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Does competition bring out the best or worst? Scholars show how to create positive, productive outcomes

Champaign, IL—Athletes cheat in games. Executives misrepresent corporate finances. Politicians utter false promises. Is there something about competition that pushes people to act in these ways? Former senator Bill Bradley decided not to seek reelection in part because American politics had become a form of competition run amuck. Researchers David Shields and Brenda Bredemeier explore why competition seems to lead good people to act in bad ways and share their findings in the upcoming *True Competition: A Guide to Pursuing Excellence in Sport and Society* (Human Kinetics, February 2009).

“The authors present a compelling explanation that helps to clarify when and why contests result in bad outcomes, rather than good,” Bradley states. “I feel better equipped to create and sustain the most positive and productive forms of competition in ways that benefit everyone—my family, my work associates, our country, and our world.”

Shields and Bredemeier find the key to maximizing competition in the dictionary. They note the root meaning of competition: *to strive with*. Yet, most sports participants, business people, politicians and others focus on conquest and instead *strive against* their opponents. The authors coin the term “decompetition” to represent this phenomenon, the opposite of true competition.

“This misunderstanding of competition has severely limited our ability to take advantage of its positive potential,” explains Shields, who also suggests that traditional sports’ emphasis on winning might contribute to the popularity of action and extreme sports. “We believe competition is an incredibly positive mode of human interaction that can build positive relationships, foster personal growth and promote ethical behavior.”

Ideally, participants in “true” competition enjoy a quest after personal and team excellence. “In true competition, each party pursues excellence by trying to meet the challenge presented by the opponent’s best effort,” Shields remarks.

True Competition provides a researched-backed blueprint for implementing change in organizations, teams, and individual practices. For more information on *True Competition* or other sport psychology, coaching and sport management books, contact Human Kinetics at 800-747-4457 or visit www.HumanKinetics.com.

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