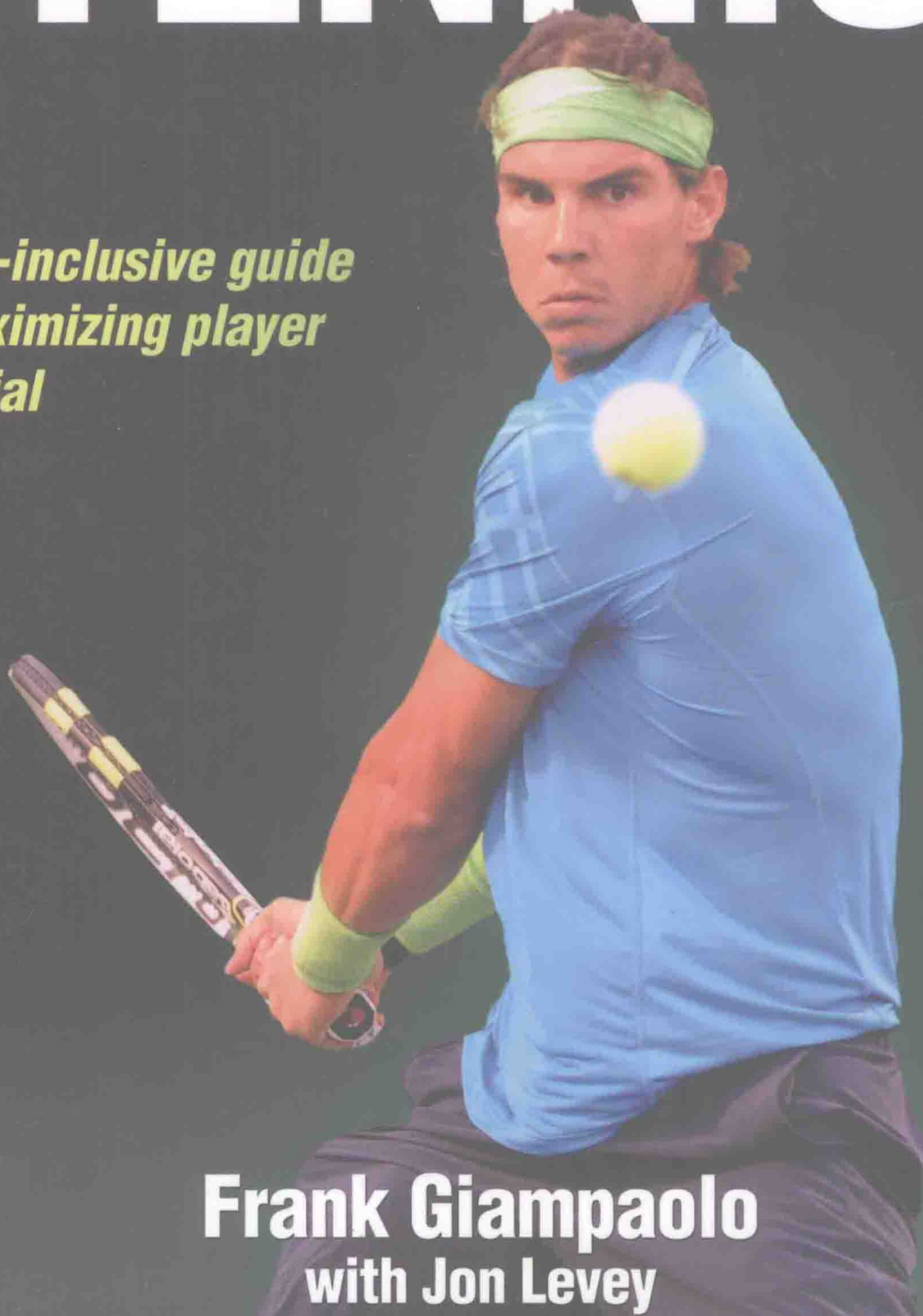


CHAMPIONSHIP TENNIS

*The all-inclusive guide
for maximizing player
potential*

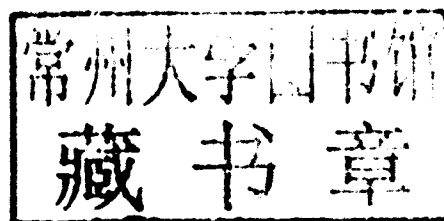


Frank Giampaolo
with Jon Levey

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CHAMPIONSHIP TENNIS

Frank Giampaolo
with Jon Levey



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Human Kinetics

Website: www.HumanKinetics.com

United States: Human Kinetics

P.O. Box 5076

Champaign, IL 61825-5076

800-747-4457

e-mail: humank@hkusa.com

Canada: Human Kinetics

475 Devonshire Road Unit 100

Windsor, ON N8Y 2L5

800-465-7301 (in Canada only)

e-mail: info@hkcanada.com

Europe: Human Kinetics

107 Bradford Road

Stanningley

Leeds LS28 6AT, United Kingdom

+44 (0) 113 255 5665

e-mail: hk@hkeurope.com

Australia: Human Kinetics

57A Price Avenue

Lower Mitcham, South Australia 5062

08 8372 0999

e-mail: info@hkaustralia.com

New Zealand: Human Kinetics

P.O. Box 80

Torrens Park, South Australia 5062

0800 222 062

e-mail: info@hknewzealand.com

E5669

This book is dedicated to Lisa.

Preface

Like every sport, tennis is constantly evolving. The level of play on the pro tours continually sets new standards which trickle down to the mere mortals littering the adult leagues and junior ranks. Because the competition has gotten bigger, faster, and stronger, a new training methodology has been created. What Andre Agassi did well, Rafael Nadal does better. And as the game continues to evolve, one of you will surely be the next innovator. Shake hands with the racket to learn a forehand? That has gone the way of the Walkman. Tennis has long since entered its digital age.

The purpose of this book is to assist players and coaches in developing every aspect of the modern game at an accelerated rate. It starts by evaluating a player's current skills and organizing a personalized blueprint for development. After that comes laying down a solid foundation of fundamentals to build upon. Then each pillar of the game is enhanced using revolutionary stroke principles, teaching concepts, and state-of-the-art drills. Insights into mental and emotional training are covered in great detail. Components such as strategy, tactics, conditioning (physical and mental), and proper practice regimens are all presented to help the player advance through the different levels of competition.

For players wishing to accelerate the learning curve at the quickest rate, customization is the key. Too many players and coaches use a one-size-fits-all approach. No two players are exactly alike and neither should their training methods. Accelerated learning demands strong consideration of a player's brain and body types (genetic predisposition), as well as previous athletic and tennis achievement. In this book, readers will quickly understand how to tailor a developmental program to their individual needs rather than adapt to a fixed, singular model of teaching. Even though two players can be of similar ability, their development and training may be polar opposite.

Anyone with the desire to pick up the sport for the first time will find this book an excellent reference providing both information and inspiration. And for those who have played tennis, but want guidance toward significant improvement, this book will offer a wealth of invaluable new insights. Regardless of ability or experience, all players looking to enhance their games using the latest teaching concepts can use *Championship Tennis* as their ultimate tennis resource.

Acknowledgments

To Linda, I am honored to have you as my wife.

To my tennis mentor, true visionary, and dear friend, Vic Braden. Vic changed the entire world of professional tennis coaching.

To Chuck Cannon. Chuck's soulful dedication to the craft of writing prepared me to take each subject and go deeper, then deeper again.

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To Brian Anteck. Brian's superior knowledge of tennis-specific, off-court training helped me fill in the blanks in chapter 12.

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Jon Levey (cowriter). Jon's expert attention to detail polished the rough edges and made this book shine.

Bob Silverstein (literary agent). Thanks again, Bob, for putting this whole crew together. Without you, it would not have happened.

Lastly, the great staff at Human Kinetics publishing, including Justin Klug, Laura Podeschi, and Laurel Plotzke. You made this two-year project painless.

—Frank Giampaolo

To Frank for letting me tag along on his book. You put your heart and soul into developing players. Your students are lucky to call you their coach.

Bob Silverstein for setting up this partnership and getting the project off the ground. It's heartbreaking that we have to cross the finish line without you. I will miss our talks about Grand Slams and bestsellers.

Laura Podeschi, Laurel Plotzke, Justin Klug, Tyler Wolpert, and everyone at Human Kinetics who made this book possible.

Martin Barnard, Nick Saviano, and Paul Roetert for sharing their advice and experience.

All the great coaches and players I've collaborated with and learned from over the years. I hope some of that wisdom found its way into this book.

To all those hackers and hopefuls who are addicted to smacking a fuzzy yellow ball over a three-foot-high net. You're the lifeblood of the sport. Keep searching for that perfect forehand.

My parents, Julie and Mark, for putting a racket in my hand, getting me hooked, and feeding my addiction.

And to Allison, my doubles partner in life. You cover so much more than your half of the court. I couldn't play this game without you.

—Jon Levey

Key to Diagrams

C Coach

X Player

————→ Path of player

-----→ Path of ball

● Service toss placement

○ Bounce

 Cone

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Athlete Assessment



Player Profiles

Nature versus nurture is one of the oldest debates in sports: Are great athletes born or made? Are innate physical qualities—size, speed, and coordination—more important than learned behaviors? Scientists and coaches have rallied back and forth over the issue. Most agree that it would be foolish to boil it down to an either–or conclusion. Plenty of evidence supports the belief that both factors play an integral part in an athlete’s development. The influence of either factor generally depends on the athlete. From this perspective, every player’s profile is unique. To maximize the player’s potential, the player and coach must understand the player’s genetic predisposition along with personal life experiences.

BRAIN TYPING

When establishing a player profile, the best place to start is between the ears. For something that seems so physical, playing sports, especially tennis, is truly a mental endeavor. The root of brain typing dates to the 1920s and the pioneering work of Carl Jung, a renowned Swiss psychologist. His 1921 book, *Psychological Types*, theorized that people generally fall into specific mental categories that define behavior. During World War II, the mother–daughter team of Katharine Briggs and Isabel Myers used Jung’s teachings to design a personality type questionnaire in order to help women find suitable jobs as they were entering the industrial workforce. That questionnaire eventually evolved into the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, first published in 1962. Although neither Briggs nor Myers was formally educated in psychology, their psychometric questionnaire has become the world’s most widely used personality assessment tool.

In the past two decades, sport scientists have been using brain typing to assist in athletic profiling. In my own experience, I have seen my students achieve remarkable improvements when we have redesigned their developmental plans to fit their brain types. It starts with players discovering and embracing a playing style that suits their personality. Tennis is a difficult sport, and it becomes even more difficult when players struggle to find their playing identity. Improvement takes time, and it won’t occur if the

process seems boring and laborious to the player. This cuts to the heart of the “nature” dynamic of development: A player must choose a style that comes organically.

For example, 11-year-old Sarah and her mother came to one of my tennis workshops that focused on the mental and emotional aspects of the game. At the time, Sarah was struggling with an inflated ranking in the 12-and-under division of Southern California. After I gained her trust, Sarah confided to me that she didn’t like tennis—she found it horribly boring. Then I asked Sarah several questions in an effort to discover her genetic predisposition (in other words, her nature). I followed those with questions about her training (or how she was being nurtured on and off the court).

Sarah was being taught by a South American clay-court specialist. He had fitted Sarah with a Western forehand grip and systematically began to develop Sarah’s game in the model of his own defensive, patient style of play. Sarah complained, “He makes me hit 300 groundstrokes in every lesson. Nothing else! I never get to serve or volley. I just hit the same boring groundstrokes from 15 feet behind the baseline. I hate it. I want to quit!”

Sarah shared a similar brain type with all-court offensive players such as Roger Federer, Andy Roddick, and Pete Sampras. After explaining the importance of brain and body types (described next) to Sarah and her mother, I suggested that she give tennis three more months using a redesigned developmental plan. After one year of training with the style and patterns that develop an all-court player, Sarah found herself ranked number 1 in her age group in Southern California. The following year, she was ranked number 1 in both the girls’ 14 and 16 age divisions simultaneously. Sarah would go on to earn a top 300 WTA ranking and play in the U.S. Open by age 15, and end up with 10 U.S. national junior titles.

Sarah is far from the only example. Hundreds of my students have improved exponentially once they adopted a developmental plan that fit their brain design. This is not to say that a player with a certain brain type can’t be nurtured to play a style that is not intuitive for that player. Both Roddick and Sampras had success early in their junior careers using a counterpunching, defensive style of play. Who knows what would have happened if their developmental advisors had insisted that they continue in that style? My guess is that their professional careers would have turned out much different. We may have never even heard of them.

Let’s peek into the tennis world and see how a player’s brain type, or preferred intelligence, may affect the player’s performance style, strengths, and weaknesses on the court:

Extroversion Because extroverts draw energy from action, they generally prefer to make things happen with a proactive style of play. They often enjoy the socialization and harmony of good doubles.

Introversion Introverts draw their energy through quiet reflection. In many cases, they feel comfortable behind the baseline in a counterpuncher role (refer to the Playing Styles section later in this chapter). Introverts often hesitate when they have the opponent in a vulnerable position; thus, they often miss opportunities to gain an on-court positioning advantage. Introverts commonly prefer the solitude of singles over doubles.

Sensing Sensates make on-court decisions based on concrete evidence. They enjoy details and facts. Sensates only rush the net after they have digested all the necessary data and have determined that attacking is an acceptable behavior. For a sensate, playing it safe is the logical protocol on the court.

Intuition Intuitive players have a deeper level of trust in their hunches. They rely on their sixth sense or their gut instinct. An intuitive player might say, “I had a feeling he

was choking, so I attacked!” Intuitive players would be wise to apply intelligent between-point rituals instead of winging it.

Thinking Thinkers are more detached from the emotional climate of the match. They use systematic logic rather than random choices for shot selection. Thinkers prefer being truthful over being tactful, so they generally have no problem dealing with on-court confrontations.

Feeling Feelers express emotions easily on the tennis court. They are frequently heard verbalizing their feelings during match play. Feelers express empathy toward an opponent who is performing badly, and in many cases, they are easy prey to the drama of a crafty opponent’s gamesmanship.

Judging Judges enjoy predictability, routines, and rituals. They take satisfaction in running the same old boring—but winning—patterns over and over again. They rely on percentage play to gain the upper hand.

Perceiving Perceivers habitually enjoy the freedom to be spontaneous. On the doubles court, perceivers unknowingly surprise their partner as much as the opponents. Perceivers are comfortable adapting to and applying a wide range of secondary shots and patterns. Because a perceiver’s mind is often focused on the future rather than the present, this type of player commonly has a difficult time closing out leads.

To learn more about brain typing, visit www.braintypes.com.

BODY TYPING

Besides matching a playing style to their personality, players must also recognize their body type. The two predominant body types are classified as gross motor skills and fine motor skills. Being a sport of both power and finesse, tennis demands proficiency in each:

Gross Motor Skills Gross motor skills require the use of large muscle groups—the legs, core, and shoulders. This is where a player derives most of the power for a shot. Resistance training, swimming, biking, and yoga are good cross-training exercises for developing gross motor skills.

Fine Motor Skills Fine motor skills require the use of smaller muscle groups—the forearms, wrists, and fingers. Players with well-developed fine motor skills are said to have “good hands” and generally thrive hitting touch shots. Arts and crafts, drawing, playing a musical instrument, and carpentry are a few cross-training techniques for enhancing fine motor skills.

ATHLETIC HISTORY

Another important consideration in the player profile is a player’s previous athletic history. Although two players may be at a similar ability level, their sports backgrounds may necessitate vastly different developmental models. For instance, a few months ago, Kaitlin and Laura signed up for the free Tennis Across America clinic offered at my club. This was a beginners’ clinic that would be run by my assistant pro, Jay. Before the clinic, I offered Jay one quick piece of advice: “Make sure you ask the players about their backgrounds in sports.” Jay responded that the players were all beginners. What difference would it make?

Five minutes into the clinic, Jay was nervous and confused. It turned out that Kaitlin was an Olympic gold medalist in volleyball. She had spent thousands of hours developing the physical, mental, and emotional tools of a world-class competitor. Before long, she started whipping topspin forehands over the net that had her fellow beginners backing up to the fence. Laura, on the other hand, failed to make contact with any of the three balls that Jay fed her. She had spent thousands of hours developing her accounting skills at a major law firm. She had never played sports before or even owned a pair of decent athletic shoes. Although these two women fell into the beginner category, their skills were worlds apart.

This is an extreme example, but it underscores the importance of recognizing differences in players. Someone with a background in dance may have wonderful balance, footwork, and cardiovascular endurance but may struggle mightily with eye–hand coordination. Working on making clean contact with the ball should be this player’s primary order of business. Conversely, someone with many years of baseball experience may strike the ball beautifully but may stumble around the court and rarely be in position to do so. These two players may be of similar ability, but what they bring to the court greatly influences how they should play and develop.

PLAYING STYLES

Once players are fully attuned to their personality, body type, and athletic foundation, they can more effectively adapt their playing style. Having an innate stylistic preference leads to numerous advantages. The player

- has the knowledge to hire coaches and trainers who possess personalities best suited to accelerate her learning curve;
- has the confidence that comes with knowing exactly how she performs best;
- has the ability to lure opponents out of their preferred style and force them to play out of their comfort zones;
- is able to impose her best style, strategies, and tactics on the most important points;
- improves her ability to reach the goal of mastering a minimum of three playing styles—called A, B, and C game plans—which adds depth and variation to the player’s game; and
- can select a stylistically complementary doubles partner to help form a winning team.

Though there are subtle variations, six basic playing styles are seen in tennis. Let’s review each of these styles and how the styles match with a player’s personality.

Net-Rusher Given the shift toward baseline play in the modern game, the true net-rusher is becoming more difficult to find. Usually possessing a strong serve and volleys to back it up, a net-rusher loves to apply relentless pressure and keep the points short. Groundstrokes are viewed as a means for advancing forward so that the point can be determined at the net. Patience can be a liability to the net-rusher, because this type of player prefers 2- or 3-ball rallies. Net-rushers rely on quick feet and reflexes to cover the net and pick off passing shots. With such weapons, net-rushers generally thrive on the doubles court.

All-Court Player All-courtiers have well-rounded, fully developed games. They can be flexible in their style of play depending on the conditions, the surface, and the opponent. They feel at home in offensive, neutral, and defensive situations and can quickly adapt to

any of the three. Medium-length rallies of 8 to 10 balls don't faze them, but eventually they will go for a bold winner from any court position. Having a deep repertoire of shots and styles is advantageous most of the time, but it can also be a curse. The all-courter can sometimes lose focus, become too experimental, and wander from a winning game plan.

Baseline Counterpuncher Some players thrive on using their opponents' strengths against them. When playing against a net-rusher, these players execute their passing shots and lobs. If they're up against a big hitter, they enjoy taking the ball early, changing the direction, and taking away the opponent's recovery time. Counterpunchers possess solid groundstrokes, good court coverage, and excellent stamina. They don't mind long rallies, and they relish the idea of wearing down opponents. Because counterpunchers retaliate rather than initiate, they can fall victim to opponents who successfully take pace off the ball by using height, depth, and patience. Many counterpunchers don't possess the weapons to hurt opponents who play a retrieving style of tennis.

Aggressive Baseline This has become the most prevalent style on the professional tennis tours. Aggressive baseliners try to dictate play from the center of the court, usually with a powerful forehand. They are usually physically strong, and they hit with lots of pace and spin, trying to elicit a short ball that they can crack for a winner. This is a macho style of play in which the player looks to end points within 4 to 6 shots with a winner rather than wait for an opponent's mistake. When playing well, aggressive baseliners can blow people off the court. On the other hand, if they're misfiring or playing a talented counterpuncher, they can implode in a hail of ill-advised shots and unforced errors.

Retriever Although hitting winners feels very satisfying, most points end courtesy of a player's miscue. Retrievers understand this, and nothing pleases them more than allowing their opponents to self-destruct. At the club level, where unforced errors greatly outnumber winners, the retriever is still the most challenging opponent. Retrievers have ample patience, determination, speed, and endurance. They have steady groundstrokes, and 20-ball rallies are standard operating procedure for them. Grit, more than any stroke, is the retriever's primary asset. But that also means that retrievers are usually reactive and at the mercy of their opponent's tactics.

Finesse Player Finesse players possess excellent fine motor skills and enjoy hitting with angles and touch. They like using all the dimensions of the court by executing delicate drop shots or well-placed lobs. Manipulating the ball trajectory with high, looping topspin or low slice is also a staple of the finesse game. With the changes in speeds and the use of deception, these players are sometimes even referred to as "junk ballers." Because they are rather creative, they tend to not have a very high shot tolerance, and big hitters can overpower them. But their soft hands and inventiveness make them rather effective on the doubles court.

MOTIVATION

A few years ago, after winning Wimbledon, a famous WTA tour veteran said that her desire to win came from the fact that her boyfriend had recently broken up with her. She used this setback as added incentive to work toward another title. In essence, she was proving to him that she's a winner. Extrinsic forces—such as pleasing a parent or coach or proving a naysayer wrong—can be powerful motivators, as can intrinsic forces such as enjoyment, the gratification of mastering a sport, the need for exercise, and wanting to be part of a group.

For players to get the most out of tennis, they must know what they are hoping to accomplish. Is it making the club team? Receiving a college scholarship? Finding an activity to enjoy with friends? Motivations can change throughout the course of a player's career, but most experts agree that self-motivation is imperative for long-term success. Once players familiarize themselves with what they hope to accomplish, designing a proper developmental plan becomes much easier.

FINDING THE RIGHT COACH

The surest way for a player to get the greatest fulfillment and enjoyment out of tennis is to find a coach who is best suited to the player's needs. This can take some effort. There's nothing wrong with testing out a coach and moving on if that coach isn't the right fit. (Remember Sarah's problem earlier in the chapter?) There's also nothing wrong with using multiple coaches for different parts of the game as long as there's no overlap. Using two different teachers to fix the serve can result in conflicting information and battling egos. But using one for the serve and another who specializes in groundstrokes can be an effective combination. In the early stages of development, however, most players choose their coaches based on cost, proximity, and availability. Once players move into more competitive stages of the game, they should identify those who possess the coaching styles and personalities that are most effective for furthering their development.

There are eight primary types of coaches, although some fit into multiple categories. Different styles may be appropriate at different stages of an athlete's career.

Detailed Analyzers These are strong technical coaches who like to break down a player's strokes to the core elements, often employing the use of video replay.

Off-Court Fitness Experts Although these coaches know tennis, they specialize in the conditioning aspect of it. Players with established games or those primarily looking for a workout will be attracted to this type of coach.

Fun Lovers Such coaches are kind-hearted and easygoing. They appeal to players who see the court simply as a place to enjoy themselves.

Hitters These coaches may not be great technical instructors, but they are highly skilled players. This is a good coach for players who are looking for someone to compete against. The forte of these coaches is the "playing lesson."

Psychoanalysts Many of these coaches have studied sport psychology and can help students who struggle with the mental or emotional challenges of tennis.

Strategizers Such coaches prefer to discuss the Xs and Os of a match and the characteristics of an opponent rather than the nuances of personal technique, movement, or focus control.

Academy Recruiters This type of coach works in tandem with other like-minded coaches who believe that competition between students fosters the greatest success.

Drill Sergeants These coaches employ a no-nonsense, demanding approach that works well with students who respond to tough love.