

Nine Commandments of Successful Playmaking

Many coaches see the team's smallest player who can dribble the ball into the frontcourt and enter it to the wing as the point guard. To me, this is like seeking a quarterback to receive the snap from center and hand-off to a running back. I need more, want more and demand more from a point guard. I envision a quarterback in a West Coast or Fun n Gun Offense.

The lead guard requires a special skill set. He leads his team, acts as a catalyst on defense and a playmaker on offense, knocks down big shots and creates easy opportunities for teammates. They understand the game, while an increasing number of players, at all levels, rely strictly on physical abilities, failing to develop the game's mental aspect.

Below are the **Nine Commandments of Successful Playmaking**. They appear commonplace and may require little explanation, but they build the foundation of a lead guard who controls the game offensively and defensively, relieving and applying pressure, creating opportunities for teammates and himself.

The 9 Commandments of Successful Playmaking

1. *Thou shall dribble the basketball for three reasons:*

1. Acquire balance.
2. Alleviate a five-second count.
3. Go somewhere.

2. *My Number One Rule of Good Ball Handling: Always keep head and shoulders directed toward the basket: attack North-South.* When a player dribbles laterally, the defense has the advantage. Once an offensive player feels the defense pushing him toward the sideline, with head and shoulders no longer facing the rim, use a "Space Dribble" to create separation from the defender and square toward the basket to attack or create a passing lane. Dribbling laterally is unproductive.

3. *Thou shall never commit the Cardinal Sin of Playmaking: the "Dead Dribble."* The "Dead Dribble" is when a player catches the ball, takes one dribble and immediately picks up the ball. This destroys offensive efficiency, triggers traps and makes one easy to guard.

4. *Thou shall always dribble with head and eyes up to see the floor.* As a rule, focus eyes on the bottom of the net and use peripheral vision to see the entire floor. A great dribbler is of no use to his team if he pounds the ball with his head down. Playmakers see the floor, see the openings and see the play developing. Less is more; use the dribble to create an offensive play, not to own the ball or to yo-yo with the dribble at half court.

5. *Thou shall never enter the "Dead Corners."* The "Dead Corners" are every ball handlers' worst nightmare. They are the corners on the backcourt baseline and just over half court in the frontcourt. Here, a defense can trap an offensive player and leave him no outlet, using the sideline and the baseline/half-court line as added defenders. An experienced ball handler never finds himself in such a predicament. To avoid the "Dead Corners," start high on the floor when catching an inbounds pass versus pressure. When dribbling versus pressure, never turn your back on the court and cross mid-court in the middle third of the

court. If pressured into the corner, stop short of half court, use a retreat dribble to alleviate pressure and push the ball toward the middle of the floor with a pass or dribble.

6. *Thou shall never jump to pass.* Players must be prepared to shoot or pass off the dribble; jumping into the air to create a play often leads to turnovers (exception Steve Nash). Playmakers remain under control; once in the air, players lose control and make hurried decisions. See the play develop and take the shot or make the pass.

7. *Thou shall master the change of speed dribble.* The most basic, and still most important, element of ball handling is the ability to change speeds with the ball. A player playing at one speed, even if it is fast, is easier to guard than a player who constantly changes speed. Use the change of speed to maintain control, separate from the defense and set-up a move or shot. In transition, dribble the ball at about 80% of full speed to allow for acceleration to separate from the defense.

8. *Thou shall attack.* In transition, put the defense at a disadvantage; pass the ball ahead to an open teammate or pressure the defense by pushing the ball quickly with the dribble. Make the defense stop the ball. Put pressure on the defense with dribble penetration, with the ability to shoot or pass. Force help defense to rotate to stop the ball, thus occupying two defenders and creating an open look for a teammate. Believe that one person cannot stop a great lead guard; look to create a shot one-on-one or force help defense.

9. *Thou shall play with quickness, balance and control.* These are the key elements to basketball success, especially ball handling. Be quick with the ball. Eliminate ineffective and unnecessary dribbles. Stay on balance, able to stop and pop, hesitate and go or pull back away from the defense at any moment. Maintain control to avoid careless turnovers. Utilize a jump stop or veer away from defenders. Never go too fast.