

Kimberly football coach Steve Jones: 'Don't ever lose your why'

[Jen Zettel](#), USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin Published 12:17 p.m. CT April 24, 2018

Jones shares keys to leadership at United Way Fox Cities annual report



(Photo: Danny Damiani/USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

APPLETON - Remember your "why."

That was one of many messages Steve Jones, Kimberly High School educator and head football coach, gave to community leaders at United Way Fox Cities' annual report to the community on Tuesday morning.

"Why?" is the starting point for successful leaders and organizations, he said.

"What is your why? Why are you part of the United Way? Why do you work where you work? Why do you do what you do? What's your 'why'?" Jones asked. "There's a great quote: 'People don't get burned out because of what they do. They get burned out because they forget why they do it.' Don't ever lose your why."

Jones disclosed the Papermakers' formula for success: People + Culture + Preparation + Execution. A key piece of that is perspective. The team never talks about winning, he said, but rather, they focus on what it takes to be a winner.

He talked about the difference between Thinking Wrong (negative thoughts, not being present in the moment, expecting bad things to happen before they happen) and Thinking Right (positive thoughts, being in the moment, expecting good things to happen and working toward them).

Jones recalled the first time he told his team he loved them. It was five years ago, the week before they played for what would become their first of five consecutive WIAA Division I championships.

They were invited to practice at the Green Bay Packers' Don Hutson Center. The morning of the practice, Jones received an email from a former coach who said, "Don't forget to tell your kids that you love them."

At first, Jones brushed off the advice, having never played for or worked for a coach who said such a thing.

"But then I thought about it. I'm like, 'I do love these kids.' They're awesome kids. They work so hard. They're so respectful. I'm with them more than I'm with my wife, literally. I do love these kids," he said.

At the end of practice that day, Jones dropped the L word.

"My final thoughts were this: No matter what happens on Friday — win or lose — just know that I love you," he said. "You should've saw the looks on their faces ... but then I explained what I just explained to you, on why and what that meant and what unconditional love meant. It didn't matter if they won or lost, they were going to be loved.

"A couple of cool things happened after that moment. One: That word started to be used in our program ... and the other cool thing: I walked away ... and realized in that moment there were probably a lot of kids that that was the first time they ever heard that word from an adult male. I never heard it growing up — not once — and I was able to give that," Jones said.

The annual event highlighted United Way Fox Cities impact in the community. In 2017, the organization raised \$8.8 million to support programs and provide grants to partner agencies.

Sue VandenBroek and Julie Merritt received the Wes Urch Service Award, which is given to individuals who are dedicated to volunteerism through United Way Fox Cities.

Laurie Butz, United Way Fox Cities' board chair and a senior vice president at Community First Credit Union, said she didn't realize how many people in the community face problems such as homelessness, mental health issues or providing basics necessities for their families until she got involved with United Way.

"I don't know about you, but I didn't see all of the things that were happening in our community in my everyday life, and I still don't. But I can see it now through the eyes of (the LIFE) study," she said.

She mentioned the PATH program, which has provided in-school mental health counseling for Fox Cities students since 2008. PATH, whose acronym means Providing Access to Healing, started after the 2006 LIFE Study revealed a jump in the percentage of young people who said they considered suicide, Butz said.

Other programs, such as the Fox Cities Diaper Bank, 211 and The Connector, helped people overcome challenges in their lives.

"The statistics say that through these programs the United Way impacts one in three people in the Fox Cities. I think that's wrong," she said. "It impacts all of us in ways that sometimes we don't even realize until we look closer."