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DISCOVER | DEVELOP | DEDICATE

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2026

Connecting with Generation Z

Brian Polian

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John Carroll University
25-Year College Football Coach*



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Self Determination

Teaching
Generation Z
how to drive
the

C.A.R.



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Who is Generation Z?



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What Shaped Them?

Technology

Terrorism

Global Recession

Coronavirus



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What Makes Them Unique?

Relationship Driven

Instantaneous

Independent Learners

Anxiety

Lonely

Authenticity

Risk Averse

Late to Develop Resilience



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Relationships First

**“YOU HAVE TO HONOR THE RELATIONSHIP BEFORE YOU CAN ASK
THEM TO HONOR A TASK.”**

Alex Zaqueira
Headmaster – St. John’s High School (MA)



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Why Relationships Are Important

There is a mental health crisis in America.

- Anxiety and Suicide rates are rising.

Relationships are vital for our well being.

- They lead to an overall healthier life.

They help you succeed!

- Why wouldn't you want your people in healthy relationships?



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Relationships > Systems

“Relationship Guy”



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Relationships are the Reward

What is your “Why”?



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Dynamics of Inclusion

Apathy is no longer an option.

- Educators cannot choose to ignore the challenges in our society.

Recognize the individual.

- Seeing someone as a unique person shows value.



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The Building Blocks of Relationships

Trust

Time

Respect

Communication

Love



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Feedback and Gen Z

“The only thing I can do for my players, in good moments and in bad moments, is tell them the reality.”

Pep Guardiola – Manchester City FC



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Giving Feedback to Generation Z

TIME AND PLACE

PLAN

BE TIMELY

IT'S NEVER PERSONAL

BE SPECIFIC

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

MAKE IT ACTIONABLE

SAY THANK YOU



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Working Better with Gen Z

Gen Z is Independent

Crave Interpersonal Interaction

They Expect You to Listen

Diversity is the Expectation

All About Technology

They Want the Big Picture



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Working Better with Gen Z

Learning Environment

Desire Practical Skills

Adaptable

Financially Focused

Peer Opinions Matter

They Want to Have Fun!



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“Honor the human being in front of you and what that person brings to the world, and they will work their butt off for you.”



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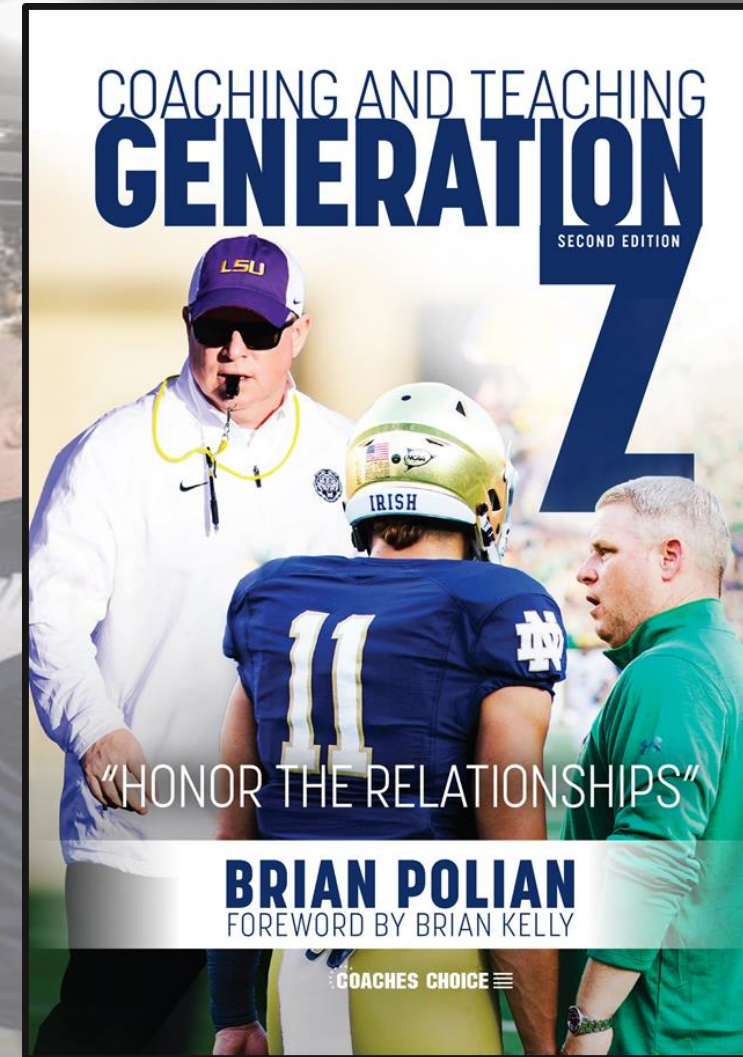
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