

# A GAME PLAN



*By Bruce Farr*

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– Grant Knight, Senior, Chandler Prep

# FOR SUCCESS



*Photos by Bailey Brown-McCray*

Several years ago, billionaire financier Warren Buffet spoke to a group of Columbia University grads and said: “Right now, I’d pay \$100,000 for 10 percent of the future earnings of any of you. By having good communication skills, you can improve your value by another 50 percent. If you have good communication skills, see me after this, and I’ll pay you \$150,000 for 10 percent of your future earnings.”

Having solid communications skills in your repertoire as you’re about to enter the job market is one thing. But, as most of us recognize, the path to becoming a good communicator begins

long before we reach that milestone. It starts with our earliest nonverbal interactions and continues, nuanced and refined, throughout our lives.

Turning our focus to the critical school years, how, precisely, does communication affect our success in and out of class, and does it carry over into our athletic performance, as well?

We posed these very questions to two Great Hearts students, who offered their own unique perspectives on how communication, in its many forms, can help advance a student’s performance throughout his or her academic career—and beyond.



### The great communicator

“I don’t hang back,” says Scottsdale Preparatory Academy senior Anika Weisbrod when asked how important she thinks communication is to being a successful student. “I ask questions because I always want to be looking forward and know what I need to know.”

From all accounts delivered by her teachers, coaches and peers, Weisbrod is the quintessential 21st-century American high school student and athlete. In addition to maintaining a 3.5 GPA, Anika excels in a variety of sports, including volleyball, basketball, soccer, track and, in the spring, sand volleyball.

“She’s an excellent athlete—just gifted,” says Bob Shishler, head coach for Scottsdale Prep’s cross country/track and field teams. “Bubbly, energetic and enthusiastic, she’s extremely coachable.”

Anika chalks up a good measure of her success to knowing how to interact with people.

“I’m a good communicator,” she says. “I always have been because I know it’s important. If I’m struggling in a class, I always go to the teacher for tutoring. I always want to be forward-thinking with my challenges.”

Lori Musico, Anika’s Classical Languages teacher agrees. “The first thing that comes to my mind about Anika is how persistent she is,” she says. “She doesn’t talk just for talking’s sake—she’s very purposeful about what she wants to know and how she goes about getting that information. She’s never vague; she’s very direct with her questions.”

Anika believes there is common thread between how she communicates with her teammates on the playing field and how she communicates with them in the classroom.

“Working with them in sports makes it easier for me to be involved with them in class, because you’re on that ‘next level’ of knowing them,” she explains. Musico says the same thing is true in sports on the playing field.

“A really strong leader isn’t simply shouting commands at his or her fellow players. They’re going to watch their play and then have a dialogue based on what they’ve done or not done. That makes both a strong leader and a good communicator.”

Although her college plans for next year aren’t yet set in stone, Anika’s attention is most recently focused on Elon University, a mid-size liberal arts college located in north-central North Carolina.

Her bottom line? “I’m a very organized person,” she says with complete aplomb. “And so my parents know that I’ll work to balance both my athletic and my academic activities. For the most part, I can handle my own schedule.”

### Confidence is key

Grant Knight’s day typically begins at 5:45 a.m. and ends when he finally stretches out for a few hours sleep at midnight. It takes discipline—and good communication—to make it all work to his advantage, he says.

The 18-year-old Chandler Preparatory Academy senior, who holds a steady 4.0 GPA, has a resume with an array of honors, accolades and accomplishments. Aside from having captured a host of local and national academic awards, the young scholar is also an outstanding four-sport athlete, with championship achievements in varsity tennis, basketball, track and golf to his credit.

To make it all work, Grant says that he has to be able to micro-manage his time



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and activities—as well as his performance using whatever tools he can. Communication, he says, is crucial.

“With academics and sports, school takes up a pretty decent amount of time,” he admits. But having confidence in himself helps. “My confidence comes from hard work, dedication and being prepared. Some of it comes from how I’ve been raised, but it also comes from the way I’ve been taught. In class discussions, for instance, I feel I’m in a position where I can contribute. And in sports, I feel like I’m in a place where I can assess what’s happening and make smart decisions.”

Maura McCluskey, Grant’s former Humane Letters teacher, recalls those class discussions and witnessing, firsthand, his confidence not only in discussing the topic at hand, but also confidence in his knowledge of the topic and his ability to articulate his ideas.

“Grant is great communicator. He’s articulate, but with a confidence that allows him to speak with a certain level of authority,” she says. “He’s careful, making sure to speak thoughtfully about the material without merely thinking out loud. Being able to communicate is really the only way the students can learn.”

That same emphasis on communication carries over into sports activities, Grant says. “It’s one of the cornerstones of being a good athlete; being a great athlete isn’t just about how much talent you have, or how fast you can run or how high you can jump. Being the best athlete means understanding how to use your skill and ability in ways that are beneficial to the team as a whole.”

### Team work

Anika and Grant both have a keen sense of how much communication has played in their success as students and athletes. As Grant describes it, one of the offshoots of good communication is collaboration, and he feels that the culture at Great Hearts promotes working together rather than working in opposition.

“We’re all on the same journey, going through the same thing. It’s a highly collaborative environment,” he says. “A lot of my friends and I help each other with



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questions if we’re confused, and you can always find someone who’s willing to help you. In our school, people are invited to ask for help, and there’s always someone willing to offer it.”

In Grant’s experience, communication isn’t merely sharing information with someone else; it also involves the nature and the emotional commitment people have to their interactions.

“Whenever I’m in a position where I can help someone, I look at it as an obligation to do so. It’s a lot of fun helping other people learn something,” he says.

Having good communications skills is a requirement for achievement on any level, Grant believes.

According to Cameron Karimi, Grant’s tennis and golf coach, and a chemistry teacher at Chandler Prep, whether students are on the playing field or in the classroom, it’s important to develop a skill for really listening to someone.

“Listen to what they’re actually trying to communicate, and not just what you might think they’re saying,” he says. “It’s important to remember that communication in a game—or maybe even in a classroom—isn’t always verbal; sometimes it’s communicating by exhibiting a certain posture or body language. Keeping your head up—literally—is letting people know that you have the upper hand.”