

Still Shipping My Art

How a book became a lasting influence on the way I create, coach, and develop others.

In 2019, as part of my Hockey Canada High Performance 1 certification, I reviewed Seth Godin's *Linchpin*. Near the end, I wrote:

"This book has motivated me to create and ship my art at work and in hockey, and in doing so provided a sense of accomplishment and confidence to continue creating and making a difference."

Years later, I am still doing that work. It takes shape in a session at Mind Body Hockey, a practice with the U18AAA Battlefords Sharks, or a conversation that helps a player move forward.

Three ideas from the book stayed with me: becoming a linchpin, creating art, and shipping things that make a difference. Together, they challenged me to turn what I believed about development into something people could experience.

Godin describes a linchpin as someone essential to an organization, a person who creates, connects, and finds a way forward. Working in post-secondary education and hockey, I came to understand the value of structure. I also saw that people needed different things within it. An explanation could connect with one person and miss another entirely.

That is why the idea resonated. I could use my experience and judgment to find another path. I did not need every step laid out before I could contribute.

In my review, I described art as "creating positive change with purpose." A practice, an explanation, or a question could change how someone understood a skill, approached a challenge, or saw themselves.

But someone had to experience that work before it could make a difference. Shipping it meant accepting that it would be imperfect, putting it into practice, and learning from the response.

That helped me act.

In 2019, after years of on-ice development offerings alongside my full-time work, I launched Mind Body Hockey. I was putting my beliefs out there and asking people to invest their time and trust in what I had to offer.

The launch felt enormous then. Today, it can seem almost trivial compared with what has followed. The decision has not changed; my experience has. Taking that step helped build the confidence to take others.

My coaching experiences reinforced that learning. Applying to support the Sask First female program eventually led to the opportunity to coach Team Saskatchewan's U18 team to a silver medal at the 2019 national championship. Working with the University of Saskatchewan Women's Huskies from 2018 to 2023 challenged me to contribute, learn from others, and refine my approach.

In 2024, I committed to Mind Body Hockey full-time, leaving a secure career after 12 years in post-secondary education. The responsibility grew: make the work useful, earn people's trust, and keep improving.

Today, I ship my art by connecting skill acquisition, cognitive performance, and mindset on and off the ice. I want athletes to understand what they are doing and become more aware of how they see, decide, and respond.

A session puts those beliefs to work. I introduce a challenge, observe the athlete, ask what they noticed, and adjust. Their response helps me decide what to teach next.

Sometimes a familiar object or analogy helps an athlete see a mental performance challenge differently. On the ice, I might break a skill into manageable layers, then connect those pieces as the challenge grows. Explaining the why helps players recognize when an option is useful and choose it as the game changes.

That learning needs an environment where athletes can ask questions, attempt something unfamiliar, and make mistakes while being challenged to improve.

With the Sharks, those beliefs shape a team environment.

When I took on the program in 2023, families and players trusted a vision before there were results to back it up. Our staff, volunteers, and families helped build the environment. The players brought it to life through their willingness to learn, contribute, and hold one another accountable.

My responsibility was to make our philosophy visible through purposeful practices, clear expectations, honest conversations, and opportunities for ownership.

Our player journals are one example. They give players somewhere to prepare, reflect, reset, and connect their habits to their goals. They evolve because each group has different needs.

My university coaching experience also shaped what I wanted those tools to accomplish. Players needed preparation for role changes, increased competition, adversity, and the responsibilities that come with being a student-athlete. I want their learning to remain useful when they move beyond our program.

That philosophy is tested when things are not going well.

Some coaches will disagree, but I believe letting frustration drive my response to a player or team wastes an opportunity to teach. When I feel that frustration, I need to examine my part in how we got there.

Were we prepared? Did we miss a step in the learning process? Were the expectations clear? Are we asking players to execute something they cannot yet perform consistently under pressure?

Those questions do not remove the players' responsibility. They make sure I am accepting mine.

That responsibility extends to how I communicate. Yelling "compete" may tell a player I want more, but it does little to explain what more looks like. My job is to make that expectation specific: arrive sooner, establish body position, support a teammate, or stay involved after losing the puck.

This is another way I ship my art: taking what I see and understand about the game and turning it into guidance a player can use on the next shift. The value is in whether it helps them recognize an opportunity and respond differently. Their response then helps me understand what to reinforce, clarify, or teach next.

I also need to be careful not to assume a player does not care just because I dislike what I see. I can address a behaviour directly. Understanding what is behind it requires an honest, respectful conversation.

The standard we create and uphold still matters. Upholding it sometimes requires difficult conversations and consequences. My responsibility is to address the behaviour, treat the player with respect, and explain the path forward. A player can be disappointed with a decision and still trust that I care about them and am committed to their development.

That is part of the art too: the judgment, patience, and clarity I bring when someone needs help.

If my message is not getting through, I need to examine how I am delivering it. The expectation to reflect, adjust, and improve applies to me too.

The Sharks' first league championship in 2026 was a meaningful outcome of what we built together. So are the moments when a player finds her voice, responds differently to adversity, or becomes better prepared for her next opportunity.

Those outcomes bring me back to what I wrote in 2019: creating positive change with purpose.

For a coach reading this, consider what your art could look like today, this week, or next. An on-ice adjustment at practice that helps a player connect with a skill. A

question that gives a player a different perspective. A conversation you have been putting off. A tool that helps your team take greater ownership.

Choose one thing your players need and create something that could help. Then commit to when you will put it into their hands or bring it onto the ice. An idea in your notebook has potential. Shipping it gives someone the opportunity to benefit.

You do not need to wait until it is perfect. Prepare it with purpose, share it, and pay attention. Ask players for feedback, look for what changed, and adjust.

That is how you keep developing your art and how your art helps develop others.

When I wrote that review, I believed I had something to contribute. Experience keeps changing what that contribution looks like. The responsibility to make it useful to someone else remains.

That is why I am still shipping my art.

About the Author

Nolan Horbach is the Head Coach of the U18AAA Battlefords WPD Ambulance Sharks Female program (2023–present) and the founder of Mind Body Hockey, a development-focused training environment centred on skill acquisition, cognitive performance, and mindset.

He previously spent five seasons as an Assistant Coach with the University of Saskatchewan Women's Huskies (USPORTS), helping the program to a national bronze medal in 2018, and has coached within Hockey Saskatchewan's Program of Excellence, earning a national silver medal as Head Coach with Team Saskatchewan at the U18 Women's National Championship.

Nolan holds a Master of Arts in Leadership from Royal Roads University and has achieved Hockey Canada's High Performance 1 certification, along with multiple coaching-specific credentials. His academic and practical experience shape a holistic approach to development, preparing athletes for success at the next level and beyond.