffith Joyner. That's who I was. I set my sights on Flo Jo. She was beautiful. She was graceful and she was fast. So, I ran track for the most part. And I didn't start playing basketball until like eighth grade, but my cousins, they were playing after church one day.

In the backyard. And I just went out there and I was like, Hey, can I play? Didn't have a clue about basketball. It just looked fun. It looked exciting. I just wanted to play. And when I went out there, they said, no, you can't. I go why? And they said, yeah, I wasn't good [00:05:00] enough. So that really made me mad.

Brought me to tears. I went into the house and I, I said something to my big mama and and I just told her, she saw me crying. I said, Hey, the guys are they told me I couldn't play this. That wasn't good enough. And she came out and she said, if she can't play, none of you guys can play.

And so, they put me on the team and I realized I wasn't very good. And that didn't sit well with me. So, what I started doing was I started practicing on my own. Had no clue I just would watch. And I would practice on my own every day sun up sun down until I got pretty good. I kind of taught myself the game.

And before you know it, they were picking me up on the team. I started beating them and once I started beating them in the backyard, then I would go down to Harris park, which is now the Nikki McCray park.

I had to prove myself, [00:06:00] had to prove myself then, at the park, because that was a big thing. You playing with the guys. And when you get on the main court, that means you've arrived. And I worked to get on that main court. And when I worked to get on that main court, I was the first one to get picked up. And then the park became my park and my cousins, they were a non-factor to me. By the time I got to college

**Michael: [00:06:24]** That story reminds me of the legend, which I don't know if it's true or not, but you hear this legend about how Paul McCartney tried out for his church choir. And they said no you're not good enough. And of course, he went on to become Paul McCartney. That your story sounds like a basketball version of that story. So were you a good student as well?

**Nikki: [00:06:44]** Yes, a very good student. I had to work at being a really, good student. Obviously when you're scoring a lot, I played three different sports. I ran track, I played volleyball and I played basketball and I was pretty good at all three. So, I was in the paper a lot. People knew me, [00:07:00] all the teachers knew me. I had great support. When I was in school, I was, I worked hard at my grades. I loved my teachers. I love my principals, all of those things. So it was really

good, to have that support from, from my teachers.

**Michael: [00:07:16]** So it sounds like you had natural ability, but you worked really hard as well

**Nikki: [00:07:22]** Yes, I am no stranger when it comes to hard work. I think all of my success has come from my hard work. I've always played with a chip on my shoulder. Like I have something to prove starting with my cousins, not picking me up, so I like challenges like that. And I think when you work hard, I think you can be successful anywhere because you have a blueprint of what hard work look like, and it just feels good. It feels like you deserve what you get, because you've earned it. Nothing was, nothing has been given to me.

**Michael: [00:07:54]** Yeah. Sure. And it sounds like you really have earned it you've put in your dues in terms of practice. It said that you [00:08:00] have to do something 10,000 times in order to master it. It sounds like that's very much your approach. So, you went to Tennessee undergraduate, you had a great collegiate career. You got a degree in education. And at that point, did you know, you were going to make it big in basketball, or were you thinking about pursuing a career in education?

**Nikki: [00:08:21]** Well, one of the reasons why I decided to play for Tennessee is I wanted to play for a disciplinarian and Pat Summit. She was someone that just, it just wasn't about basketball. It's about life lessons. But I want it to be a pro. I wanted to play professional basketball, and at that time it was overseas. She had a lot of players that play for her that went overseas and were very good and they were considered stars. So that was, that's what I wanted to do. She had a blueprint of what it looked like. She was an Olympian Pat was, and she had coached pros. So, I wanted to play for someone that walked [00:09:00] the shoes that I wanted to do. And I was very fortunate, to do that, but I've always wanted to be a pro. I had a setback my freshman year. I tore my knee entering my first year in college. So again, coming in with that chip on your shoulder and having something to prove was big for me. I actually came back within four months of my ACL because that's, I was not gonna let you know, tearing my knee, get the best of me. That's always been my motto. We're going to have a plan of attack and then we gonna, we're gonna figure out a way. To win the battle. But my freshman year, having to sit out, with my knee, but I came back with vengeance and I was ready to go, it was a special year for me, a special year for growing and learning and coming into my own and really figuring out who I was going to be because I could have easily folded and cried and I did cry, but not for long.

**Michael: [00:09:58]** Yeah Pat summit [00:10:00] was, and is still, and will always be a legend. So I can only imagine what it must've been like to play for her. In her speech, she talks about how hard she was on you, that she at times would call you lazy or say whatever she needed to say. So, she was one of your great mentors?

**Nikki: [00:10:17]** She was. My freshman year, I think any student, student athlete that comes to school, it is an adjustment because you're so accustomed to one way at home. And now you got to come to a place where you got to fit in with 15 other girls and a culture that is very different. And in the ones that adjust the quickest are the ones that usually have a lot of success. So, I had a hard time adjusting. Yeah. But it just took some time, but once I got it, Once the light bulb went off, I was fine, but just being on time, not getting overwhelmed. I mean, you get very overwhelmed when you're a freshman, especially coming to a [00:11:00] team that just won a national championship.

So that in itself is pressure. Cause you want to play well. And you want to play and you're trying to figure it all out. And you don't have your parents there other than phone calls, you have your teammates, which my teammates were great, and you have your coaches, but still, you're still trying to figure it out. But that first year, that first semester, it took some time to adjust. But after that, I settled in and I was able to, have a pretty good, pretty good freshman year.

**Michael: [00:11:33]** Do you ever hear Pat Summit's voice when you yourself are coaching when you're speaking to your players?

**Nikki: [00:11:40]** Absolutely all the time. All the time. And she just left so many life lessons amongst all of her players. And everyone that she's touched just because it was, she did everything the right way and she just, was phenomenal. I just, I can't even, [00:12:00] she was phenomenal in how she got the best out of you. She just knew how to get the best out of you. And if you didn't think you were good enough, or you could do certain things, she showed you that you could. And you just wanted it and wanted to play hard for her.

**Michael: [00:12:17]** So I want to talk to you now about moving into the pros and the way I'm going to do that is I'm going to use something out of my own life. When I was in college, I was a great student, a top student and. I just, I aced college. And then I went to law school and I went to a top law school grade school. And when I got there, I, it was a shock for me because I now realized, wow, everybody's just as smart as me. And I'm not so special. But I imagine when you went to the pros, you didn't feel that way that you still felt like no, you've got an edge.

What was it like transitioning into the pros?

**Nikki: [00:12:56]** Well, first of all, I had a great foundation at Tennessee because [00:13:00] when you play at that level and every year, the expectation is to win a national championship, so you're having to play at a high level all the time. You're focused your energy, your commitment is high all the time, because the next man up, I had an All-American to the left, to the right, front, back of me. So you always had to have an edge about yourself because of the culture and the standard. So that prepared me for the Olympic team, which was my first stint. Before I became a pro I was on the national team and I was very fortunate to be one of 12 players selected. Because that really prepared me for the next level of being a pro, because we traveled around in 1995 to 96, we went to every major city and promoted women's basketball and played in front of the top 25 programs. And really jump-started, women's basketball as far as getting a professional [00:14:00] league.

So, I was in the midst of pros. I had to learn how to be a pro from going from college to having to, stay in my own room and all of these things that I just wasn't accustomed to being a professional. When you are in college, you get second chances when you're pro, you don't really get that many second chances. So, you have to be ready and you have to stay sharp. But I was so thankful to my coaches and my teammates that helped mentor me and help me through that that 12-month process being on the national team. And once I got to the pros, I was ready because of my foundation at Tennessee and my foundation on the national team that really made that transition really smooth.

**Michael: [00:14:44]** All right we're going to come back to the pros, but since you brought up the Olympics, I have to ask. So, you're a relatively young woman, you still got plenty of career ahead of you, but was getting the Olympic gold medal, that first one in 1996, was that like the best achievement of your entire life? [00:15:00] I can only imagine what it would be like to win a gold medal.

**Nikki: [00:15:03]** At that time. Yes. That was the best achievement. I think that's what you work for. That's where all the days and the backyard against the fellas at the park, the Harris park, which is now the Nikki McCray park, of all the times away from Sunday dinners versus your families.

I mean, that's what it, that's what it's meant the sacrifice and to see it come to fruition was beautiful. It was an unbelievable experience how we won it was even more powerful because we went 60-0, that Olympic team did not lose one game.

And I would tell you those young ladies, those ladies that I play with then, they are now my sisters, I can call on them because we just have a bond that can never be broken and no one could ever take away what we did [00:16:00] because that Olympic team, in my opinion really set the stage for women's basketball, the pros, and just jump-starting some things, because we had Lisa Leslie's.

We had Rebecca Lobo, we had Dawn Staley, Sheryl Swoopes. We had Katrina McClain. All these greats wrapped up in one and people got to know us.

We traveled every city. They got to know us. They had, they personally got to touch us. And to me, that was unbelievable. And in '96, when we won the gold medal, to play in front of 35,000 plus fans for women's gold medal game. It's pretty awesome.

**Michael: [00:16:43]** That is pretty awesome. And yet hearing you talk about that, I've got to believe that may have been one of the most dominant teams in sports history, that kind of domination.

And do you ever feel like it doesn't get enough recognition these days?

**Nikki: [00:16:59]** No, it's [00:17:00] not even that. I think what we did was we were the pioneers for the ABL and the pioneers for the WNBA, because when the ABL started, you had most of us go to our respective cities as franchise players. And then there were three players that opted to go to the WNBA to jumpstart that league.

So, something good came out of it, which was two professional leagues started and one now still in existence. And pretty much all of those Olympic players were in the WNBA, and we became franchise players for our programs. So, I was a franchise player for Columbus, and then I was a franchise player for the Washington Mystics.

So, it was very. It was something that needed to happen and I'm just thankful to be a part of it and be a part of that Olympic team that helped, spearhead that.

**Michael: [00:17:55]** So you went to the American basketball league first and you were [00:18:00] dominant there. You won a national championship and then the ABL didn't make it.

And then you went to the WNBA. So, how'd you feel about that?

**Nikki: [00:18:08]** It was hard, because we won the ABL championship. I got the MVP. So the league was doing well and it was hard for the MVP to leave the league and go to the ABL. That was a hard decision. But it's something that, at the end of the day was the right decision because the ABL ended up folding and the WNBA was the next thing.

And everybody eventually, went to the WNBA because, for the stability of who had the NBA behind them. They had the marketing, they had the ownership, they had their arenas, they had everything, and they had the visibility. So, it was a way to continue to market women's basketball and I wanted to be a part of it.

**Michael: [00:18:55]** And then you won three MVPs as well.

**Nikki: [00:18:57]** Yes

**Michael: [00:18:58]** Yeah. It's just [00:19:00] what a career you've had. So of course, all this ultimately leads to the Hall of Fame and that would have been my second choice for the ultimate accomplishment of your life to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. So you want to speak about that experience?

**Nikki: [00:19:14]** There's two Hall of Fames, there's the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, and then there's the Naismith Hall of Fame. So, very fortunate to be in the women's basketball Hall of Fame, which is in Knoxville, which is obviously where I went to school.

And again, it's the sacrifice, it's the blood, sweat, and tears that you've given to the game. I'm a firm believer when you give to the game it will give back to you. And don't, I didn't get here alone. I have to thank, all of my coaches, my teammates, my people that have pushed me, my parents, my neighborhood, my cousins.

I mean, everybody had a hand in me getting, to the Hall of Fame, my coaches, my teachers, all of them. They were a big part of it because they just pushed me and they challenged me, but they were in my [00:20:00] corner and they told me when I was wrong, when I was right. And it helped me become a better person and player.

**Michael: [00:20:06]** Yeah. So I found your comments to be interesting when you said, well, there's the Women's Hall of Fame and there's the Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts. So is that an aspiration that you should be in that Hall of Fame as well?

**Nikki: [00:20:22]** Well if it's God's will, I would love to be, but that's not up to me. That is up to the people that have seen my body of work. But you know, that is that is a class that is a special class, to be inducted into the Naismith Hall of Fame. And there's a lot of people that I've watched that I've competed against that have, done wonderful things and so deserving, to be in there. So that, that is a league of his own, but if it happens. If not, I'm very happy with, my career in what I've done, because I just gave a lot to the game.

**Michael: [00:20:59]** That's [00:21:00] interesting. So, someone who's accomplished so much, so who's got the broadest possible body of work still aspires to something else. And of course, I'm sure you also aspire for National Championship with Mississippi State.

Absolutely. Yes,

Of course. Well, let's get to coaching now. So so, okay, so let's go through your resume. So, you've been at Western Kentucky, South Carolina. As I mentioned, you won a National Championship there. Old Dominion, now you're at Mississippi state. So, is coaching harder than playing?

**Nikki: [00:21:30]** Yes, it is. Why? Because when we're, when you're when you're a player, you kind of control like your energy, your effort, I mean you do. When you're a coach, you have to manage people's personalities. You have to mesh all of that together. You can have energy, but some players may not have energy. You can have effort, but they may not have effort, you could be a highly motivated person, [00:22:00] they may not be, is all of those things. And you gotta figure out a way to get them to that level to where they're not like you, but they have somewhat of the same DNA like you, but there's some things that you cannot compromise, the hard work, being a team player, being a good person, just competing. There's some things that you don't sacrifice the fundamentals when it comes to basketball. But you just try to mesh it all together. You got the players, then you have administration that you have to work with. It's a lot of moving parts that make, it work. It truly takes a village. You've got to have the right people around you that are going to support you from your staff, your support staff, all of it, because you cannot do it alone, but I always try to surround myself with great people.

I think you have to start with that. You have to surround yourself with great people with winners that care about you.

They care about [00:23:00] young people.

**Michael: [00:23:01]** So, I wonder if we have something in common. I imagine if I played you in basketball, a game of 21, it would be ugly on my side. But I am the CEO of an organization and I was thinking about what it must be like to be a head coach. At a top tier program. And I was thinking about the things that I think about as CEO of an organization and what I'm responsible for, including inspiration and strategy leadership, teaching recruitment, empathy. Is it like being a CEO of an organization?

**Nikki: [00:23:38]** It is. And you just said the right word, empathy. I mean, that's so big. Because, the people that I'm around, we come from different backgrounds, and everybody's story is different. Everybody is different, but you got to figure out a way to have some connection. You gotta be a good listener. You gotta have empathy. You gotta have all of those things [00:24:00] to just kind of get on the same page, but you're right. You are the CEO.

You gotta delegate responsibilities. But you gotta make people feel a part of it too. Yes, this is I've been given the keys, to the car, but everybody is in the driver's seat really to drive our culture.

All of those things, I can't do it by myself, but relationships to me in this position is really what drives winning. You got to have great relationships because if you do, people will talk to you, they'll communicate with you. They'll respect you. They won't want to let you down because they know your heart. And for me, basketball is what I do. Coaching is what I do it's not who I am. And I tell our kids that you're more than just basketball players. Who are you as a person? My job is to get them to understand who they are as a person, because this only lasts so long.

**Michael: [00:24:52]** Yeah. So, for you you're suggesting that those relationships that you build with your [00:25:00] teammates, that those relationships ultimately are what propel you to success at the highest level?

**Nikki: [00:25:06]** Definitely it drives winning because it's, it is in the last three minutes when things get hard, that's where you're going to hang your hat on. You want to win and lose with the people, that you love.

**Michael: [00:25:18]** Yeah, I call that social capital at our organization. I call it social capital and social capital is the energy that we create between each other, the bonds that hold us together and make us most effective together.

**Nikki: [00:25:35]** Yes, you got to have it. And when you are with a team of 15 women, there's going to be ups and downs, all of those things, but it's those intangible things that bond. And even right now, especially in the pandemic, I talk about our bond, our bubble, and our basketball. Like those three things have to stay intact. You have to stay intact, but when [00:26:00] you care about the person to the left and to the right of you, then, you start to focus, and you start the lock in on those things because you don't want to let them down. You just don't.

**Michael: [00:26:11]** And I like the fact that you mentioned administration too, because what you realize is that when you're the head coach or in my case, the CEO, your people think of you as, sort of the ultimate boss and what you realize is no, that's not true. Everyone always has someone that they report. And for me, I think I report to our shareholders, our board. Much as you would report to an administration, but I feel like I report to our players as well. That is our employees. We have an obligation to them as much as they do to us.

**Nikki: [00:26:42]** Yes. For, I have a culture here where, we empower each other. I include our kids in our decisions. Number one, because I want them to take ownership in it. Cause it's not, we're in this together. When it comes to our rule book. What do you guys think? Because now they'll [00:27:00] take ownership and it's not just, well, this is what coach McCray wants. No is what you want, and they have to understand who I am in order to put the rule book together. And I have to understand who they are, in order to accept what they put down. I mean, it goes both ways. So just giving our kids a voice to have a platform, to be able to share. Good, bad, or indifferent and to be able to talk, that's what's key for me. And I think when you have that the players really appreciate it. They start to appreciate it. And the culture starts to run itself.

**Michael: [00:27:34]** Can you build a team around a superstar? You have a superstar. The others are not quite the same caliber player. Does that work?

**Nikki: [00:27:42]** You can. I mean, just, everybody is the same. It's just, some people are more talented than others. But you know how to play off of a superstar, you do. That's what our Olympic team was. We were superstars what we knew how to play together and that's all it is teaching them that team, first mentality, getting them to buy into it. What is team [00:28:00] first and as something that you gotta preach, but you gotta be consistent. You gotta treat the star player and the last player the same, they're no different.

**Michael: [00:28:10]** So before we move off of your coaching and playing days, I want to ask you if you have anything to add about your Sydney experience. So, you won two Olympic gold medals and actually won a World Cup gold medal too. So, I'm going to throw that in there as well. And just ask if those experiences were different? How you felt about those experiences? How you felt about those accomplishments

**Nikki: [00:28:34]** Yeah, I think Atlanta, we were in the States, so a lot of pressure to win because they was talk of professional leagues. So, I mean, we just did it in, in an excellent fashion to go 60-0, to have, like I said, 35,000 fans witness our gold medal game and we dominated. And, but people knew us. I mean, because we traveled around the world, they had a personal connection with us. So [00:29:00] that to me was big pressure because we knew if we would've failed, we probably wouldn't have these two leagues, but we accomplished that feat, the core group was still intact. Now we have to go on a contender's home court in Sydney to win a gold medal.

Obviously, they were not a favorite, but going to Sydney, they were pretty good. They were very good. We played them pretty well in In Atlanta for the '96 games. So we knew that they were going to be good. Some of their players were in the WNBA, but we just had too much firepower. Yeah, we did. And again, to go on a contender's court and win it, that was pretty, that was pretty awesome too. And it was a wonderful experience.

**Michael: [00:29:48]** If I went to your house, would I see the gold medals displayed somewhere, or you put them away and only bring them out when you want to look at them.

**Nikki: [00:29:55]** Yeah. I only bring them out when I want to look at them.

**Michael: [00:29:56]** Really? Yeah. I'd have them front and center. [00:30:00] It's just, it's such an extraordinary accomplishment.

**Nikki: [00:30:03]** I have a seven-year-old son. So, I don't know.

**Michael: [00:30:07]** Probably take one and go out and play with it, like in the sandlot.



**Nikki: [00:30:10]** Yes, he would.

**Michael: [00:30:12]** So among all these accomplishments, you want to win a National Championship, so you're in a program right now where that could happen.

**Nikki: [00:30:20]** This year because of COVID I think teams that are experienced have an advantage, but I think it's the team that it is meshing at the right time. Do I think we have enough talent? Absolutely. Are we there yet? No. And for us, we're still getting better each and every day. We're learning a new system on both ends of the floor and we're just, we're working it out, but definitely got a great group of young women. That I love battling with. Got a great staff, as well. And I'm at a great university on a great leadership. So, I couldn't ask for anything more

**Michael: [00:30:59]** Did you recruit [00:31:00] this group because you did you just come from Old Dominion this year?

**Nikki: [00:31:02]** Yes. I came from Old Dominion this year. I did not recruit this group.

There's two, three players on the team that I recruited, and I brought in.

**Michael: [00:31:10]** Okay. So, I read online that you are well-known for your recruitment acumen. So, what's the secret of that. What's the secret of finding good people?

**Nikki: [00:31:19]** I think it's just, getting players that have a, somewhat of your DNA. Cause you know, I know the type of players that I like. I like go getters, but also, I'm a relationship person, you gotta be in a relationship with AU coaches, parents, players. Those are not hard conversations with me, that's good. And I think when you can form a connection with kids, they like that.

They want to get to know you and you have to sell them on how you can help them. Especially this generation, they want to know how are they going to benefit from it. And, but it's hard work doesn't matter where you go. If you don't work hard, it doesn't matter. You're not going to get to where you [00:32:00] want.

So, it's having a competitive spirit being discipline and working hard.

**Michael: [00:32:06]** Again, the information on you says that you were personally selected by President Bill Clinton for his council on physical fitness and sports. So, could you tell us about that experience?

**Nikki: [00:32:16]** Yeah, that was awesome. Just to, be a part of that to promote physical fitness throughout the country, healthy lifestyle, eating all of those things.

To me, that was a, that was another highlight of my career to be a part of that, spend a lot of time at the White House and doing some stuff with President Clinton and Hillary Clinton. So those things were a lot of fun. But, to say that you were part of that and promoting, good health an educating, healthy eating, exercise, all of those things. And especially being in a profession that I was in that meant a lot.

**Michael:** [00:32:52] I was reading or rereading a book called the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, you may have read it. It's an old [00:33:00] classic. I didn't read it until later in my life. But one of the seven habits of highly effective people is what the author calls sharpening the saw.

And that means, taking good care of your body, taking good care of yourself, because that feeds into everything else. Who are the other members of that, that you got to work with of that group?

**Nikki:** [00:33:19] Oh, so many different people. Oh, that was so long ago.

**Michael:** [00:33:23] But from different, different sports?

**Nikki:** [00:33:25] Yeah, different sports. It was, we would come together. I want to say Dominique Dawes was on there.

**Michael:** [00:33:31] Really?

**Nikki:** [00:33:33] Yeah, I want to say that, but I can't, it was some athletes. It was a lot of different people. Yeah.

**Michael:** [00:33:37] And and then I also read that you were selected by the library of Congress to be the keynote speaker for the women's history month address. So that must've been a great honor as well.

**Nikki:** [00:33:47] It was. I think that was in that was in DC. And I was part of the Mystics at the time that was pressure, just having to get up there and speak, but great opportunity. Great honor to you [00:34:00] know to speak and to have that voice, to be able to share my story.

And that's what it's all about. Just being able to share your story and hoping that you touch someone's life, along the way.

**Michael** [00:34:11] I'm now going to move into what I'm calling the teaching moment. And I'm going to ask you three questions and you can answer them as quickly as you want, or you can take as long as you want.

I'm putting you on the spot for our listeners. Please know that Nikki did not have these answers to these questions in advance. That's not the way we do things. We want to have a good free flowing conversation. So, here's my first question for you. What single habit, technique, or tip would you offer that has helped you be your most extraordinary self

**Nikki:** [00:34:46] Single habit or technique?

I think the biggest thing is every morning when I get up, it is my faith, spending time with God. It balances me. It just, it gives me [00:35:00] clarity. It does. So, from seven to nine, I have a routine, I have my faith. I exercise and then I spend that time with my son.

But that part is huge. It is, it keeps you balanced because there's a lot of stuff going on in your head, and when you're a coach, you're a CEO, you just wake up and you got lots of stuff going on in your mind, what you have to stop and you have to, understand, you're what grounds you, and I'm not thinking about anything else other than my relationship with God at that moment. And it just brings clarity throughout the day.

**Michael: [00:35:34]** I love that, so, so it's for balance. It's also, you mentioned earlier that you're not just about basketball, so it allows you to have that broader dimension, allows you to be with your family and it allows you to be your best, yet most focused self.

Yeah, that's great. Great advice. Here's one that could be a little bit harder for you. Okay. Do you have a personal mission? [00:36:00]

**Nikki: [00:36:00]** Do I have a personal mission? For me it is to be a servant, a leader, like when I'm dealing with young people is not about me. You have to service them. There's certain needs that need to be met, because they're coming from different families. I knew that when I was in college and now being in this position, you have to have a servant mentality through the good, the bad and the ugly, because again, everybody's not like me. Okay. That's where the empathy comes in.

But you have to just understand how do you service people? On a daily basis. How do you meet them where they are on a daily basis? And as competitive as I am, I want so many people to be like me, but they're not, I have to be able to meet them where they are, especially young people.

I too like the service, the servant leader model. [00:37:00] And I know that there are many ways to be an effective and impactful leader, but I like that model as well, and I try to follow it as well. Leadership is an opportunity for service. That really is, the best leaders are always thinking about ways that they can serve others and work with others.

That's great, Nikki. Thank you. So the third question, you're doing a great job by the way these are good answers. So here's the the last question. What's the best advice you've ever received from someone else?

The best advice I've ever received. Basically, it's something that I continue to live by is, the disciplined person can do anything.

Yeah, I think you have to be disciplined in every aspect of your life and your faith and your relationships and your marriage in everything. You have to be completely disciplined. And I think when you're disciplined, it just you have a good understanding about it, of [00:38:00] what you need to do.

And to me that's key discipline. Even, being here, at Mississippi State a program that's on the brink, was on the brink of winning a National Championship. And the expectations are very high being disciplined in my preparation, being disciplined in my message to the kids, being very disciplined in every aspect, you gotta be very clear in your message. But you gotta be disciplined and being clear, in that, because again, it is, it's key. It's key.

**Michael: [00:38:34]** If you're ever looking for any advice in your coaching, just go to your Twitter site. And I noticed yesterday that you're getting plenty of advice from all the people that follow you. They all have the answers. How can our listeners follow you?

**Nikki: [00:38:48]** Oh, they can follow me @nikkimccray15 on Twitter, on Instagram. Facebook is Nikki McCray. So yeah, more than happy to follow [00:39:00] me. And I'm always posting something positive. I'm always sharing something about, my son or whatever, my family.

So I'm just one of those I like to spread positivity. I was talking to my kids, I was telling our kids, this year is really about, having a driver's mentality of your attitude, especially with everything, being positive and having a grateful heart, those two things. I think, you have a chance to really do something. If every day you come in with a positive attitude and you have a grateful heart, cause you never know what tomorrow's gonna bring, especially with everything going on in this world, but you can control those two things.

**Michael:** [00:39:38] Yeah. That's great. And that's a great attitude control what you can control.

So, what's the future for Nikki McCray?

**Nikki:** [00:39:46] Well, the future for me is to one day at a time, for me it is, every day I'm going to make my days count and in everyday try to empower the people around me, continue to be [00:40:00] the best wife, best mother, best coach, best colleague, that I can be.

**Michael:** [00:40:09] Okay, well we've got a great UCONN program here in New England, but I'm going to be pulling for the Bulldogs this year. So, I'll be following you and watching your great success. Ladies and gentlemen, that is the extraordinary Nikki McCray. And thank you to our sponsor, The Colony Group. The Colony Group is a national wealth and business management company with 15 offices across the country. That itself seeks the extraordinary as it pursues its unrelenting mission of providing clients with peace of mind and empowering their visions of tomorrow. To learn more about the Colony Group and how it manages beyond money visit [www.thecolonygroup.com](http://www.thecolonygroup.com).

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