



# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## Make a Difference: Help Others Climb the Ladder of Success

John Calipari, Head Basketball Coach  
University of Kentucky

John Calipari's career has been defined by decades of winning and unprecedented achievements on and off the basketball court.

In becoming only the second coach in NCAA history to lead three different schools to the Final Four, he has racked up more than 500 on-court victories, 13 NCAA Tournament appearances and numerous national coach of the year honors.

While building a program out of obscurity at Massachusetts, laying the foundation at Memphis and restoring luster to college basketball's greatest program at Kentucky, he has achieved the second-most wins in NCAA history in the first 19 years of a college coaching career.

In his goal to lead a players-first program, he has helped 21 players realize their dreams and guide them to the NBA, including a record five first-round draft picks in 2010.

Much like he did at UMass, where his players graduated at nearly 80 percent, Coach Calipari continues to stress academics. Fifteen of his last 18 seniors at Memphis earned their bachelor's degrees, and all four UK seniors under Coach Cal have walked away with a diploma in hand. The Wildcats posted a 3.015 grade-point average for the 2010-11 season.

The Calipari Family Foundation has raised millions of dollars to help the lives of those in need in the Commonwealth and across the country.

Do you ever stop to think about how fortunate you are to be in the position you're in? When was the last time you thought about how blessed you are just to be born in this great country?

I think about it every day in my position as a coach at the University of Kentucky, the winningest program in college basketball. My grandfather was a West Virginia coal miner and now here I am, with a plate overflowing of blessings. I am so unbelievably blessed to be in the seat I'm in and it's my job – my responsibility – to help people with the opportunities I've been given.

In January 2010, in my first season at Kentucky, a 7.0 earthquake rocked Haiti. We were getting ready to fly down to Auburn for a game on Saturday when my good friend Royce Pulliam called and said, "We need to do something." Amid devastation, there was an opportunity to use my seat as a way to help others.

**The question I always pose to my team is: When you've attained success or you've been blessed with wealth, how are you going to use it to help other people? How are you going to give back and help others climb the ladder of success?**

In hindsight, it may not have been very fair to our fans at UK, but during that trip my mind was on the tens of thousands who were struggling to live in the Caribbean. My friend Royce was exactly right, we had to do something, so I put in a call to Wayne Martin, the general manager at Lexington television station WKYT, and we got the ball rolling on "Hoops for Haiti."



We ended up winning on Saturday, but during our game, countless people worked behind the scenes to help Wayne and my staff put together a telethon in a mere 48 hours. We flew back that day and the next afternoon my players were fielding phone calls and taking donations.

After talking with Wayne I had an idea that we could help a lot of people, but never did I imagine we could help the United Way and Red Cross collect more than \$1.2 million in relief efforts.

There were a lot of people that helped make the telethon such a success, including our players, my staff, Ashley Judd, LeBron James, Dick Vitale, former players and so many more. Of course, none of it would have been possible without our great fans picking up the phone to donate. I know if other coaches could have done what we did, they would have. We're in a unique situation at Kentucky, where we can make a call and get statewide TV for an hour and a half.

I've visited Haiti a couple of times since, to see where the money that the Big Blue Nation had raised was going. I hate to tell you, there doesn't appear to be a lot of hope. Even if you educate, there are no jobs, no infrastructure, no grade schools, a short supply of water and limited electricity. The feeling I always get when I leave Haiti is despair for those young people who were born there. They were born there by fate in an area that, for any of them to do well, they're going to have to overcome a lot.



*Wayne Martin, general manager of Lexington television station WKYT, and Coach Calipari host the "Hoops for Haiti" telethon*

And that's why I go back to how blessed we are to be born in the United States at this time. What did we do to earn it? We didn't do anything. Now what do we do with what we've been given? That is in our hands.

The question I always pose to my team is: When you've attained success or you've been blessed with wealth, how are you going to use it to help other people? How are you going to give back and help others climb the ladder of success? Some people climb the ladder of success and they turn around and they pick up the ladder. Special people climb the ladder of success and they turn around and they pick up the next person, because they've been blessed.

I've been blessed in so many ways to coach in this program, at this school and in this state, and I'm truly amazed I've gotten this opportunity. With it, I hope to make a difference in someone else's life on a daily basis. If I can make someone feel special, wanted or cared for when they feel empty, whether it's at the grocery store, at mass or at work, I feel like I've made a difference.

It's a big reason why my wife, Ellen, and I try to be involved as much as we can with the community around us on a daily basis. Our foundation, The Calipari Family Foundation, is dedicated to improving communities and bettering the lives of those in need. The foundation advocates and invests in policies and programs that make a positive, measurable impact on communities across the country.

Through the Foundation, we are supporting a statewide financial literacy program this year. With the help of local Lexington banks and EverFi, Inc., we hope to have the "Vault Understanding Money," an online learning program, in every grade school across the state of Kentucky. The focus will be on teaching young children the value of saving.

We also will be involved with a fundraising effort this year to endow a chair at the Center for Research on Violence Against Women at UK, in addition to our continued work with Samaritan's Feet, Streets Ministries

in Memphis, Tennessee, and Mike Gottfried's Team Focus Program.

I encourage all of you to do what you can to make a difference in people's lives. I've obviously been put in a great position as the basketball coach at Kentucky to be able to do more than most people, but that doesn't mean we all can't make a difference. ▽